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"Working Mothers in Rogaland Area – Norway"
(Women Constructing Motherhood)

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Abstract

Title

Working Mothers in the Dichotomy of the Stereotype of "Good Mother" and "Bad Mother" in Rogaland Area, Norway. (Women Constructing Motherhood)

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Keywords

Motherhood, Mothering, Working Mother, Gender, Feminism, Family

This thesis was based on the qualitative analysis of working mothers' experiences regarding motherhood stereotypes in Norway. In April 2023, semi-structured in-depth interviews with five women of European and Asian descent who were working mothers in Norway were conducted. The research findings chapter examines the working mothers' experiences of 1) motherhood, and 2) the stereotypes around working mothers in Norway. The thesis, however, differs from previous research in that it focuses explicitly on the working mothers in the dichotomy of "good mothers" and "bad mothers" stereotypes in the Rogaland Area, Norway, and how these women construct their motherhood. The main findings indicate that working mothers in Norway still experience motherhood stereotypes of "good mother" and "bad mother". Although the work-life balance and child-centered values adopted in Norway aid working mothers in their daily lives, they talked about intensive mothering, appropriate mothering and child rearing, mommy wars, and women facing neoliberal challenges of life. There is room in Norwegian policy to support working mothers, including, i) improving company programs to support working mothers, ii) programs for empowering women to speak up about their needs as working mothers, iii) programs for encouraging men to take on more responsibility for housework and child care, iv) providing after-nursery care, v) providing alternative children's activities outside of the home and at school, vi) providing affordable services for housework and child care, vii) support networks/groups and communities, and viii) financial aid.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Women experience multidimensional transitions into motherhood. Some of these transitions can be conceptualized as *matrescence*, a term coined by the anthropologist Raphael (1975), which describes a woman when she is experiencing changes throughout the process, or *rite of passage*, in her physical state, her place in the community, her emotional life, the emphasis of her daily activities, her own identity, and her interactions with everyone in her vicinity when she becomes a mother. Yet, motherhood is not a natural state, but an institution viewed as 'naturally' arising from 'natural' sex differences, as a 'natural' consequence of (hetero)sexual activity, and as a 'natural' manifestation of innate female characteristics, namely the maternal instinct (Smart, 1996). Cultural conversations around new motherhood focus on "bouncing back" rather than honoring the transformation that has occurred (Berry, 2016). As reflected in these common questions: When will you return to work? Are you ever going to fit into your jeans again? Are you ever going to be the same person you were before having a baby? (Borresen, 2023).

When it comes to working outside the home, mothers seem to experience more work-family guilt than fathers, which is related to both their gender roles and organizational gender norms in European countries (Aarntzen, Lippe, Steenbergen, & Derks, 2021) but not only. Despite the fact that the majority of European families with children under 18 years old have both fathers and mothers working (OECD, 2017), work-family divisions remain highly gendered in heterosexual couples, with men still working most of the paid hours and women still working at home, doing household chores and caring tasks (Aarntzen, Lippe, Steenbergen, & Derks, 2021). Despite that, society acknowledges that work outside the home is a "need" and a "right" for mothers, it also transmits to them in a tacit or explicit manner the idea that other care, such as nurseries or nannies, is inferior to mother care (Eyer, 1996).

The guilt and feelings of being judged as "bad mothers" arise, partly because of the concept of intensive mothering which tends to be put upon women (Constantinou, Varela, & Buckby, 2021). Intensive mothering (Hays,1996) is a gendered model that advises mothers to spend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money on raising their children. The concept of intensive mothering comes from Confucian and western societies, generating a localized style of middle-class intensive mothering (Nguyen, Harman, & Cappellini, 2017). Intensive mothering is

problematic because it portrays the "supermom" as the ideal, which emphasizes a cultural ideal of making mothers perform well on all fronts, including at work, with their children, with their partners, in the gym, and in the kitchen, and making those meal within fifteen minutes (Hallstein, 2006). Thus, to be able to build a healthy economy, it does not only depend on one particular gender role but also on a balance between the two (Bertay, Dordevic, & Sever, 2020). Other than that, the 20th century saw a radical increase in the number of women participating in labor markets across early-industrialized countries (Ortiz-Ospina, Tzvetkova, & Roser, 2018). Specifically, the number of working mothers in Norway is 73%, slightly different from other Scandinavian countries, such as Denmark with 74%, and Sweden with the highest 76% (Master, Working Mothers: Countries Compared, 2001).

1.2. Research Purpose/Aim

This research focuses on studying heterosexual mothers who gave birth to their children, not foster, adoptive, or stepmothers. This research aims to provide an overview of the experiences of women in choosing to (although, the term 'choosing' is in itself problematic) work after giving birth, how they construct their perspective as working mothers, and what they see as the most helpful form of support that enables them to be working mothers. This was qualitative research with in-depth interviews with six working mothers in Norway, consisting of Norwegian mothers and mothers with continent origin from Europe and Asia. Norway was chosen as the research place because it ranks highest in the work-life balance index in 2022 (KISI, 2022). In addition, Norway was one of the most gender-equal countries in the world in 2021 (Statista, 2022). A constructivist grounded theory approach was deployed for analysis, which emphasizes building theories from data, and iterative and recursive approaches where data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand and often reference one another (Bryman, 2016).

The findings of this research may contribute to an improved understanding of how working mothers in the context of Norway perceive stereotypes related to motherhood. Moreover, the findings of this research might highlight the potential support needed for working mothers.

1.3. Research Problem and Question

There are many myths that suggest that women are, in a sense, born for the role of mother (Ambrosini & Stanghellini, 2012). Motherhood, being a societal construct imposed on women as

a continuation of the birthing process, is essentially not a 'natural' phenomenon (Miller, 2005; Perez & Torrens, 2009; Smart, 1996). Unreasonable expectations are placed on women in the realm of motherhood while they also fulfill their numerous responsibilities as employees, and, for some, spouses or partners (Toril, 2010) in a neoliberal context, i.e., free-market economy, rampant individualism and removal of the welfare protections (Gotby, 2023). The combination of these roles gives an insight into the work-family conflict which can play a role in constructing "good" and "bad" mother stereotypes (Toril, 2010). These maternal stereotypes and their effect on the multiple roles of working mothers also impact mothers' well-being.

Therefore, it is important to understand how these stereotypes are experienced by mothers, so that this imbalance and discrimination can be addressed, and that gender equality is promoted. The findings from this study add to the literature on motherhood, specifically in combating gender stereotypes against working mothers.

Therefore, my research question is how working mothers in Norway perceive their experiences of stereotypes in the context of motherhood. The objective of the question and research is to understand the experiences of mothers who are employed in the context of the 'good' and 'bad' mother stereotype in Norway.

2. Literature Review

In this section, a review of the relevant literature shall be discussed. First, it will describe which databases were searched and key themes shall be identified. Second, the key debates shall be discussed in more detail. The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the relevant research and identify the research gap that this research project aims to address.

A variety of databases to find relevant literature was used, including those maintained by ICSTE - University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal), the University of Stavanger (Norway), and the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) library. It is important to note that there are a lot of research and many discussions regarding working mothers, but it is dominated by research from the US and Europe (May, 2019). There is still a dearth of research on mothers and working mothers in Indonesia, the home country of the researcher. One Indonesian source covers working mothers and even that source focused on a health perspective rather than a social one (Ernawati, et al., 2022). Although, this research does not focus on Indonesia specifically, the Global North/Western domination needs highlighting as this shows that this particular type of motherhood is seen as

primary, thus exclusionary.

With quite a wealth of discussion and research on working mothers in the North America and Europe, there is also a lot of research looking at working mothers in Scandinavia. Especially when visiting the UiS library, books about motherhood were mostly dominated by North America sources. Meanwhile, in the Scandinavian context, the researcher only found two available physical books that discuss the topic of motherhood (Bull, 2010). Thus, it is clear that a particular picture of motherhood dominates scholarly literature, namely western, middle-class, white and heterosexual motherhood (Sosnowska-Buxton, 2014). The researcher can take this gap to carry out additional research on how working mothers in Norway perceive stereotypes related to motherhood. This phenomenon interests the researcher because research on mothers particularly working mothers is less of a research priority nowadays since Scandinavia, one of which is Norway, is known for its high level of gender equality (Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2022).

2.1. Research

Research on working mothers addresses a wide range of issues, such as stereotypes about working mothers and stay-at-home mothers (Odenweller, et al., 2019), work-family guilt that affects women (Aarntzen, Derks, Steenbergen, & Lippe, 2022), workplace wellness for working mothers (Ernawati, et al., 2022), bias in employment decisions about mothers and fathers (Vinkenburg, Engen, Coffeng, & Dikkers, 2012), the impact of pregnancy in the workplace (Masser, Grass, & Nesic, 'We Like You, But We Don't Want You'—The Impact of Pregnancy in the Workplace, 2007), working mothers versus working fathers (Mat, Satoshi, Rashid, Zabidi, & Sulaiman, 2022), working mothers' emotional exhaustion from work (Greaves, Parker, Zacher, & Jimmieson, 2017), and similar topics. Working mothers face numerous difficulties and injustices in life as a result of their double load, which is rarely experienced by their male partners (in this context, husbands and/or fathers of children) (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Mothers who work to make a living but are also in charge of a sizable amount of unpaid domestic work are said to be carrying a double burden, also known as a double load, double day, second shift, or double duty, meaning that the mothers work outside and inside the home, while their male partners tend to work outside the home and little inside the home (Parker, 2015).

2.2. Demography

When looking up statistics online about working mothers, US data is more recent and simpler compared to Europe. Working mothers with children under the age of 18 makeup as much as 72% of the population in 2021, according to data the researchers discovered in the American context (Statistics, 2022). From the data in 2001, it showed that Scandinavia had the highest percentage of working mothers—73% in Norway, followed by 74% and 76% in Denmark and Sweden, respectively—and the lowest percentage—32% in the Czech Republic (Master, Labor > Working mothers: Countries Compared, 2001). In 2021, 72% of women aged 25 to 54 with children in the EU were employed, compared to 90% of men with children (Eurostat, 2023). Furthermore, over 2.2 million working motherss are now primary earners in their households, a 1 million increase since 1996/97, implying that nearly one-third of all working mothers with dependent children (EIGE, n.d.). Some of these data indicate that research related to working mothers is becoming increasingly relevant for discussion due to the social dynamics that have occurred in recent times.

2.3. Mothering Ideology

Attempts to define motherhood ideology invariably refer to Hays' (1996) groundbreaking publication on intensive mothering as the predominant motherhood ideology. According to Hays (1996), intensive mothering is a child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive ideology in which mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and development of the sacred child and in which children's needs take precedence over the individual needs of their mothers (Hays, 1996). This ideology outlines the requirements a woman must meet to be considered a good mother (Forbes, Lamar, & Bornstein, 2021).

From 2012 to 2022, over 60% of women worked in Norway, with the percentage reaching a peak of 67.4% in 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2023). Mothers are under immense pressure to conform and perform intensive mothering ideology, which may increase the stress experienced by working mothers (Lamar, Forbes, & Capasso, 2019). According to this ideology, women should be their children's primary carers and should always be there for them, both physically and emotionally (Hays, 1996). This is clearly not possible if the mother is also to work outside the home, sometime out of necessity, sometime because of her choice, and sometimes a mixture of both.

