Mothering the Organisation

A phenomenological exploration of women who off-ramped careers: influences, time use, skills, and the business practices that support or hinder women's professional re-engagement.

By

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Date: 22 November 2017

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Dedication

For Ayden and Eryn - because of you, my heart has danced and sung.

For Winton - because with you, I found the steps and the songs.

List of Tables and Figures

Acronyms

ABS, Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACCI, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

AIM, Australian Institute of Management

AQF, Australian Qualifications Framework Council

BCA, Business Council of Australia.

DCA, Diversity Council of Australia

DEST, Department of Education, Science and Training

DEWR, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (now defunct)

DEEWR, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (now split in two: Department of Education and Training, and Department of Employment since 2013)

DIISRTE, Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education

EEO, Equal Employment Opportunities

EOWA, Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (WGEA - Workplace Gender Equality Agency, since 2012).

HILDA, Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia

HREOC, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

IGR, Intergenerational Report

ILO, International Labour Organization

OECD, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

SAHM, Stay at Home Mother

WGEA - Workplace Gender Equality Agency

ABSTRACT

This research challenges common images of the stay-at-home-mother as it explores the lived experiences of women who: a) off-ramped élite professional careers to become <u>long term</u>, stay-at-home-mothers (SAHMs), and b) have considered re-engagement with the professional workforce. I investigate firstly, the women's reasons and experiences of being SAHMs; secondly, their expectations of organizational re-engagement; and thirdly, managerial views and organizational practices that hinder or support such re-engagement.

The direction for this research emerged from a desire to address issues of inequality and marginalisation faced by professional women in organizations, as a penalty for becoming mothers. My research draws from sociology, philosophy, feminism, management and organization studies. Through the use of feminist, standpoint, phenomenological and narrative methodologies I create a space in which to give SAHMs voice, and consider issues of fit and misfit between their narratives and those of business managers.

This research makes three significant contributions. It profiles a politically unrepresented, socially marginalised and organizationally ignored group of professional women. It identifies SAHMs as a significant cohort of plausible re-entrants into professional roles in Australia's ageing workforce. It locates organisational receptivity to such re-engagement.

The findings suggest that SAHMs are highly educated and experienced women; that their strengths and employability potential are not understood within organisations; and that there are no pathways for them to re-enter the professional workforce. The overall conclusion is stark: this cohort who off-ramped from élite careers is not deemed employable in professional roles.

The thesis addresses a major gap in current literature, theory and discourse on professional women who mother, who off-ramp careers and who engage in care work activities <u>long term</u>. The research contributes to career, care work, skill, organisational practice and older workers literatures. The characteristics of SAHM-like women and their potential as an underutilised source of skilled talent should also be of interest to organisations, HR practitioners and ageing workforce strategists.

Key words: stay-at-home-mothers; off-ramped career women; skill; care work; professional work; career re-entry; older workers; ageing workforce.

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 The research problem - Genesis

During the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) revolution of the 1980s, I graduated from university, shopped for black power suits with double strength shoulder pads and entered corporate life. There, I met my husband, earned more than him and outranked him. We were both focused on corporate career paths and confident that we would succeed. A decade and a half later, with the ticks of a biological clock in my ears and a firm glass ceiling in my sight, I became a mother. Initial plans for three months maternity leave turned to two decades of leave-for-mothering.

Totally unprepared for my new role, I absorbed Piaget and Biddulph and immersed myself in the philosophies of Maria Montessori and Shinichi Suzuki. I had made a life altering decision - to be a full time-mother. I had entered a new world and saw no fit with my corporate self. My work site, networks, recreational activities and financial situations had all changed, as had my perception of self. Although I felt very privileged to be in a position where I could choose to full-time-mother, there have been times beyond the walls of home and my inner sanctum where I have been regarded as *just* a mum. Nonetheless, my mothering years have been a rich and fruitful journey. I became involved in new networks and community work, using some old skills and learning an array of new ones. I have been very productive and have met or heard about many women on similar trajectories. Highly educated and accomplished ex-career women who also turned to their families and communities as a primary focus in life.