In the intensive mothering culture, working mothers are under pressure to manage the majority

of childcare and other domestic duties, i.e., housework (i.e., 60%–90%) while also being successful at work, i.e., work outside the home (Coogan & Chen, 2007). This is an instance of work-family conflict, which happens when demands from both work and family obligations make them feel incompatible (Lamar, Forbes, & Capasso, 2019). Working mothers, according to Johnston and Swanson (1996), accept the happy mother - happy child perspective to the extent that they believe mothers should have an identity outside of motherhood. Time away from children due to full-time employment, on the other hand, causes cognitive dissonance. To overcome this cognitive dissonance, full-time working mothers rationalized their time away.

2.4. Motherhood and Neoliberalism

Neoliberal power is characterized by the reduction of time, especially "productive time," to the immediate present without any awareness of the various imaginaries and collectivities that have existed in the past or the potential of a different future (Amsler & Motta, 2019). Neoliberalism creates the perception of an exclusive "working mother" category, that is the public employee whilst at the same time excluding the private childrearing and caring mother – both of these aspects have a dualistic effect on conceptions of motherhood (Gotby, 2023).

The Price of Motherhood by Ann Crittenden (2001) and *Consuming Motherhood*, an edited collection by Janelle Taylor and colleagues (2004), both highlight the paradox of a neoliberal paradigm that demands full-time motherhood while still requiring mothers to be economic actors. Neoliberalism has further entrenched engrained understandings of what it means to be a "good mother," thereby amplifying the domestic goddess image, despite the rising popular focus on motherhood. Instead of moving the discussion away from biological conceptualizations, this has increased the domestic goddess image (Giles, 2020). This idealization has significant social and material costs for mothers, (Giles, 2020, p. 376) argues:

> The idealization of the "domestic goddess" and the intense maternal image only serve to conceal the growing feminization of poverty, which is a direct effect of neoliberal policies that undermine social assistance for mothers. Furthermore, while the domestic goddess idealizes biological motherhood, it offers no structural support for the expanding majority of working women. As a result, the "working mother" is de-gendered within an "equality" framework, while the "intensive mother" myth is stuck within biological gendered preconceptions. In this paradigm, the state finds it profitable to shift social reproduction onto mothers' shoulders while simultaneously fabricating a "feminist" paradoxical story of freedom through

"choice".

This further strengthens the possibility that mothers are more likely to bear a double burden due to the demand for "perfection" in both the private and public area. That the mothers appear to have a choice regarding the professional work she conducts, but at the same time she is under perfectionist demands in the private sphere, to continue to be able to provide primary attention in child rearing and conducting domestic labor. This, combined with feelings of guilt and tension between family and job, has an extra influence on mothers. Working mothers' positions are becoming increasingly challenging to fully articulate in the public area or work sphere.

2.5. The Norwegian Context: Gender Equality in Working Scheme

Norway appears to be a refuge for working parents compared to many other nations (Thun, 2020). Since the 1970s, raising young children has been a key component of the movement to advance gender equality and increase possibilities for both working mothers and fathers to provide for their families. The dual-earner/dual-career family model has raised the bar for gender relations in households with young children, and the Norwegian welfare state allows parents extended parental leave (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006).

In Norway, the employment rate has continuously been higher for men than for women for the past ten years. In 2022, 67.4% of women and 73.1 % of men who were of working age were employed (Statista, 2022). In addition to having lower employment rates than men, Norway still has a sizable pay disparity between the sexes. Men often make more money than women based on the average monthly income in the public and private sectors. For both central government and private sector employees, the difference in 2021 was roughly 7,000 Norwegian kroner. The gender pay gap in Norway was just slightly less than the average for the European Union when compared to other European nations (Statista, 2022). The processes that take place in the family are currently seen as one of the biggest barriers to the further advancement of gender equality in the workplace. Women currently experience significant wage and career penalties from motherhood, while men currently benefit significantly from marriage. These two divergent processes together contribute to an increase in the wage gap between women and men (Petersen, Penner, & Høgsnes, 2014). The ostensibly gender-neutral country has some blind spots that show gender bias (Thun, 2020). Organizations may contribute to gender inequality, particularly in light of neoliberalism's influence

on the language surrounding work-life balance. That neoliberalism can convey the idea of "inclusive excellence," which can exclude mothers for increasing productivity demands (Thun, 2020).

The explanation of the literature review above shows that the construction of motherhood tends to put aside individual experiences in the context of motherhood in relation to the national context, such as when the country's gender equality is strong (Knudsen & Waerness, 2008). In addition, although there is a discussion about working mothers, the available research tends to be quantitative. Thus, this research project can enrich our understanding of motherhood at the individual (micro) level and with a different approach, using qualitative methods.

3. Theoretical Considerations

This section will cover theories of motherhood, firstly, drawing on the works of Freud, Klein, Dinnerstein and Chodrow. Then, the notion of "intensive mothering" by Hays (1996) shall be explored as this is one of the key ideas explored in this thesis. Moreover, this chapter will discuss gender quality in the context of motherhood, drawing on a feminist analysis.

3.1. Theories of Motherhood

Sigmund Freud described the mother as the child's primary love 'object' and the parent most responsible for its optimal development (Freud, 1963). He argued that in the early years of the infant's life, the relationship with the mother was close, but during the Oedipal conflict, the boy-child renounced the love of his mother in fear of his more powerful father. The girl-child also moved away from her mother, whom she saw as powerless and 'castrated'. Freud's ideas of difference between male and female behavior provided a starting point for many theories on motherhood. Melanie Klein, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow (2015), for example, made use of his exploration of the unconscious instincts and drives of infant girls and boys. Freud's case studies and clinical appraisals of men were often from data collected from women. As sociologist, Sondra Farganis (1989) suggested, they provided a useful source of information about women's behavior for the feminists, psychoanalysts and sociologists who came later.

Sharon Hays, who wrote the 1996 book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, described "intensive mothering" as being self-consciously committed to child rearing. It involves being dedicated to mothers to the point that she takes much better care of her child than herself,

even if it means cutting back hours, or even setting aside a whole day for the child to do whatever he or she wants. Children need consistent nurturing by a single caretaker who will expend an abundance of energy, time, and resources for the child; this may also require research on what the child needs at every stage of development. Intensive mothers see themselves as the primary caregiver for the child; men cannot be relied upon for that (Glassvisage, 2009). Intensive mothering, overall, is child centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive (Ennis, 2014). The values of middle-class, heterosexual, and white "proper" child upbringing were initially identified as the foundation of this intensive way of mothering (Hays, 1996).

3.2. Theories of Gender Equality

Another seemingly simple method would be classification of theories as socialist, liberal, and radical feminist. A more useful classification, which will be used here, is to group the theories according to their main themes: power relations; family structure and household; social roles, especially occupational work roles, and sexuality.

Feminist theories also contribute to the theory of gender equality. A feminist theory is a type of critical theory that examines inequalities in gender-related issues. It uses the conflict approach to examine the maintenance of gender roles and inequalities. In patriarchal societies, men's contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women. Patriarchal perspectives and arrangements are widespread and taken for granted. As a result, women's viewpoints tend to be silenced or marginalized to the point of being discredited or considered invalid. All of these pertain to how women's status is subordinate in traditional/mainstream research and in broader society, although this list is not comprehensive, it provides a solid sense of how most feminists view the research process (Letherby G. , 2003). These theories help raise awareness among women and men in dealing with stigma and labels, especially in the context of motherhood.

Furthermore, when combining the concepts of feminism and mothering, there are discourses about better mothers. Since feminist mothering emphasizes the concept of maternal empowerment, where mothers can continue to actualize themselves beside of the mother's role, and mothers who represent freedom and happiness can be direct examples for their children about the importance of nurturing ourselves and to remain ourselves while carrying out our roles (O'Reilly, 2014).

Delving deeper into the discussion of working mothers, it seems that the male breadwinner model continues to pervade the social order (Guerrina, 2014). Meanwhile, working mothers continue to be confronted with dominant notions about gender roles in the household. Caregiving is still regarded as part of the work of women and mothers. As a result, in the context of austerity, this rhetoric becomes a real issue for working mothers. Gotby (2023) argues that comforting a family member or friend, soothing children, keeping the elderly company, and ensuring that people are healthy enough to work are all examples of vital labor. Capitalism would fail to exist without it. Unfortunately, some jobs continue to be gendered. This form of job is still considered free and unpaid labor and is classified as women's work. Unpaid work accounts for up to half of all labor done on the planet. And the most of it is done by women (Georgieva, Alonso, & Era Dabla-Norris, 2019).

4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction

A theoretical paradigm positing that confusion, which occurs as a result of cognitive disequilibrium caused by contradictions, conflicts, anomalies, erroneous information, and other discrepant occurrences, can be advantageous to learning if adequately created, regulated, and resolved (D'Mello, Lehman, Pekrun, & Graesser, 2012, p. 153).

The statement is an apt representation of the research journey. This research stems from the researcher's curiosity about the topic, which isclose to her heart, parenting, because of her experiences as a daughter and growing up by observing her mother's actions and wondering what the experiences of other working mothers are. In this section, the ups and down of this research journey will be explored. It was a strange journey as the researcher felt like an insider since she conducted interviews with other women who she already knew, but simultaneously felt like an outsider because she has no actual experience as a mother. At the same time, she had experienced parenting or mothering of her parents, albeit in a different context than the participants. The participants were also friends and people with whom she had a close relationship because the researcher is the person who provided (babysitting) services for the participants. As a result, throughout the interview process, researchers felt she benefited from being an insider since the

participants were more eager to answer questions openly due to the connection and trust that had been built before the research process itself – it can be argued that it takes a lot of trust to let, essentially, a stranger look after one's children.

4.2. Research Design and Approach

The researcher choose a qualitative approach to research, specifically in-depth interviews because this research will (1) explore how and in what ways women experience becoming a mother and working at the same time; and (2) it aims to '[...] challenge the silences in mainstream research both in relation to the issues studied and the way in which study is undertaken' (Letherby G. , 2003, p. 4) and 'its emphasis on participants reported experience and emotions – the private sphere of women's lives' (Sosnowska-Buxton, 2014, p. 29)

A qualitative approach is appropriate because the aim of the study is to understand and present the perspective of working mothers. Thus, the researcher aimed to see the social world from the perspective of the people she studied (Bryman, 2016). The main steps that the researcher had taken in carrying out this research were as follows: (1) construct a general research question, explained in the previous section, (2) select relevant participants, which will be discussed below, (3) data collection, here qualitative interviews, (4) interpretation of data. The researcher chose the constructivist grounded theory as an analytical lens – reasoning shall be addressed below, as (5) her conceptual and theoretical location, and (6) writing up findings/conclusions (Bryman, 2016, p. 200).

4.2.1. Constructing A General Research Question

The researcher prepared semi-structured interview questions with 13 initial questions for the participants. In the interview process, the researcher was open to the possibility of additional questions according to the life context of each participant. Please see the appendix for the research guide.

4.2.2. Selection of Participants

The researcher chose participants from several relationships she had developed while working part-time as a sitter during her second and fourth semester in Stavanger (Norway), using the purposive sampling technique. The research participants come from different backgrounds

(countries of origin and fields of work) to maintain diversity and in order to maintain the privacy of the participants, all their identifying details have been anonymized.