In the last few years I began to notice a marked shift in the conversations these women were having. As children have grown up and are preparing to leave home the women are coming to terms with the realization that being a full time at-home-mother is finite and that their current roles are becoming redundant. There has been a palpable sense of imminent change and conversations are increasingly about the next phase of life (post kids) and how to best invest ones' time. Some are toying with the idea of re-entering

the paid workforce as a plausible but largely unexplored option. They are asking themselves and each other questions like: what do I really want to do next? Do I want to go back to paid work? How would I sell myself and the 20 years at home? What are my marketable skills?

These recurring conversations and questions became the impetus for my research because they raise for me crucial questions on how *skill attainment* and *time use* are framed and given value in the often opposing spheres of home and of work. Thus my research gives voice to these women, provides for the telling of their situated stories, and articulates their issues for organisations and for society.

1.1.2 The research problem - Context

Observing some key socio-economic trends over the last decade also played a large role in motivating me to research. In particular I felt that Government, media and employer bodies' rhetoric seemed to be punctuated by concerns over work life balance, diversity and ageing workforce issues. What I saw as largely missing from those three discourses was any serious consideration being given to the body of professional women who have exited successful careers to focus on family and community long term. Additionally no one appeared to be asking 'why' they had quit. What was really happening with my generational peers that were trained under the 1980s mantra of 'we can do it/have it all'? This to me appeared as serious lacunae of both information and knowledge, in short, a *void*.

Those motivating key trends I refer to are the result of Australia's changing demographic and workforce structures. For example, increased life expectancies, declining fertility rates, and the reaching of retirement age by the baby boomers have resulted in Australia facing not only an ageing population but also an ageing workforce (Intergenerational Report [IGR], 2015; Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [DEWR], 2005; Productivity Commission, 2013).

The structure of our workforce has experienced both the growth of part-time work and unprecedented increases of women's participation (Campbell, 2000; Baxter, 2002). During the 1990s alone, three quarters of employment growth in Australia was in part-

time jobs (Gregory, 2002) an increase met predominately by women. However, the growth has been substantial in part time, not full time roles (Clare, 2001; Ginn, Street and Arber, 2001); in the 'peripheral' not the 'core' groups (Wigfield, 2001); in the 'adaptable jobs' (Wolcott and Glezer 1995); those deemed to reflect women's family roles (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw and Freysinger, 1996); and not the 'career track jobs' (Gaze, 2001).

The *void* is also reflected in the extreme paucity of research literature on professional women who totally exit their careers. The work of Palladino Schultheiss (2009), Rubin and Wooten (2007) and Zimmerman (2000) serve to emphasise how little is known about graduate women who quit careers for staying home with their children, <u>long term</u>. Research related to motherhood and career breaks is largely limited to mothers of neonates or young children who generally re-engage with the workforce during a child's infancy or early school years. These studies have been driven by sociopolitical agendas over issues such as family friendly work arrangements, maternity/parental leave entitlements, and childcare funding (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 2007; Pocock, 2003; Brennan, 1998).

Looking to the future economic needs of our nation there are escalating calls for older people to increase their workforce participation and prolong their working lives (IGR, 2015; Productivity Commission 2013; Hewlett, 2005). Additionally, the Commonwealth Government has established policy goals of both increasing and extending the participation rates of older workers (IGR, 2015; EOWA, 2008a; House of Representatives, 2000).

In this context of an ageing Australian workforce, women represent a major reserve of potential labour particularly amongst those wishing to return to work (EOWA, 2008a) and non-employed women (Austin and Giles, 2003: 260). However, there is a reported lag and limited response from the business sector in implementing programmes to engage or retain older workers (Australian Institute of Management [AIM], 2013; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [ACCI], 2012; Duneman and Barrett, 2004; Shacklock, 2004; Hudson Report, 2004), or indeed to actively attract career-exited women.

It is timely then that we find out and understand more about professional women who leave their careers for home, <u>long term</u>. Time that we explore what is in this *void*.

1.2 Research Questions

1.2.1 Scope and broad aims of the questions

Bearing the above background and problem in mind, this thesis explores what is happening in that *void* from the standpoint of 20 <u>long term</u> SAHMs and six corporate managers. The broad aims of this thesis are to: firstly, find out who SAHMs are, what they do and why they do it; and secondly, to investigate SAHMs' potential for, and organisational receptivity to, workforce re-engagement.

1.2.2 The questions

The salient question underpinning this thesis is:

To what extent do SAHMs consider themselves as skilled and how do current organisational practices hinder or support their re-engagement with the professional workforce?