The demographic data of the participants are as follows:

Age Range	Number of working mothers within the range
26-30	2
31-35	1
36-40	2

Table 1. Working Mothers' Age at Time of Interviews (2023). Source: Interview Data 2023

Continental Origin	Number of working mothers
Asia	2
Europe	3

Table 2. Working Mothers' Continental Origin. Source: Interview Data 2023

Working Mothers' Marital Status	Number of working mothers
Married	4
Divorced	1

Table 3. Working Mothers' Marital Status at The Time of Interview (2023). Source: Interview Data 2023

Number of The Children	Number of mothers with the number of children
1	2
2	3

Table 4. The number of children of working mothers. Source: Interview data 2023

4.2.3. Data Collection and Analysis Method

Qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducated with five working mothers. The data collection plan and consent form were submitted in advance to the participants. This

number of informants was chosen by considering the available time (about four months) and quality of data. This part of data collection was followed by data transcription and data analysis.

This research used semi-structured interviews in which the researcher prepared several questions based on the topic and research question. However, as the researcher planned semi-structured interviews, there was room for discussions arising based on the nature and variety of the interview process as well as the interviewees' life circumstances. This allowed some flexibility in the interview process and created a space where meanings could be constructed together between the interviewer and the interviewees throughout the research process.

Charmaz (2006), whose analytical approach of constructivist grounded theory, was used to generate dense analysis with explanatory strength and conceptual understandings notes that a research process is a journey, and the researcher hopes that she conveyed this in her thesis. Constructing grounded theory was chosen as a data analysis strategy because the researcher sought to comprehend the participants' experiences through the stories they told during interviews. As a result, this narrative become the primary source of information in the analysis and served as the foundation for the research's principal theorising. With constructivist grounded theory methods, the researcher shapes and reshapes her data collection and data analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p.15). During the interviews, the audio was recorded using a phone with Dictaphone application and then transcribed as per the NSD specifications.

4.2.4. Interpretation of Data

According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the critical link between data collection and the development of an emergent theory to explain the data. The researcher defines what is happening in the data through coding and begins to deal with what it signifies. This coding process produces the main themes in the research findings. Grounded theory coding comprises of at least two major phases: 1) an initial phase that involves labeling each word, line, or segment of data, followed by 2) a focused, selected phase that sorts, synthesizes, integrates, and organizes enormous amounts of data using the most significant or common initial codes. Constructivists investigate how – and sometimes why – participants construct meanings and actions in particular circumstances.

4.2.5. Conceptual and Theoretical Location

The researcher developed an understanding of this topic through the analysis of the previous research.

4.2.6. Findings and Conclusions

In the findings section, the researcher analyzed the interview participants' narratives. The researcher elaborated on the theoretical framework and the existing literature on the topic-specific research findings. While the conclusion contains a summary of the research findings, including a summary of the research objectives, it also provides a brief overview of the implications, suggestions, and limitations of her research.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues, including (1) cultural differences between researcher and participants, (2) sensitive issue surrounding the topic of stereotypes, (3) selection of participants through work relationships, and (4) the role of women as mothers who are attached to issues in an intimate setting (family) were also considered while conducting this research.

The researcher is from Indonesia, a country that has different social and economic conditions than Norway in which this study was conducted. Diverse experiences can enhance the dynamics and results of the research. With these differences, the researcher can learn more during the research process from both from the dissimilarities and similarities.

The researcher discussed specifically the stereotypes regarding the 'good' and 'bad' mothering stereotypes that women might have experienced in the context of motherhood. Thus, this topic can be considered a sensitive issue or a taboo. Therefore, in carrying out research including data collection, the researcher needed to be more careful and aware to keep the participants feeling safe and comfortable when sharing their narratives. Additionally, the researcher also needed to be mindful that the participants felt confident and comfortable to decline to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable or that they simply did not want to answer for whatever reason.

The research participants were selected from the researcher's previous work as a babysitter. This can be advantageous in qualitative research because the researcher had already created relationships and bonded with the participants outside of the research process. Thus, the participants could feel

more relaxed because they were in a setting with the person they knew and already trusted with the care of their children. In this sense, that the role of the researcher can also be as an in-between, as an insider because she already has had an insight into her participants' lives but also as an outsider as she had not been privity to the mothers' intimate experiences of motherhood, or at least not to such degree of detail. That she was a female researcher, again a part of her identity that marked as an insider. But as she has no experience as a mother, let alone a working mother, marked her as an outsider. The researcher can adopt the role of an in-betweener to pragmatically utilize the insider status which allows for privileged access and empathic understanding (Chhabra, 2020, p. 315).

During the whole research process, researchers must simultaneously be critical while also being culturally sensitive, constantly reflexively examine their own conduct, how they produce and handle the data in an ethical and responsible manner that is not exploitative (Letherby, 2003). The researcher took a number of steps to ensure this, namely providing consent forms, ensuring the participants' anonymity and listening to the participants' feedback which was always positive and reassuring in that they did not feel used or unsafe.

The final ethical factor relates to the setting, particularly the intimate setting, meaning the family. Mothering is a role that women play to represent both their families and themselves (Aziza, 2020). Therefore, in this instance, it could be difficult for the mothers who were participating in the interviews to speak their mind, irrespective of their position and attachment in the setting of the family. This instance also has something to do with studies conducted in close quarters with children. In the Comparative Journal of Social Work (Elden, 2013, p. 7) it is explained that predominant views about children preclude us from letting children speak for themselves about matters concerning the family. The case studies (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) demonstrate that research involving roles in the family can also provide multiple roles for participants, as individuals and as specific roles within the family, including mothers. Therefore, researchers must be aware that the validity of participant consent forms may change over the course of the research, depending on how comfortable the participants are with the data they have provided and the results of the analysis. In addition, participant confidentiality must be upheld to prevent potential harm to the participants and their families.

4.4. Timetable and Resources

This thesis is provided in order to fulfill a master's program requirement. The researcher wrote

a thesis for five months from January to June 2023. The following is a breakdown of the timeline from January to June 2023.

Month	January		February				March				April				May				June
Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Research Proposal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓													
Literature Review			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Theory and Methodology			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Draft on NSD						✓	✓												
NSD Approval							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Data Collection (Interview)											✓	✓	✓						
Transcription														✓	✓				
Data Analysis														✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Thesis Writing															✓	✓	✓	✓	
Revision																		✓	
Submission																			✓

Table 5. Timeline of The Thesis Journey

The timeline makes it simple to visualize the progress and completion of this thesis proposal. In addition, the timeline aids in developing a productive working relationship between the researcher and the thesis supervisor.

In carrying out this research, the researcher maximize the available resources, by using a laptop and cell phone with interview application; resources from the three universities that are part of the consortium for my master's program in the form of books and journals; human resources such as my supervisor for formal discussions and friends who are also working on thesis for informal discussions and as a support system, including research participants as volunteers and main data sources during the course of this thesis; means including resources in data collection, such as interviews and transcription.

5. Results

This chapter presented the explanation on the experience of working mothers in Norway perceived motherhood stereotypes.

5.1. Women Experiencing Motherhood

5.1.1 Experience and Feeling of Motherhood

The discussion of the research findings begins with the exploration of the experiences and feelings the interviewed women expressed towards and about their experiences of motherhood. Motherhood seemed to provide a two-sided experience for the women, being both happy and challenging. Becoming a mother changes lives in all sorts of ways. Tina Miller (2005) explained

that the biological act of giving birth implies that women go from being pregnant and expecting parenthood to being mothers in a relatively short period of time. The powerful combination of cultural, social, and moral knowledges and practices that surround perceptions of motherhood, together with the biological act of giving birth, caused women to process and require time to come to grips with and develop their social self as mothers. Most of the women were trying to come to terms with, and make sense of, the changes in their life at the time of the early postnatal interviews. Experience of motherhood comes with two sides: happiness and challenges. The experience of happiness of motherhood included the following: i) reward and fulfillment, ii) pure joy, iii) and feeling supported.

- **Reward and Fulfillment**

  Charlotte described her first experience of motherhood as

  > So, everything was very like, exceptions. But it was, at the same time, it was
  > absolutely beautiful and really nice and rewarding. A rewarding experience, it
  > felt very fulfilling.

Although Charlotte noted that there were 'exceptions' in her experience of motherhood, this was an experience that was fulfilling. Charlotte's description of the experience of motherhood which explains the experiences of in between (exceptional and fulfilling) defines the world encountered by women when they become mothers, which are related to 'appropriate mothering' and 'mommy wars'. Appropriate mothering seems to take over a mother's identity as a woman who can feel many things, including things that she legitimately feels about herself, such as being self-interested, then turning into selfless and focusing on children. So instead of explaining more about exceptional experiences, Charlotte attempts to characterize her motherhood experience as a fulfilling experience. Meanwhile, 'mommy wars' describe the myriad of dichotomies that mothers encounter, such as working mothers against mothers who remain at home, mothers who give birth vaginally versus having a caesarean, mothers who breastfeed versus mothers who provide formula milk, and women who choose to have children versus women who are childfree (either by choice or involuntarily). A woman's sense of feeling more complete after having children is described as fulfilling. Some may claim she is cold, callous, and unfulfilled as a woman, reinforcing Hays (1996) argument that women willingly

remaining childfree might be seen in such a negative light as, essentially, 'unnatural'. This theory still resonates with women's experiences as stereotypes of 'good and bad mothers'. Some choices appear to be better than others due to social construction.

> Oh, with Stella [Charlotte's first child], I think fulfillment is probably like you know, joy, happiness, and fulfillment.

Meanwhile, Mabel has a similar tone to expressed about her motherhood experience.

> I think it's just very rewarding and fun. I think it's extremely busy, but it's quite fun as well to watch them grow, watch them change and you know you get more and more kind of that, and being able to have a conversation with them and understand what they're like as people so you're, you know it's very rewarding to get to, to see that. …Yeah, I think it's just, it's very fun and rewarding.

Charlotte and Mabel's rewarding descriptions of motherhood reveal how narratives of motherhood frequently occur as pleasant experiences in the midst of other things, such as being exceptional or being busy. Women's happiness of motherhood was expressed as a happy experience for or of their children rather than happiness for themselves. This was represented in the narrative of how the women related their feeling about motherhood to their experience with children. This is in line with what was stated by Long (2019) that theoretically, socially, and personally, motherhood is frequently portrayed as a function, meaning that the topic of motherhood is the child receiving mothering – the function – rather than the mother – the person – herself. Motherhood is meant to be a selfless delight expressed through the joys of the mother's children, rather than a joy held by the mother.

- **Pure joy**
  Like Charlotte, Jade described the experience of motherhood as joyous and also noted some ambivalence or hinted at challenges as indicated by the word 'sometimes'.
  > Sometimes it's pure joy. I mean, you can say every day it's all of these things.
  > … And joy is all the time there. So, he was a newborn, I was in pain, but I was

in joy. Every phase, I had something else going on, but the thing of joy is just continuous.

Lara talked about her experience of motherhood as ecstasy.

First feelings? So, there was a complete like, I don't know, like ecstasy, excitement, happiness. There was like, nothing, nothing else coming. It was a feeling which is difficult to put into words. It was just like I don't know, complete satisfaction, like everything was alright.

The feelings experienced by Lara, relating to her motherhood are interesting and she framed them as 'natural' as though becoming a mother will 'naturally' make a woman happy, she will not have to even think about it. For example, she said:

Why? Because it somehow came naturally. It wasn't at the time that much of thinking about it or why it just was that way. I think that I kind of felt like, as you can see, like the happiest person in the world.

The narratives of Jade and Lara demonstrate the variety of emotions associated with motherhood. About 'pain', 'something else going on', 'ecstasy', 'feeling which is difficult to put into words', but the predominant feelings were 'pure joy', 'excitement', 'happiness', 'satisfaction', and 'like everything was alright'. Tina Miller (2005) says that the drive to provide recognized stories of early mothering experiences and to be seen to 'do the right thing' can become crucial at this time in the journey. The women may struggle to create narratives that fit with what they perceive to be 'normal' responses to becoming mothers, in order to demonstrate to those around them that they are coping and in control. Women are still challenged with preconceptions of 'good mother' and 'bad mother' in this explanation. Long (2019) argued that the 'joys of motherhood' suggest that motherhood is perhaps the most idealized, exclusive, and defining identity associated with womanhood, and that a woman's relationship to her reproductive capacities is a primary social site for the construction of a divide between 'good' and 'bad' women.

- **Feeling of supported**
  Summer reflects on her motherhood experiences with her relationships with those around her.

At that time, it was okay because I mean we live in J city and our family is also in J city. So, we have a lot of support. … I know that actually motherhood is never a lonely journey because my husband really helped me a lot even back then. So, when I was first, gave birth to Kayla, even the first week or first two weeks I never changed her diaper. So, my job was only to breastfeed her but for any other things like changing the diaper and washing her. It's always his job. …Well, back then, I felt supported, I guess. …But when I have a baby, I feel that everyone tried to help me to juggle this situation, so it's not only me that's fighting this situation. So, I feel that everyone wants to help me.

Summer's explanation offers a unique viewpoint on the maternal experience. She shared her experience of receiving a lot of support as a new mother, particularly from her spouse and family. Summer had her first child outside of Norway. Summer's statement is reminiscent of the Ubuntu system's worth. The traditional African adage "it takes a community to raise a child", clearly depicts the critical role of the Ubuntu value system in supporting the procedures of communal child-rearing responsibility. More specifically, family, community, spiritual, and environmental viewpoints inspired by Ubuntu models of social work with children have grown in popularity and have the ability to give children safety, counseling, support, and mentorship (Abusaleh, et al., 2023). Furthermore, Hays (1996) stated that in most countries, the care or rearing of small children is shared between women or between women and older children. As a result, the mother's parenting model as the primary caregiver is not always the main reference in maternal practices around the world. In addition, men's (in this context, spouse) engagement in the early phases of motherhood are vital and helpful, both for mother and children but also to the father of the child.

Besides bringing happy experiences and feelings, motherhood also present challenges. The change and transformation of women in becoming mothers are significant, and it is important to note that all feelings and emotions, including the 'challenging' ones are valid and need to be recognized but seem to be a taboo, especially in the context of 'naturally' 'fulfilling' motherhood. . There is no denying that the journey to motherhood is a huge transition. According to Sacks (2017), the shift to motherhood is a profound transformation. Knowing the sources of the distress and feeling comfortable discussing them with others is essential for developing into a well-adjusted

mother. Then, the challenging experiences related to motherhood include the following things: i) a lot of worry, ii) fear and anxiety, iii) challenging and hectic.

- **A lot of worry**

Charlotte continued explaining her motherhood experience, noting that there was a reason behind worrying.

> I don't know, you have a little human being that you're suddenly responsible for and that you care about more than anything else in the world and that you would do anything for, to keep them healthy and well. And with that, I mean, honestly, comes a lot of worry as well, because you don't want that to go away, right? And it's a big responsibility for someone to suddenly kind of have responsibility of a little baby that you don't know.

The feeling of worry in motherhood was closely related to the mother's new responsibilities for her child. Based on the societal construction of appropriate child-rearing, children are regarded as innocent and dependent beings in need of ongoing nurturing. In other words, according to Hays (1996), the virtuous mother must not just express compassion for the child, she must also be continually watchful in maintaining her own virtue and applying the necessary methods to implant such virtue in her child. Of course, all of this was not only emotionally draining but also time-consuming.

- **Fear and anxiety**

Jade's narrative is similar to that of Charlotte in terms of fear and anxiety that seem to be an integral part of motherhood.

> Every stage is different. Sometimes it's fear, anxiety. …Sometimes fear, sometimes a bit of anxiety, like if they hurt themselves or something happens.

Mothers reported feelings of fear and anxiety as a result of the proximity of ambiguity in their children's growth and development. Each stage of the child's development can be distinct. Fear and anxiety about unfamiliarity are triggered by this uncertainty.

Mabel describes the feelings that represent her motherhood experience as fear and stress.

> So, I think, [with] the first one we were quite scared because Ruby [Mabel's first child] ended up being in hospital for quite a while when she was born. So, she was in hospital for like a week when she was born. …So, it was quite scary to begin with … And also, quite frustrating because she wouldn't eat. She didn't like eating and didn't like her milk. So, it was a lot of hard work to get her to eat and drink her milk. But yeah, it was lots of fun, lots of love for her. But it was very stressful, especially living in a big city and you didn't like noise. But then, it was a lot of stress and fear I think, overall.

Many things that happen are outside of parental control, such as when the child needs to be hospitalized. Mabel's child was not interested in drinking or eating which was clearly out of her control, thus very stressful, particularly the mother (Tayebeh, Mohammad, & Hasan, 2012).

- **Challenging and hectic**

The mothers noted that motherhood is also challenging and hectic, Lara, for example noted that:

> At another time, it became also challenging and hectic. So, yeah, it was different when they were babies, it's different when they are now, it's changing. I find it now, in some way, more hectic now, than when they were babies. So, in some way, yeah, now I like that they've become independent, but it can be challenging to navigate it at the times.

Child-rearing is explained as an activity that needs to be continuously adjusted and changed along with the developmental stages of the child, see for example Shamah (2011). This constant change requires mothers, in particular, to implemented continuous learning strategies, being always vigilant to those changing needs. However, this constant learning and being vigilant might make mothers feel like they are facing constant challenges without any breaks. Moreover, the mothers might feel that such living conditions are hectic, overwhelming and that whatever they do, is not even enough.

The challenging experiences the women went through in their motherhoods (yes, in plural to

highlight their different, albeit similar stories) were about children and in many ways their narratives were child centric. According to their stories, children are the primary concern and obligation for women after becoming mothers. This demonstrates that once women become mothers, their identity shifts from themselves to the other priority that they regard to be the most important, their children. This, it could be argued, is a reflection that the notion of intensive mothering is a part of the "good mother" stereotype that persists. The children become the sole focus of the mothers' lives, even getting a job is constructed as a means to make the child proud of the mother. On the one hand, being a mother was constructed by the women as the most important aspect of their lives that brings 'pure joy'. On the other hand, motherhood was also constructed as a role that is not valuable in and of itself, and that becoming a working mother (that is working outside of home for a wage) adds value to the women, who might otherwise be seen as 'just' mothers.

Intensive mothering demands, what is considered to be, appropriate child upbringing, which is child-centric, expert-guided, emotionally draining, labor-intensive, and financially costly (Hays, 1996). In other words, women who fail to match the required child rearing criteria are likely to be stereotyped as "bad mothers". It should be underlined that, as Hays (1996) notes, intensive mothering ideology is socially constructed, thus derives from society and is, in a sense, implemented by an individual, here a mother, who feels she needs to perform tasks and duties of mothering the 'correct' way in order to be considered a 'good' mother and not a 'bad' one.

Most of the time, the women described their motherhood experiences with mixed emotions, in both positive and negative light.

Jade

> I mean, it was a mix. … That feeling of trying to be an adult, you know, if something happens, you are throwing a tantrum, you have to tell yourself that you are an adult in this situation.

'The feeling of trying to be an adult' demonstrates that mothers instantaneously turn into parents or are associated with new sorts of responsibility. Because children are regarded innocent and dependent beings in the practice of intensive mothering, they require a caring care giver, who in this case is the woman.

Mabel

> Yeah, I think it's just, it's very fun and rewarding, but overall it's also kind of quite challenging because you're always worried about what they're going to, you know, what they should be doing and shouldn't be doing and how your actions are like influencing them, what they, their, um, what, how you, how you gonna turn them into nice little people?

Being a mother is the first step toward adulthood. Mothers attempt to be more responsible after having children because they recognize they are setting a good example for their children. The researcher had differing viewpoints on this subject. Growing up with children essentially has sides where parents can revert to being children. Because we need to be able to play like children in order to interact with them. At the same time, the researcher can empathize with mothers' concerns about their children's well-being. Gotby (2023) stated that while the family remains the 'appropriate' locus of intense feeling and the most important source of emotional wellbeing, it also causes suffering, trauma, worry, and disappointment, as well as investment in love and labor beliefs.

Charlotte

> I don't know, you have a little human being that you're suddenly responsible for. …Some things come naturally, but honestly, like, you try and sometimes fail and try and succeed, you know? Because one thing that you do one day might not work another day, so you kind of need to just figure that out as you get to know baby.

The experience of motherhood and the responsibility of a mother to her child are intimately intertwined. Since each strategy can modify its efficacy depending on the child's developmental stage and at different periods, there have been several trials in the child-rearing practice. The mothers frequently have a part in the child rearing process because intensive mothering demands such involvement as it is their primary duty to guarant the child's growth and development into 'nice little people' as Mabel said. In this situation, fathers tend to undertake things that are more

enjoyable and refreshing or fun, as opposed to child-rearing tasks that are more routine in nature, labor-intensive, often invisible and not seen as valuable (Gotby, 2023). In other words, intense mothers consider themselves to be the primary caregivers for their children, whereas men cannot be relied on to do so (Glassvisage, 2009).

Lara

> It's lovely. At another time, it became also challenging and hectic. So, yeah, it was different when they were babies, it's different when they are now, it's changing.

Lara began her testimony with "lovely," which was quickly followed by "hectic and challenging." Lara's statement makes perfect sense, especially when linked to what Gotby calls "the political economy of love" (2023), meaning that it takes a lot of effort to keep us, humans, alive and healthy. Food must be cooked, residences must be cleaned, and children must be cared for. We all require the care of others. Emotion cannot be considered apart from our other needs. As a result, we must locate emotional reproduction, that is care for and of others, within the larger context of social reproduction. Through this broader perspective of emotional reproduction, caring for others is then seen as an intrinsic part of neoliberal way of living and working – which is the social reproduction.

Summer

> It's really a long mission, just never give up and know that you don't know anything, you will learn everything, just keep learning.

In the statement on motherhood, Summer stressed that becoming a mother is a protracted undertaking that necessitates continuous learning skill to 'do' the role of the mother well. This statement also shows that indirectly the responsibility of nurturing children and child rearing is still primarily the mother's responsibility, which demonstrates the continued impact of intensive mothering on women.

Childbirth itself, besides being the process of giving birth to a baby, it is also a process of women becoming mothers – in a way, a child and mother are born at the same time. Pregnancy

and new motherhood are enjoyable experiences for the majority of the women who were interviewed, at least some of the time. However, most mothers also experienced anxiety, disappointment, guilt, competition, frustration, and, in some cases, rage and dread just as noted by Sacks (2017).

Yet, to those surrounding the mother, such as family, friends, and experts, a woman becomes a mother as soon as the child is born, this powerful new identity superseding all other identities (Miller, 2005). Most of the time, the experience of motherhood is not good or bad, it is both good and bad (Sacks, 2017).

5.1.2 Meaning of Motherhood

Motherhood can mean different things to different people. This section will analyze the participants' interpretations of motherhood.

When Charlotte was asked about what she means by 'motherhood', she said it is:

> Kindness, love, comfort, unconditional love I would say.