This main question is explored through two studies and a consideration of the following ten pertinent sub-questions:

In Study I (the women)

1. How do SAHMs position themselves?
2. Why did the women drop out of their professional careers and become SAHMs (and why did they not follow the dominant trend to re-enter the workforce during their children's early years?)
3. How do SAHMs use their time (what do they do with their time)?
4. How do SAHMs perceive their skill development if any over the last 20 years?
5. What are SAHMs' time-use aspirations into the future?
6. What do SAHMs consider a fit or misfit between their skills and experience and (their understanding of) current employment practices?

In Study II (the managers)

7. What is the attitude of managers towards professional women who have been out of the paid workforce for 20 years?

8. How do the women's skill development and time use differ from or concur with organisational or managers' notions of skill development and time use?

9. What position do managers present regarding recruitment and attraction practices of re-integrating professional women, particularly mothers, to their organisations?

10. To what extent if any, are managers addressing the issue of an ageing workforce in practice?

1.3   Research approach

1.3.1   Methodology

This thesis straddles both feminist and organisational concepts and theories.

Working as a feminist researcher I draw a clear distinction between Methodology and Method. The first pertains to theoretical and philosophical positions underpinning my work and the second to the tools I employ. These are both developed and discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

My methodological style takes an explorative, qualitative feminist approach and is based on that pioneered by Rich (1976) in that it integrates academic research with personal experiences. I address feminist and phenomenological theories and the concepts of voice, standpoint and interpretation. I employ a relational research style (following DeVault, 1999) that reflects and respects participants' ways of sharing their stories as well as methods that privilege positionality and subjectivity (Riessman, 2000). This is a collaborative manner of working between researcher and participants that begins with our 'situated' experiences. That is, our direct experiences of the everyday become the 'the primary ground of our knowledge' (Smith [D], 1987). Importantly, this is a methodology that considers the lived experiences of the researcher, not as a contaminant or barrier to knowledge but rather as a window to knowledge – a point of

entry (ibid). Thus my own experiences as a career woman, scholar and mother provide not only the impetus but also have great influence on this study.

1.3.2 Method

My work is a narrative exploration of situated experience and as such it relies exclusively on data garnered through in-depth interviews. Two different groups of participants were interviewed.

The first (and major) Study is an analysis and discussion of the narrative data provided by 20 women with strong professional credentials and experience, currently practicing as long term stay at home mothers (SAHMs). The second (and minor) Study analyses and discusses results from six current corporate managers' interviews.

The design of the two studies, the overall management of the data gathering, and the thematic analysis process employed are explained in detail in Chapter 4.

1.4 Thesis roadmap

1.4.1 Structure

The thesis is set out in 9 chapters and compiled thus:

The following two chapters present the literature reviewed. Chapter 2 addresses the literature that informs or is pertinent to women as mothers and care work. It explores motherhood as ideology as well as the mothering of adolescents. Decision making models are discussed, as is the context within which women's choices between home and paid work are made. Chapter 3 focuses on the literature relevant to organisational conditions that affect employment: Australian workforce trends; women and market work; concepts of career and skill and the impact of gender on the paid work environment. This chapter concludes with a conceptual framework for the research.

The first part of Chapter 4 presents the methodology and discusses the feminist, standpoint and phenomenological theoretical and philosophical frameworks that are used for this thesis. It considers feminist issues of gender essentialism, otherness and difference. It delves into the use of voice to encapsulate issues of silence in subordinate

or marginalised groups and the key role the search for voice plays in nascent feminist theory. It explores phenomenology's concern with the nature of embodied experience and its applicability to experiential analysis. The second part of this chapter explains the design of the studies and the tools employed for data gathering and analysis.

Chapters 5 and 7 present interview findings from the two studies. Chapter 5 is the first level of analysis of 20 in depth interviews with SAHMs and similarly Chapter 7, with the six managers interviewed. The findings are presented according to distinct themes that emerged. These themes then form the substance of the discussions in Chapters 6 and 8.

Finally, in Chapter 9 the research questions are re-visited. Implications and considerations for praxis are considered and the thesis' contribution to current scholarship and further research possibilities are also highlighted. The thesis ends with a personal reflection and thoughts.