Hays (1996) notes that motherly love is key for having and raising a child who is happy and well-adjusted. But this love 'ought to' be reciprocal and this too, is a key component of intensive mothering. Raising a child is "naturally" (to use a term preferred by Spock, Brazelton, and Leach, 1946) emotionally draining, especially if done 'right' (Hays, 1996). Charlotte's statement above is consistent with Hays' explanation of identical sentiments appearing to represent the maternal experience. Moreover, Gotby (2023) argues that emotions are neither non-political nor private, and motherly love seems to fit this argument perfectly. To love one's own child properly and look after her properly, that is in a socially sanctioned way, i.e., intensive mothering, means to perform mothering as a political and public act. Love and care, then, have strongly gendered meanings, and people are forced by societal expectations, to express and 'do' gender-appropriate emotions.

Jade

> I think, yeah, for me it is being, you know the meaning of being a safe home? We are, we mothers or we parents are a home for our kids. I mean, they don't see the four walls, they see us. So that feeling, that is motherhood. Whoever can provide the kid with those four walls, that home, that person, you can call

that motherhood.

Jade also explained about her version of safe home.

> I mean if you are tired, you go home. If you are traveling, you want to go home. If you are at work, you want to go home. If for a whole day you get to stay home, you are very happy. So home is the thing like that's like a, that's where you can be yourself.

Based on the statement from Jade, the analogy of home as the definition of motherhood shows that it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children feel safe and that there appears to be a long-term plan. Again, Hays (1996) argued, many women find it difficult to differentiate nature from nurture, maybe because the process of socialization begins so early. However, identifying whether women's parental obligation is due to dominance, learned behavior, or heredity does not appear to be a pressing issue in their everyday lives. What is crucial is that it is constant or consistent, or even relentless.

Summer

> It means to me, it's a really big responsibility because actually when we plan to marry and also when we plan to have a kid, we really have a lot of preparation, like we need to prepare our mental, our financial, and everything so when she comes, we think that we are prepared enough, but when the real situation is going on, we know that still have a lot of things to learn. So, for me, being a mother, you never, you learn, emm how to say, you never know what comes. Because in every stage, when she has a baby, when she was a one-year-old, two-year-old everything is really different. It was like you never know what to learn next.

Still tied to the job of nurturing, Summer's portrayal of 'big responsibility' as an unavoidable component of motherhood reinforces the image of intensive mothering, which continues to overshadow women. Hays' (1996) notion of intensive mothering is still valid; the mothers may not like it, but it is the way it is – the mothers (have to) take the main responsibility for raising the children and for doing it correctly or properly.

The meaning of motherhood can vary greatly between women. The quotes above show motherhoods to mean i) unconditional love, ii) safe home, iii) something the woman wants, iv) reward, fun, and being extremely busy, v) and a lot of preparation. In many ways, the term motherhood includes all these meanings as the stories of the mothers show remarkable similarity between each other.

The description about the meaning of motherhood above reflects more on the feelings of the mothers towards the children. All of these aspects seem to be firmly connected to intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), which seems to be constant work, that requires planning, organization, delivery of tasks and services (such as cleaning, meals preparation, emotional work of carrying for one's child, and feeling unconditional love for that child) – to be a mother is to have a job as a mother as the mothering tasks are constant and never ending, it is a job that is never done and new skills have to be learnt and acquired by the mothers to 'do' mothering well. This is an interesting and significant shift from the 17th and 18th centuries in Western Europe where children as young as six or seven were considered mature enough to become "apprentices" in adult work. As a new understanding of childhood had emerged, one that had emphasized the child's newly discovered "innocence" and immaturity and need of protection as well as nurturing. Furthermore, meaning of motherhood as a home is understood mainly as the construction of sensitive and emotional women, so that women are considered suitable to be the primary caretakers in the practice of intensive mothering because they are socially seen as 'naturally' good at it and perhaps even destined to do so.

5.1.3 Changes Before and After Becoming Mother

The participants described how their lives had changed after becoming mothers. The changes they identified were due to an overall shift in emphasis.

Jade

> Everything. I don't look the same at all. My priorities have changed. I have a routine now. Everything changes, you have responsibility. Just an adult. What another person (my kid) will be eating. I focus more on my things. I use words very carefully now.

Lara

> I did, like I would always describe myself as a responsible person, but then

when you have all of a sudden this little being, you kind of become parent for, like all of a sudden you are the one taking charge, you are the one to have responsibility for someone, like so I felt in a way like now it was me, now I was like on my own, it was not now me to look for help from someone. Now it was me the one, the kind of caregiver. So that was the change. I feel more responsible after becoming a mother. I was the one in charge, I was the one everybody turned to, to ask for help. Like, there was some difference, like, like, yeah. So not that I was irresponsible before and I finally became responsible, but there was some difference, some kind of, you need to, you know, I like, I don't want them to get sick, more much hour. More like yeah. I was the one in charge, who one the main caregiver, I don't know.

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Summer

I think my first impression is actually, I know how big the struggle that my mom had before because she was like a single mother and she raised me and my brother, we can say alone. So even from the labor, like she's fighting by her own side for that whole... This is really a big responsibility. And then it's a really a big thing that, okay, like every mother is quite special, I guess. Then I feel that I have a big responsibility of raising this kid because whatever happens to her is on me. If she's become a bad kid or a bad person is actually my fault. So, we try to make a good environment for her, we try to talk with her, and be present with her. So before, I think our priorities like our own, like our career, our friends, and everything, but when she comes here, actually she is our priority.

The unifying thread in the participants' narratives, is that after they had become mothers, there was a shift in their priorities and that their main responsibilities were their children. Such a shift, in the literature, was noted by Miller (2005, pp. 102) who noted that:

> A narrative turning point occurs when experience replaces anticipation, leading at times to a reordering of past events. The biological act of giving birth means that in a very short space of time women shift from being pregnant and anticipating motherhood to being mothers, with all the responsibilities associated with a dependent child.

The above quote illustrates that the mother is still accountable for whatever happens to the child following the delivery process. Because children are thought to be dependent beings, particularly on the mother. Moreover, as Crtittenden (2001) argues,

> For whatever reasons - biology, social conditioning, institutional inertia, choice, or no other choice - children's live are still overwhelmingly shaped by women, and children are still the focus of most women's lives.

The narratives of the women in this research reflected the above quote by showing just how much they thought it was their job as a mother to focus on the child. Although other members of the women's families were involved, at least to some degree, in childrearing, the mothers noted that it was their main responsibility. What is more the women seemed to accept this situation and were not critical of it.

It was interesting when the women reflected on their experience of being cared for by their mother. Sacks (2017) argued that whether a woman raises her child in the same manner as her mother or in a different manner, becoming a mother provides an opportunity for a second chance, to do mothering 'better'. In some ways, parenthood allows a woman to relive her own childhood, repeating what was good and attempting to improve on what was not. If a woman had a strained relationship with her mother, she may attempt to be the mother she wished she had.

5.2. Working Mothers and Stereotypes around Working Mothers in Norway

5.2.1 Meaning of Working Mother

The decision to become a working mother after giving birth was made because the participants wanted it, or at least they framed it, both as a choice and something that was desired but questions of how much this is or can be a choice remain contested (Barbagallo, 2016). White, middle-class women, in particular, have become increasingly devoted to pursuing careers in this social setting, especially when their carrying work could be now undertaken by migrant women (Gotby, 2023). Many of these women were entering the paid labor workforce not because they had to, but because they wanted to (Hays, 1996) – or at least this is how they explained it. Especially when they were raised by parents who were also working parents. For the participants, being a working mother seemed to give them: i) a sense of purpose, ii) knowing the definite consequences of conflicting priorities, iii) as part of the norm, iv) achievement, and v) feelings of guilt for everything she did.

Charlotte

> Oh, for me it's never been a question, I mean nothing else has been an option. I grew up with most of my parents working, my mom has an engineering degree the same as my dad. So, for me, I've always been told, like, Charlotte, you have to do a degree first and then have kids. And if you have kids before, like my parents had me before they finished their degrees, you still study. So, it's never been an option to be a stay-at-home mom, although I respect those that want to do that. And I fully understand why they want to do it, because it's extremely challenging if you don't have a flexible working situation to be a mom and work.

Charlotte, in her explanation above, attempted to appreciate the decision to be a stay-at-home mother. She also knew the implications of her decision to become a working mother, particularly the struggle between home and work.

Mabel

> I always thought that, you know, I remember someone asking me when I had Ruby if I was going back to work and I thought it was a really weird question because of course, I was going back to work. I didn't really consider it as an option to not go back. …But I always knew I was going back. It wasn't really an option not to go back.

Mabel stated that the question of her returning to work after giving birth was a strange one, since she was certain that there was no other option than to return to work as part of her life.

Lara

> Well, I wanted that. That was something I wanted all the time. I felt that I in a way couldn't like... I always felt that I need it, I couldn't imagine myself to be stay at home mom. That kind of knew right away that that wouldn't be anything suiting me, that I just wouldn't, I couldn't see myself that way. But it took some time in the beginning, this first year, year and a half, I was just completely, I

didn't get for work, I just so focused on my baby. And then just like kind of then came another baby and just life went. And father to girls he traveled a lot, so I didn't have opportunity to really work. And I felt somehow frustrated about it. There was something missing in my life.

Lara revealed that there were times when she had to take care of the babies and therefore, she could not go back to work due to the demands and unpredictability of child rearing and because her partner had other priorities. She also noted that a part of her was missing because she was not working.

Summer

I did my master [in Y county] and I finished in 2017, and then I go back to X country, I was working as a lecturer, university lecturer, and I think it's because of my mother knew that I always wanted to be a working mom and even it's actually influenced my choice of career. So, I want to be a university lecturer so I have flexible work hours and I can more focus on my family. So, actually, it's me being, wanting to be a working mother and it's actually influenced my career choice. So, this is now me having a PhD, like working on my PhD, and hopefully still working in academia because I want to be a working mom.

In numerous other nations, it has become more difficult to pursue a career as a working mother. One of Norway's strengths is that it provides opportunities for academics to experience a better work-life balance compared to other countries. So, this can benefit mothers to be able to divide their time between academic life and personal life, including family.

Charlotte

A working mother, it means that I'm always going to have conflicting priorities. And the kids will almost always come first. There are some things when I've done work first, but then it hasn't been anything critical with the kids or anything like that. It's more like logistics. So, I guess the kids will always come first if I need to prioritize. So, it's about being quite clear with your

employer and also about boundaries.

Charlotte described the consequences of being a working mother which were about conflicting priorities and drawing the boundaries at work. So, it becomes important for working mothers to be able to communicate with their employers about their needs and set boundaries. However, not all industries and nations can benefit from the setting of bargaining in the workplace. Despite her decision to work full-time, mother still struggles with tensions between home and work life. It appears that the mother still be the child's primary caretaker, regardless of what is important to the child. So that if her child ever needs her attention while she is working, she will still have to continue to bargain with company regarding her situation. This is still connected to the practice of intensive mothering, which is associated and social constructed with women. So that in this context, the double burden for working mothers also becomes real.

Jade

> So, work makes me, you know, like my home is a safe haven from work, but my work is also a safe haven from my everyday life. So, it keeps me sane. It keeps my purpose alive. And it will keep my kids inspired that yes, my mom is something. I mean she has a life. I mean they will grow up and they will move out. But I want my life here like this where I earn my own money and I contribute shoulder to shoulder with my husband and I have friends who are not working mothers and their kids are like, Papa goes to work, what do you [mother] do? So, kids start asking these questions. I don't want to answer those awkward questions. It's a joking point but yes, work gives me a bit of purpose and it keeps me sane, and it keeps me able to make things happen for our son.

Jade made an intriguing remark about her role as a working mother. Apart from keeping her sane and having goals in life, work is also a real example for children to learn and understand that being a parent means they can still actualize themselves, that there is a balance of roles between mother and father in the decision to continue working. It is interesting that she constructed her worth to her children in terms of work outside of home and not as a mother which might be indicative of the value society places on money earning employment and devaluing mothers' work

at home. This shows that there is a preference for work, that outside-the-home labor is more valued than work inside-the-home. The societal dysfunction that keeps domestic work from being seen as particularly significant is pervasive. According to (Finley, 2020), reproductive labor is rarely fairly compensated because historically female family members, servants, and often enslaved women have done this task. Domestic work was viewed as feminine and restricted to the house by Americans. Due to this, household work became both necessary and invisible to society, and the effects of this way of thinking are still felt today.

Lara

It's like, to be a mom to my girls is, like, just part of my personality and so it's not necessary to be, like, a working mother but there's, like, other cravings I have, like other things I want to do. Like, other accomplishment I want to do. So, it's like, yeah, this one part of me wants to be very much [a] mother and [a] mom and I love it. But there are also other things I want to do. So, I've been, like, always career driven, so, and I was this kind of becoming a mom that doesn't like to delete [sic] it from me. I still kind of like some work to do and pursue some [sic] career.

According to Lara, being a working mother allows her to have another identity aside from being a mother as part of her life's accomplishments. Lara's statement was still in line with Jade's experience in interpreting working mothers. The form of self-actualization of a mother is not being a mother itself, but rather self-actualization or work outside the home. This further strengthens how society still considers that the profession of motherhood itself is still worthless or that so far it has been considered a free and unpaid job. Crittenden (2001) argues the invention of the 'unproductive housewife' continues to have seriously detrimental effects on women and our knowledge of the underlying causes of our wealth. It is less probable that the development of human capital that takes place in the home will be supported, encouraged, or rewarded as it should be if it is given any monetary value. Everyone are the losers for that, not only caretakers and children.

Mabel

I think for me it's just kind of the norm, it's not really a something different to like a working father you know it's just kind of generally most you know both parents work obviously if you don't, if you have someone that's off it's done, but for me it's kind of just a just normal it's not really anything that I think a lot about if yeah kind of wish I was working a little bit less hehe, maybe like you know four days a week would be nice. But I think for me it's just, yeah, it's just a, I don't think it, like, I find it really interesting that it's like working mother is like a concept because you don't really talk about working fathers in the same way, it's just, you know, they always work. So for me it's like, well why does it have to be working mother? Why is it not just like it's just the normal thing to do.

Mabel explained that being a working mother is a normal role, especially when contrasted to working father. She also stated that the concept of a single bread winner in society is more common, but now a dual earner in the family is also a typical concept. This phrase implies that individuals continue to value employment outside the home more than work inside the home. Domestic work, according to Finley (2020), is one type of socially reproductive labor – daily activity that allows people to execute their occupations while also maintaining their health. The dinner that keeps us going, the supply and sale of groceries to cook such meals, the clean clothes we wear on each morning, and the sterilized kitchens we cook in are all examples of socially reproductive work. It's clean linens, stocked shelves, changed bedpans, hot meals, and scrubbed skin. This is significant work, but it is nevertheless considered worthless because it is still classified as unpaid.

Summer

Well, for me, it's you just feel guilty in everything what you do. Because at work, I feel envy for those single or maybe married but not having kids. Like they can start whenever they want, they can end the work whenever they want but here we cannot do that because okay can I have a barnehehage (kindergarten) time only from 8 to 4 then I can only work in that time. Okay,

then I need to be at home with her and then we need to play together, we need to like just being there for her and do all the house chores and everything. So, even but because at home sometimes you still feel that your mind is at work especially when you have a special deadline, or you have a bad day at work. So, sometimes like at home even if you want to work more but you cannot do it because I mean you have your own daughter. So yeah, it's like you never be in a right thing.

Summer emphasized the consequences of being a working mother in terms of conflict between home and work, which leads to feelings of guilt in anything she does.

5.2.2 Factors and Support in Decision to Become a Working Mother

The factors that influenced the participants to become working mothers included real examples of their mothers as working mothers and the people around them, double earners to make ends meet, normalization of the role of working mothers, and the country including the social benefits where they became working mothers.

Charlotte

> Oh, well, probably back to my parents. I grew up in a family where two parents worked, so I never saw the... I don't think I realized how much work it was either. I never saw an issue with working and being a mother. But I think in Norway it's easier than in some other countries.

Jade

> You need a two-person income if you want to give your kids everything. It's a fact. And the thing like, I mean maybe I saw my mother doing it. She was a working mother. If I was staying home, I mean maybe like now I am on a sick leave for 5-6 days, I like staying home. But if I will be staying home for a whole year, my son going back to barnehage, I don't think I can mentally survive that kind of boredom.

Lara

It's like something else I see like a normal. There would be more like what factors influence me that I wouldn't want to be a working mother. I see like to be a working mother is like something kind of normal. That's like something I'm used to. So, yeah, there would have to come some factor that would make me think like, I don't want to work. Like I see this as a normal part of life. That's how it works in the world.

Mabel

I think it's just, yeah, I think it's also just the people like the world around you and the people around you and the kind of groups that you're in and what you've grown up used to. For me, I just never really thought about it as an option not to work. But also, obviously, that's because everyone that I... I don't think I know anyone who stays at home with their children. Maybe one or two people like peripherally through and that I've met through other things, but generally everyone that I met in the U country, in my work group, everyone, all of my friends back here, everyone kind of just goes back to work. There's not really any, no one really considers not going back. So, for me it was just not really a decision because it was always just the thing that you, you know, just what you do. You go back to work and my mom used to work when I was little, not full time but she did work, you know, quite a lot and Matt's mom didn't but that's, you know, it was probably more normal in that time and in the U country not to work. It's probably more normal in other countries, I know that like in Germany and stuff like that, it's less common to work. But for me, both here and in the U country, I think it depends a bit on who you hang out with as well. Like in the U country, because child care is so expensive, if you earn very little, there's no point in going back to work because you can't afford it and or if you have twins but yeah I think it just depends on who you're who your friends with and what groups you're in because it's yeah it's not really a for me it wasn't really a decision it was just what you do.

Summer

Maybe I can explain the situation why I chose Norway, probably because first, in Indonesia, I know that I want to be a working mom and the only career choice that I think is suitable is being a university lecturer. And then I know I want to do a PhD and because I did my master in Sweden. So, I feel that Scandinavia is the most suitable for a working mom because we have daycare and it's really affordable. And everyone is really understanding of the family situation like if you have a sick child, if you have some holiday like Easter or anything, everyone knows that you need to be there with your family. So that's why I try to go and apply just for Scandinavian countries because we know that there should be daycare that's really affordable for us and there should be like a health care system that really helps us. Because here, for the doctor and dentist, it's really free for them, for the kids. And the school is also free. So that's actually one point, like several points that are really important for us. It's daycare, healthcare, and education should be affordable or should be accessible at least.

In terms of who supported the participants' decision to become working mothers, the participants stated that, on average, everyone supported their decision, including partners, parents, family, friends, and the state.

Charlotte

Who supported it? Well, there was no one that was non-supportive, so I guess everyone.

Jade

Everybody.

Lara

It's a funny thing. When I decided in Norway it's normal to go to work one day over the one year and everything. So, then people were questioning my

decision to stay home one more year with the kids. And then when I decided to go back to work again, in some way people would be questioning it again. So, people were supportive, especially my family and my friends would be supportive and as well in some way I felt like they were questioning it as I can manage especially as a single mom, like how I manage work and everything.

Mabel

I think it's just, you know, I think, well obviously Milo was, you know, fine with, he was always, I think he would find it really weird if I didn't go back to work. I think he would kind of be like, "What? What did you do?" And you know, I think all of my friends and my parents and everyone, obviously my parents are now saying that I work too much because they're like, you need to take more time off with your children, but you know that's always the case. Because they're like you have to work but not so much, just you have to work a lot but not that much. But yeah, I think overall it was just everyone was kind of, I think people would have been more, I think I would have needed more support. They would be a lot more surprised if I didn't go back and I think then yeah they would find that really weird but overall obviously Milo picks them up from nursery most days like he does a lot of the work around the house as well so it's very much more of a if that wasn't the case then you know it would be much much trickier to work as much as I do.

Summer

Well, in I country everyone supports me, like all the family members support us, because my husband's family, so his mother is also a working mom, in my side, my mother is also a working mom, so it's really common in our family that have a working mom. So, everyone supports that. Meanwhile here, well I feel that I mean if you want to become a working mom, Norway as a country is supporting you. Because it's not only your family, because it also seems strange if a woman here has a kid and everything, but she is not working. So, it's the other way around in Indonesia if you're a working mom it seems strange

and then you're out of a "normal" community, but here if you're a housewife then you are outside the normal community.

5.2.3 Challenges as a Working Mother

Time management, readjusting to the world of work after giving birth and taking leave, dealing with emotions of guilt, and experiencing a lack of connectivity with the circle beyond the home and family were the most difficult issues for the participants while being working mothers. The notions of "second shift" and "super mom" continue to haunt mothers. Working mothers suffer double burdens between job and home, and they are expected to accomplish everything at once as super moms, therefore the feeling of guilt described by mothers is also a very legitimate concern. Unfortunately, mother guilt appears to be a problem for the individual mother rather than a problem at the macro or system level. According to Eyer (1996), motherhood ideology "framed" women by constructing rigorous, unachievable expectations and then blaming mothers for not conforming to them. This ideology is what has led us down the dead end of mother blaming.

Conflict between Home and Work

All participants acknowledged that they experienced conflicts between home and work while working mothers, although the intensity varied; some felt this way all of the time, while others felt this way just on certain occasions. The conflict between these two private and public areas demonstrates that neoliberalism creates the perception of an exclusive "working mother" category, that is, the public employee, while simultaneously excluding the private childrearing and caring mother - both of these aspects have a dualistic effect on conceptions of motherhood (Gotby, 2023). Both Ann Crittenden's (2001) The Price of Motherhood and Janelle Taylor and colleagues' (2004) Consuming Motherhood highlight the dichotomy of a neoliberal worldview that mandates full-time motherhood while also expecting mothers to be economic players. This increases the likelihood that mothers are more likely to face a double burden as a result of the demand for "perfection" in both the private and public spheres. Mothers appear to have a choice in terms of the professional work they do, but they face exacting demands in the private sphere in order to continue to provide primary attention in child rearing and household labor. This, combined with feelings of guilt and conflict between family and job, has a particularly negative impact on women. Working mothers' viewpoints are becoming increasingly difficult to properly communicate in

public or at work.

5.2.4 Stereotypes Regarding Working Mothers

Working mothers' stereotypes included expectations of being a good parent in the Norwegian setting, questions about how children may survive if their mothers work, and assumptions about maternity leave.

Charlotte

> Stereotypes, but the thing is I haven't really, I don't work for a company based here, so it's a bit different. But what I see is that there's like an assumption when people have been on maternity leave that they want to come back and they want to do a job they know and you know, not have so much challenges. And so that's kind of a stereotyping. There's other stereotyping happening like oh if I hire a female she's just gonna go on maternity leave because she just got married. I mean things like that are stereotyping. Yeah, there's probably tons of like smaller things that I can't think of now. Assumption that you can't travel because you have kids, which is a fair.

Maternity leave in Norway is one of the longest in the world, lasting approximately one year. Working mothers may be stigmatized as a result of the length of this maternity leave. In terms of productivity, companies still believe that hiring women is less profitable than hiring men. According to the findings of a study conducted by Masser, Grace, and Nesic (2007), pregnant women are liked but not wanted at work.