1.4.2   Explanation of 'SAHM' term

Women's full time, stay-at-home-mothering roles are addressed in the research literature as 'At-home', 'SAH mothers' and 'SAHM' (see Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Maat, 2006; Johnston and Swanson, 2006).

I have chosen to use the term 'SAHM' throughout this thesis as an expedient form of shorthand for 'stay-at-home-mother'. I use this abbreviating term exclusively to refer to the women who participated in my study. Different characteristics are attributed to these terms in different studies, thus it is of value that I clarify how I use and define 'SAHMs' within the context, and for the purposes of, my study.

In using the term 'SAHM' I refer exclusively to the participants in my study who all share the following four key characteristics:

- *Tertiary education/qualification* - participants in this study have all been recipients of a tertiary education and hold qualifications or industry specific credentials.

- *Career Experience* – participants have been active in career, professional or corporate roles, in employer organizations prior to full time motherhood, all have managerial experience.
- *Financial security* – during the mothering years the women did not have a pressing need to generate their own personal income, which as I will discuss later, is a significant determinant in enabling women to stay home to mother.
- *At home mother during child's high school years* – This characteristic serves to highlight both that the repercussions of such a prolonged absence from the labour market will be different from those experienced for example, by women who re-enter when their children begin school, after a much shorter career break; and that the mothering activities and care needs of adolescents are different from those of younger children.

1.4.3 Synopsis of thesis

Study I

SAHM standpoints

Explores:

- Influences for off-ramping
- Time use –what they do
- Skills & development
- Aspirations & expectations of future

Data from Study I informs interviews

Study II

Manager standpoints

Explores:

- Manages' attitudes to SAHMs & older workers
- Practices that hinder or support reintegration
- Ageing workforce strategies

The Void

- locating Issues for both sets of standpoints

- fits & misfits

Figure 1.1: A Brief Synopsis of the Two Studies

CHAPTER 2: The Literature Review - Part One

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter and the next, I explore literature pertinent to motherhood and work (care work and market work). The review of literature is divided in two parts. The first (Chapter 2) considers motherhood, and extant literature that informs why/how women may arrive at the decision on how they mother, or by extension, become SAHMs. I review literature on different decision models, ideologies and contexts. Literature pertaining to women in a paid work context, workforce trends and organisational environments, will be addressed in the second part of the review (Chapter 3).

2.1.1 Characteristics of the literature on motherhood

Current academic literature and scholarship on mothers, mothering and motherhood are characterised by either a skewed focus on some types of mothers/mothering or a reliance on original research and theorising that was conducted in the last quarter of the 20th century.

This is of crucial pertinence to my research on SAHMs. As I introduced in Chapter 1 (p 3), there is an extreme paucity of current research literature or scholarship on both stay at home mothers in general or professional women who totally exit careers for home, <u>long term.</u> It appears that the more recent studies on motherhood have been '*subsumed into discussions of women and work, migration or reproduction*' (Kawash, 2011: 971). Qualitative research on mothering is *'small'* (Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield and Sharpe; 2011:175) and on full time at home mothers it has been noted as '*minimal*' (Vejar, Madison-Colmore and Maat, 2006:17). Theory and research on '*full-time motherhood are conspicuously absent*' (Palladino Schultheiss, 2009:25) and similarly research on professional mothers' re-entry to the workforce is noted as '*limited*' (Lovejoy and Stone, 2012:632).

The study of motherhood has become marginalised in feminist thought and '*left to the side*' according to Kawash and her review of the field (2011: 971). This is exemplified by a '*disappearance of motherhood from academic journals, conferences and syllabi during the last decade*' (ibid p 972). Kawash illustrates by noting that in 1993-94

'*more than thirty titles* [on motherhood were] *published*' which were subsequently reviewed in three essays by leading feminist journal *Signs* in 1995-96. In stark comparison, nothing further was published in this journal until 1999 when one motherhood book was reviewed and then there were no further motherhood related publications until 2009 when two books were reviewed[1] (p 971). On a similar trend, Andrea O'Reilly's department, research and journal were shut down in 2010 by the university where they were situated. O'Reilly has been a prolific scholar and has long championed 'motherhood studies' as a distinct academic field bringing together academic scholarship and mainstream/popular discourses on all types of motherhood (see more in Stephens, 2011:109). Kawash (2011) concludes that '*motherhood studies today is where feminist studies was in the 1970s, uniquely poised to have a transformative effect in a broader social context but also under siege and at risk*' (p 973).