Jade

> I mean culturally, sometimes yes. You asked first, did I face any challenges when I was going back to work. But I heard distant people saying like, yeah, the kid was a poor kid. He will have to live without his mom, you know. So, it was haunting me a lot. But yeah, I just, I know work is also a priority, so I just got over it.

The next stereotype is about the thought of poor children because the mother chooses to work. This phenomenon continues to perpetuate that working mothers are still considered bad mothers because society sees the mothers have neglected their children. Still describing the phenomena of intensive mothering, Hays (1996) stated child rearing as a labor best accomplished by the individual mother - without the assistance of servants, older children, or other women. The mother was encouraged to put all of her knowledge, religious commitment, and loving capacities to bear on the task, and she was pushed to be consistently affectionate, always scrutinizing her own behavior, and exceedingly attentive in leading the children. As a result, any action made by the mother, even the decision to become a working mother, is regarded as having a detrimental impact on the children.

Lara

> That I have a thing to say actually, because when I start to work like shifts and everything, so I've got this question so often, like how because my work sometimes starts at 4 o'clock in the morning or I need to work maybe sometimes even until midnight or so. And weekends. So, I get the question often, how can I do this work when I am having kids? Yes, I get this question often. But then, my their father, my ex-partner, he travels a lot for work and he kind of ever done with anything. I don't remember anyone would ever ask him, how he can do, and he can be gone for like a week at a time and actually up to two months, it depends. I don't remember anyone would ever ask him, how he can do this work, when he has a kid. When he is not around for weeks. So yes, there absolutely I did. At some time it kind of annoyed me that everybody was asking me like how can you go work at the shift when you've got the kids.

Lara expresses a stereotyped form, similar to Jade's, addressing the stereotype of the decision to become a working mother. This time, she explained the problem as a gender issue. She witnessed an unjust expectation of mothers and fathers. Since father did not face the same preconceptions when he became a working father. When Father was gone for weeks, no one ever asked him. According to Hays (1996), men, in other words, can go to the movies without thinking about what they're leaving behind since they know mothers are in charge of the worrying.

Mabel

Yeah, I think for me the biggest thing is just maybe you're supposed to be working, like everyone in Norway kind of expects you to be working, but they also expect you to pick up, to not be the last person to pick up at nursery, make sure they all go to there and make sure they all go to activities and oh your children don't do any activities after work at school. I'm like no, I don't have time for that until they've begged me to go. They're not going anywhere, so yeah I think that's the biggest thing is like that kind of pressure to pick them up early and you know, appreciate to be like right they always have to you know sometimes, you know they don't have them, they don't have the right, you know, we forget to put their wools on because we're used to living in the U country where no one ever wears wool clothes and if it's even a slightly bit of rain they just don't go outside right, so that's that's very different, so I think that's the kind of biggest stereotype in Norway, is that it has to be very wholesome and right, and you can't work late. And how you know, so it's not so much about being a working mother, but probably more about working the longer hours and working kind of different schedules than most people. But it's kind of this expectation always that you have to work, but only the right amount.

Mabel's statement was particularly intriguing in terms of understanding local preconceptions, namely in the Norwegian context. Shee mentioned the concept of "whole parenting," where people expect parents to have a consistent mindset about how to raise children "adequately" and "perfectly," such as picking up children from nurseries on time, providing clothing that is appropriate for the occasion and weather, parents need to having enough time to play with children, and so on. This necessitates a duality of "good mothers" and "bad mothers," as well as social construction demands from the local context, particularly Norway.

Summer

Yeah, the most common stereotype is you are Asian, you are working as a PhD student, then you will get pregnant. Because here, most of Asian PhDs, it's not for being racist, but it's really common in our department. Then if you are a PhD and you are married, usually you take that one-year parental leave in the middle of your PhD. So then, you can have a longer stay here than if it's more than three years then you can get the permanent residence and everything. So, it's like they want to take advantage of that parental leave here as a PhD. I really hate that. Because I mean somehow other people pushing me. "You are working as a PhD, it's time to get pregnant again." But they don't really think about what comes after. Because then, okay, you get pregnant again and I will have two kids. Can you imagine having two kids while writing your dissertation? I will never ever do that. So, sometimes like for them as a PhD student and a working mom both, they don't really think that I'm taking my work really that serious.

Working mothers were already subjected to some of the stereotypes listed above. Being a working mother with immigrant status, on the other hand, adds to the stereotypical picture of mothers. A broad assumption that mothers who choose to pursue a PhD in developed nations, including Norway, will be able to obtain a quicker access to a permanent residence status by becoming pregnant and taking maternity leave. This phenomenon also describes motherhood stereotypes in the academic sector. In the end, working mothers were still faced with stereotypes of "good mothers" and "bad mothers", both in the private and public spheres, including corporate and academic settings.

6. Conclusion

This chapter covered how the research findings shed light on the key research questions, implication and recommendation for further research and policy, limitation of the research, and lastly, the research's conclusion.

6.1 Aim

The aim of this research is contributed to an improved understanding of how working mothers in the context of Norway perceive stereotypes related to motherhood. Previous research has discussed broad issues regarding working mothers, such as stereotypes between working mothers and stay at home mothers, work-family guilt, working mothers versus working mothers, bias in employment decisions about mothers and fathers, and other topics. The thesis, however, differs from previous research in that it focuses explicitly on the issue of working mothers in the dichotomy of "good mothers" and "bad mothers" stereotypes in the Rogaland Area, Norway (women constructing motherhood). Through constructive grounded theory of five working mothers in Rogaland Area, Norway, the researcher divided into two major themes: i) Working mothers' interpretation of motherhood, ii) Stereotypes experienced by working mothers in Norway.

6.1.1 Working Mothers' Interpretation of Motherhood

Motherhood seemed to provide a two-sided experience for the women, being both happy and challenging. The experience of happiness of motherhood included the following: i) reward and fulfillment, ii) pure joy, iii) and feeling supported. Then, the challenging experiences related to motherhood include the following things: i) a lot of worry, ii) fear and anxiety, iii) challenging and hectic. Meanwhile the meaning of motherhood can vary greatly between women. The women's reflection on the meaning of motherhood including: i) unconditional love, ii) safe home, iii) something the woman wants, iv) reward, fun, and being extremely busy, v) and a lot of preparation.

The researcher came to various conclusions from key female interviewees. Firstly, the reality that women meet when they become mothers, which is related to "appropriate mothering" and "mommy wars," is defined by women's reflections on the experience of motherhood, which explains the in-between (happy and challenging) experiences. A mother's identity as a woman who can feel many things, including what she truly feels about herself, like being self-interested, then changing into selflessness and putting children first, seems to be taken over by appropriate mothering. Mommy wars, on the other hand, refer to the various oppositions that mothers face, such as working mothers versus stay-at-home mothers, mothers who give birth naturally versus cesareans, mothers who breastfeed versus mothers who give formula milk, and women who choose to have children versus women who are childless. It's been said that having children makes a lady

feel more fulfilled and whole. She may be accused of being uncaring, cold, and unfulfilled, which would support the allegation made by Hays (1996) that women choose to remain childless. This hypothesis still relates to perceptions of "good and bad mothers" and women's experiences. Due to societal construction, some options seem better than others. Secondly, the challenging mothering experiences the women had were about the children, and in many ways their stories focused on their children even if they were different, albeit similar, stories. In accordance with their narratives, after becoming mothers, women's primary responsibility and preoccupation is nurturing their children. This indicates how, once women become mothers, they begin to identify more with their children than with themselves or with any other goal. This, it could be claimed, is a reflection of how the persistent stereotype of the "good mother" includes the idea of intensive mothering.

6.1.2 Stereotypes Experienced by Working Mothers in Norway

Nevertheless, with regard to working mothers in Norway specifically, the choice to became working mothers was made because the participants wanted it, or at least that is how they framed it. However, the extent to which this is or can be a choice is still debatable (Barbagallo, 2016). For the participants, being a working mother seemed to give them: i) a sense of purpose, ii) knowing the definite consequences of conflicting priorities, iii) as part of the norm, iv) achievement, and v) feelings of guilt for everything she did. The following is a list of common misconceptions concerning working mothers in Norway: i) the presumption around maternity leave, ii) gender inequality in society's expectations of working mothers and working fathers in their involvement with child rearing; iii) the idea of "wholesome" parents that related to local contexts in Norway, which requires parents to be able to pick up their children from daycare on time, spend more time with their children especially on weekends; ensure that their children wear proper clothes and equipment according to local contexts; and iv) working mother means poor child(ren), v) Academic stereotypes that target immigrant mothers specifically due to the stigma associated with immigrants pursuing permanent residence status in Norway.

Additionally, the primary analysis of the discourse of working mothers revealed that mothers defined their value to their children in terms of their employment outside the home rather than as mothers, which may be an indication of the value society accords to labor with a high potential for financial reward while devaluing mothers' domestic work. This demonstrates that there is a

preference for work, with labor performed outside the house being regarded as being of higher worth. Domestic labor is not considered as particularly significant due to widespread societal breakdown.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Actual Support for Working Mothers in Norway

The forms of support that were most helpful to the participants during their time as working mothers in Norway, were i) the establishment of a nursery, ii) services to care for their children until they were placed in a nursery, iii) services for completing housework, iv) support networks such as partners and friends who have had similar experiences, and v) places to actualize themselves as part of self-care

Norway is a country that prioritizes and invests more resources to early childhood education for its inhabitants. Through ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) (Commission E. , 2022), they attempt to address children's needs for care and play while also promoting learning and formative development as a foundation for overall growth. Although ECEC is not mandatory in Norway, children as young as one year old are eligible to a spot in a publicly sponsored kindergarten. Children can attend ECEC (International Standard Classification of Education Level 0) until they are six years old, at which point they begin primary school. So, with children as young as one year old and maternity leave for working parents of 49 weeks (equal to one year) (Commission E. , n.d.), this is sufficient to accommodate the needs of working parents, including working mothers.

Unfortunately, this framework does not apply to all working mothers, particularly those who work remotely, thus employment standards, including maternity leave, are governed by the nation of origin of the company. In other circumstances, children must still wait in line to be able to get a spot at kindergarten because the school year typically begins in August, so there are periods when children cannot access kindergarten/nursery despite being one year old. In this instance, assistance with childcare is essential so that parents can continue to work. *Dagmamma* (day care) services for regular babysitters and occasional babysitters are easy to locate in Norway, and there is even a website that connects parents and babysitters.

The next essential resource for working mothers is housekeeping services. Working mothers prioritize two things above everything else: family (particularly children) and work. So, services

that assist with homework on a regular basis, such as once a week, might be really beneficial. Housework services allow mothers to spend time on themselves.

Charlotte

…And also help to clean the house, because although we have someone cleaning like once a week, we still need to clean a lot, a lot all the time. So, just having that reassurance that someone comes and does that, that makes my head a little bit more calm.

Working mothers can benefit from informal help as well. Recognizing the many uncertainties in the process of becoming a parent, as well as the varied stages of child development that provide distinct obstacles, assistance from spouses, family, and other parents who have had similar parenting experiences can serve as a type of support system.

Jade

That kind of support that comes from anybody, that you are not alone. It helps. … Yeah, you have a working parent who have the same aged kids so you can talk about your kids how they are like evolving and stuff and rant to them like oh my god last night was a horrible night horrible night. So that kind of thing you can talk to the mothers, and we all are going through the same thing, body image issues and work issues and stuff like that and family things. So, it helps.

Outside of work, spaces, places, and activities that are freely accessible to everyone, including working mothers, are also a form of significant support for working mothers. Mothers require time apart from everyone except themselves, and they also require we-time with close friends without having to worry about their children.

6.2.2 Recommendation for Norway

Even though Norway has one of the greatest levels of gender equality in the world, as well as being a child-centered society, there are still ideas for support that might help optimize the welfare of working mothers. The participants shared a variety of alternative support ideas that

could help working mothers, including: i) improving company programs to support working mothers, ii) empowering women to speak up about their needs as working mothers, iii) encouraging men to take on more responsibility for housework and child care, iv) providing after-nursery care, v) providing alternative children's activities outside of the home and at school, vi) finding affordable services for housework and child care, vii) support networks/groups and communities, and viii) financial aid are available in cases where the nursery is shut down or not operating as usual (in these cases, baby sitter can be hired in lieu of the nursery's services).

Companies must develop in order to create an environment that is more parent-friendly, and to be more flexible with the needs of work and family. Companies can play a major role in reducing the double burden that women frequently face between public and domestic work. After companies improve in regulations that are more parent-friendly, women and men also need to improve. Women should gain more influence in order to express their needs as working mothers in public (such as workplaces) and private environments. Simultaneously, males must develop self-awareness and responsibility in order to share duties in domestic and child-rearing work.

Jade

> I feel like if men should start standing up and take responsibility. … Yeah, I mean, I have my friends, you see people, why do women have to say, like, oh, I cannot leave the kids alone in the evening? For example, my friend's circle, they only gather for a party or something during a workday in the morning when kids are at *barnehage* [kindergarten]. But men, they gather on the weekends.

In general, kindergartens or nurseries in Norway close at 4.30 p.m., while some parents work later. So, if kindergartens may stay open later, it will benefit working parents as well. Working parents might also benefit from assistance from the nursery to pick up their children and prepare the children's dinner till their parents finish work. Furthermore, while Europe in general respects personal space, the establishment of working mother support groups and communities can be areas for improvement that may positively support working mothers. This community can help create connections and support systems for working mothers. Lastly, financial assistance as a substitute for childcare services if the kindergarten is closed is another type of assistance that might help

working mothers.

6.2.3 Recommendation for Further Research

This research would have benefited from the inclusion of the fathers' experiences. In the context of heterosexual relationships, the researcher argued that the issue of parenthood should be addressed from both sides, mothers and fathers. Discussion from both sides, especially when discussing gender stereotypes, can supplement the dynamics of the research. A woman was at home with her spouse and child on one of the occasions of the interview. The husband did not participate in the interview process, but the research outcomes could potentially be richer, if the husband was involved.

Additionally, the opinions of stay-at-home mothers would also enrich the current result findings. In several interviews, the mothers said that opting not to return to work after giving birth was unusual option in Norway. So, it could be fascinating to understand more from the stay-at-home mothers' perspectives and experiences regarding stereotypes in the context of motherhood.

6.3 Limitation

This research was limited to the Rogaland area, specifically Stavanger and Sandnes. Conducting research on similar issues on the outskirts of Norway or its rural areas would offer an interesting perspective.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from the participants' interviews indicate that working mothers in Norway, still experience motherhood stereotypes, especially around the "good mother" and "bad mother" stereotypes. Working mother stereotypes, including subjects such as intensive mothering, appropriate mothering and child rearing, mommy wars, and women facing neoliberal challenges.

As the mothers' narratives suggest, there is still room for Norwegian policy to improve its support for and of working mothers, including, i) improving company programs to support working mothers, ii) programs for empowering women to speak up about their needs as working mothers, iii) programs for encouraging men to take on more responsibility for housework and child care, iv) providing after-nursery care, v) providing alternative children's activities outside of the home and at school, vi) providing affordable services for housework and child care, vii) support

networks/groups and communities, and viii) financial aid.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Non-Plagiarism Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation titled: Working Mothers in the Dichotomy of the Stereotype of "Good Mother" and "Bad Mother" in Rogaland Area, Norway. (Women Constructing Motherhood), submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master's Program in Social Work with Families and Children:

- Has not been submitted to any other institute/university/college.
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work.
- Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work.
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize, and will result in a failing grade (F) in the program.

Date: 6ᵗʰ June 2023
Signature:

Name: ADE PUTRI VERLITA MAHARANI

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Research Participant Data

Full name:

Date of Birth:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Racial or Ethnic Origin:

Religious Belief:

Sex Life or Sexual Orientation:

*Note: feel free to leave the answer column blank for questions that you think are irrelevant.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. When was the first time you became a mother?
2. How would you describe the experience of motherhood; what does motherhood mean to you?
3. What feelings represented your first motherhood experience at that time; why?
4. What changes did you feel before and after becoming a mother? Why yes/why no?
5. When did you decide to become a working mother? What does 'working mother' mean to you, why?
6. What factors influenced your decision to become a working mother?
7. Are there any people who support your decision to become a working mother? Why yes, why not?
8. What was/is challenging for you as a working mother? (why no challenges?)
9. How do you face these challenges?
10. Have you ever experienced conflict between home and work?
11. Have you ever experienced any kind of stereotypes regarding working mothers while living in Norway? What are they; why not?
12. What forms of support have helped you the most as a working mother?
13. What forms of support are not yet available and, in your opinion, could be an opportunity to be able to support working mothers?

Appendix C: Consent Form & NSD Notification

Would you be willing to participate in the research project:
"How do working mothers in Norway perceive their experiences of stereotypes in the context of motherhood?"

The researcher would like to invite mothers who had given birth to take part in this research project. The primary aim is to understand how working mothers in Norway perceive stereotypes related to motherhood. Below you will find the description of the project and what it entails for you to participate in it in this letter.

Purpose of the Research

This research is part of master's degree research at the University of Stavanger, Norway carried out by Ade Putri Verlita Maharani. This research focuses on studying heterosexual mothers who gave birth to their children, not foster, adoptive, or stepmothers. This research aims to provide an overview of the experiences of women in choosing to work after giving birth, how they construct their perspective as working mothers, and what they see as the most helpful form of support that enables them to be working mothers. The researcher is looking for Norwegian and other citizens working mothers who have children between the ages of one and twelve years old.

Who is responsible for the research?

The University of Stavanger is the institution responsible for the research.

Why are you being requested to take part?

The researcher hopes to be able to interview working mothers in Norway, and you are part of the criteria.

What does your participation entail?

If you decide to participate in the research, you will be interviewed for about one hour by the researcher. The topic of this interview is how you perceive the experiences of stereotypes in

the context of motherhood. The researcher has prepared some initial questions to help you engage with the topic. Follow-up questions vary according to the ongoing interview process and the participants' answers as well as circumstances.

The interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone and then transcribed into the full text. Crucially, the interview will be anonymous because no identifying information will be included in the typed-up text of the interview. This means that names of places, people, organizations, dates, and other details will be modified or omitted so that you cannot be identified in the text, and you will be assigned a pseudonym (you may choose your own if you wish).

The researcher will meet you at a mutually agreed time, location, and day. You are free to withhold some or all the information that is requested, so you are not required to respond to a question or provide a justification if you choose not to.

Participation is Voluntary

It is optional to take part in the research. Even if you decide to take part, you are always free to end your consent without having to give a reason. If you decide not to participate or later decide to withdraw, there will be no negative consequences for you because this is your story, and the researcher respects your decisions.

You can choose which information to modify, what should be typed up and what shouldn't be (we can halt the interview recording if you want to say something but don't want it to be recorded and/or typed up).

In case you'd like to read your typed-up anonymized interview, the researcher will provide it to you. The researcher would appreciate hearing your feedback on the text and making any changes you wish to make. It's absolutely fine if you don't want to do any of these things. Alternatively, if you prefer not to hear from the researcher again, your request will be respected.

Your inquiries are welcome and gladly addressed. Please see the contact information provided below.

The researcher truly values your courage in sharing, and the most essential thing is that you feel empowered and at ease discussing your experiences during the process.

Your Privacy - How we will handle, store, and use your personal information

Your personal information will only be used by the researcher for the stated purpose(s) in this information letter. Your personal information will be handled by the researcher in a private setting and in accordance with applicable laws (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- This study is being done by Ade Putri Verlita Maharani (contact information is below).
- Your name and contact information will be kept on the university server in a password-protected document.
- On the transcription, your name will be changed to a pseudonym or a number, such as Participant 1.
- After the transcription is finished, all recordings will be erased from the university server that is password-protected (only Ade Putri Verlita Maharani will have access to these recordings).
- Transcripts (the typed-up text of the interview) will be kept in an anonymous, password-protected document on a university server.

What will happen to your personal information once the research is finished?

Based on your consent, we will process your personal information.

NSD - The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has determined that the processing of personal data in this project complies with data protection laws based on an agreement with the University of Stavanger.

Where can I get additional information?

Feel free to contact the following if you want to exercise your rights or if you have questions regarding the research:

- The University of Stavanger through Ade Putri Verlita Maharani (ap.maharani@stud.uis.no, tel: +46769754518)
- The University of Stavanger, Dr Patrycja Buxton (supervisor), patrycja.buxton@uis.no
- Our Data Protection Officer's email address is personvernombud@uis.no.
- NSD - The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, through phone at +47 53 21 15 00 or via email at personverntjenester@nsd.no.

About The Researcher

Ade Putri Verlita Maharani

The researcher was born and grew up in Indonesia. She currently gets residing in Europe, and this semester she is in Norway through a scholarship program provided by the European Union government. Having worked in the field for more than five years in the domains of education, mental health, and refugees. She started a social platform that focused on concerns with maternal mental health in Indonesia before enrolling in this master's degree. She prefers to spend her free time closer to nature, photographing and filming it with a pocket camera. You can also find out more about the researcher via https://www.linkedin.com/in/putri-verlita-04395a81/.

Yours sincerely,
Verlita

Ade Putri Verlita Maharani

Consent Form

I have learned about the research "How do working mothers in Norway perceive their experiences of stereotypes in the context of motherhood?" and I understand it and have been provided with the chance to ask questions. I thus agree:

- ☐ to take part in a recorded semi-structured qualitative interview
- ☐ to be contacted about the interview in the manners stated above
- ☐ for the interview to be typed up and anonymized
- ☐ to be contacted in person, by phone, text, email, or WhatsApp (cross out the services you don't want to be contacted on)

I agree that my personal information may be handled up until the research's estimated completion date of 31st July 2023.

(Signed by participant, date)

Sikt

Assessment of processing of personal data

Reference number	**Assessment type**	**Date**
677123	Standard	11/04/2023

Project title

How do working mothers in Norway perceive their experiences of stereotypes in the context of motherhood?

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

University of Stavanger / Faculty of Social Sciences / Department of Social Sciences

Project leader

Patrycja Sosnowska-Buxton

Student

Ade Putri Verlita Maharani

Project period

15.01.2023 - 31.07.2023

Categories of personal data

General
Special

Legal basis

Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 no. 1 a)
Explicit consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 9 no. 2 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, as long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 31.07.2023.

Notification Form

Comment

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are a student or a researcher. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation.

TYPE OF DATA

The project will process special categories of personal data regarding ethnic origin, religion and sexual orientation.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

We have assessed that you have a legal basis to process the personal data, but remember that you must store, send and secure the collected data in accordance with your institution's guidelines. This means that you must use data processors (and the like) that your institution has an agreement with (ie cloud storage, online survey, and video conferencing providers).

Our assessment presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project, it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes: https://sikt.no/en/notify-changes-notification-form

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!