Yet, according to national statistics, there is no doubt that long term stay at home mothers exist in Australia, but this is not transferring to academic discourse. For example, in a recent collection of works of 'contemporary motherhoods in Australia', Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) tell us that '*having children continues to interrupt* [women's career] *trajectory*' (p 9). The authors use Australian labourforce data from 2008 to show that the trend for 37% of mothers with children under 15 is to totally withdraw from the workforce.[2] However, these women and their mothering are not explored further in the book and the subject of at-home-mothers remains invisible beyond the statistics. More recently, Baxter (2017) has again shown that the trend in career interruptions continues. Using Australian census data for 2011, she finds that 31% (or 495,600) of women are stay-at-home-mothers (in two parent families with children under 15). Baxter also does not discuss those mothers. Her article is about stay at home fathers.

I present these introductory points as indicative of the state, and lack of contemporary studies that speak to the particularities or specificities of at home mothers and their mothering. Furthermore they serve as rationale for why parts of this thesis are informed by literature and scholarship from the last quarter of last century, when there was an '*explosion*' of feminist literature (Thomson et al., 2011: 5) and groundbreaking

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[1] Books on motherhood and reproductive technologies
[2] 40% of the other 63% who are employed, only work part time.

theorising about motherhood and women who mother, came to the fore in academia. Key works from that period continue to be crucial to contemporary discourses. (See as examples how recent work in Vandenbeld Giles (2014), O'Reilly (2014), Thomson et al. (2011), Stephens (2011), Garey and Hansen (2011) has been influenced by, and continues to draw on, the scholarship and theories of Rich, Ruddick, Gilligan, Chodrow, and Hays amongst many others from the 1980s-90s).

It is regrettable that original research and theorising on mothers, motherhood and mothering have been so neglected this century.

2.2 Decision making on motherhood and mothering

2.2.1 Introduction

Decisions and practices of both caring for children, and engaging in labour markets can be driven by personal choice, circumstances or accompanying constraints. This is a process that leads almost one third of Australian mothers (Baxter, 2017; Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; ABS, 2009) to reach the decision to be full time stay-at-home-mothers for some period of time and a fraction of that third to be SAHMs as defined within the context of this study.

I begin by addressing women's decision-making processes, by reviewing literature that informs how women may arrive at care/work decisions and by extension how one becomes a SAHM. I specifically focus on theories of choice, constraint and accommodation and explore a number of frameworks that help examine how women may choose to become SAHMs. That is, decision-making processes that lead to women's different care and work arrangements. I consider that becoming a mother, practising as a mother, how one mothers - are imbued with decision making processes which are driven by either choice, preference or processes of accommodation – all of which engender levels of constraint. These choices are what lead to women deciding on how they mother and for how long. That is, whether to fully immerse themselves in caring activities or whether to combine caring work with paid work. I discuss firstly the notion that choice has become a fundamental area of focus in the current '*rhetoric of*

work-life balance' to the obscurement of gender equity (Everingham, Stevenson, and Warner-Smith, 2007; Stephens, 2011:132). Secondly, I explore preference as a motivation in lifestyle decision-making. Finally I consider that when choice is viewed from within a constraint perspective, choice becomes a process of accommodation requiring a satisficing or transitional approach. I elaborate on these terms shortly.

2.2.2 The concept of Choice

There is a large body of literature that focuses on the choices women make about their involvement in paid and unpaid work, and the constraints they face in that decision making process (Pocock, 2005; Hughes, 2002; Folbre, 2001; Crompton and Harris, 1998). Research in Australia also shows that women have moved away from traditional gender divided family models where they would have withdrawn from the labourforce and been attached to a male bread-winner (Pocock, 2003; Probert, 2001). Australian women are heterogeneous in the choices they make about their engagement in labour work and child rearing work (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Evans 2000; Evans and Kelley 2001a and 2001b; Glezer and Wolcott 1999; Harper and Richards, 1986; Probert, 1997; Wolcott, 1993; Wolcott and Glezer, 1995). Women, are said to 'choose' to participate or not participate in the paid labourforce after having children, they are said to 'choose' whether to work full time or part time, they are said to 'choose' to have careers or just a job. The choices women make, however are not made in vacuo. These choices are about balancing necessity, opportunity and desire and they are socially, institutionally and individually constrained (Pocock, 2005; Weston, 1998; Folbre, 1994). According to Goodwin and Huppatz's analysis of the state of motherhood in Australia '*contemporary women understand themselves (and are understood by others) as choosing motherhood [] and in what context*' (2010:3).

Women of my generation have benefited from three distinct choice agendas from the women's movement. From the liberation movement (1960s and 1970s) we have inherited the right to market work, that is to choose to go out to work or not. From the gender equity era (1980s) we have inherited equal opportunities where we could choose to work in more diverse areas as well as in a more socially just manner. More recently it appears we live in an era concerned with reaching a balance between home and paid work where the '*worldviews of the younger generation of women, prioritise choice –*

without the equity' (Everingham et al., 2007:432). This is a position furthered by Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) who note that members of the Y generation conceptualise gender as a problem '*that has been solved'* and see issues of gender disadvantage and the glass ceiling as things '*of the past'* or problems pertaining to their parents' generation.

Amidst work-life balance discourses, much of the social analysis research (aimed at endorsing policy) assumes we have reached or are about to reach a satisfactory level of gender equity. For example, Gibson (2003) uses a generational cohort study to demonstrate how social policy initiatives have led to women's economic and social independence. Similarly, English (in Everingham et al, 2007) writes that women's position relative to men will continue to improve in terms of equity. What these studies exemplify is that the language used in such policy driven research '*and official discourses'* (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005:147) is encased in the gender-neutral language of the equal employment opportunities (EEO) agenda. The continued use '*of gender-neutral language in the 'work-life balance' rhetoric of today conveys the impression that gender stereotypes are no longer a constraining factor; that parents are simply exercising choice when they take up the flexible options on offer'*. (Everingham et al., 2007: 420). This is a view that promotes the idea that '*women are now in a position to make their own life choices'* (ibid) and that gender no longer constrains women.

An equity argument especially fails when we consider mothers. Rothman (in Nakano Glenn and Chang, 1994:153-154) contends that liberal feminism has worked in defending women's equal rights in men's spheres but she asks us to consider what has happened to '*our rights to be women?'* According to Rothman, mothers are especially '*hard hit'* by an equal rights approach and she presents us with the question '*how can uniqueness be made to fit into an equality model?'* More recently, Stephens (2011:133) has also critiqued this trend and notes that in the '*interests of gender equity'* there is an expectation that '*the maternal should be written out'* of employment matters. Similarly Baker (in Vandenbeld Giles, 2014:171) considers how Australian governmental policies characterised by a '*rhetoric of choice'* and a '*break from fixed gender norms'* have eroded mothers' and women's services, initiatives and benefits during the last four terms of coalition government. Comparably, Thomson et al., (2011:4) refer to gender

neutrality trends in policy and culture as a '*veneer of equality*', which the authors claim in reality ignores the politics, situations and experiences of mothering.

According to Stephens, this is a '*dominant*' and '*degendered version of feminism*' (2011:133) or as Smithson and Stokoe (2005) had written earlier, a genderblind position. Their own research highlights that gender inequality is entrenched in what they term genderblind workplace behaviours and cultures. This is exemplified by one participating manager in their study who '*categorises flexible workers as female staff and, moreover, as 'mothers', hence reproducing and maintaining the gendered order of workplace and related practices*' (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005:155). It is a genderblindness which compares to an earlier suggestion that the '*discrimination against women based on marital status*, [public service bar on married women's employment], *has transmuted in the modern world into discrimination based on family responsibilities*" (Bourke, in Gaze, 2001: 4)

Discourses of equality for women have been replaced '*with notions of fairness and choice*' (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005: 162). However, gender identity continues to be a significant defining factor for women and it has become not only obscured in the choice rhetoric, but also become more '*complex than in previous generations due to the greater range of lifestyle choices*' we now have available (Everingham et al, 2007: 421; see similar in Stephens, 2011).

It is a complexity well demonstrated when we consider the polarity between women's successful entry to, and equality in, paid work whilst '*essential accompanying changes on the household, personal and institutional front*' remain '*puny, fragile and energetically resisted*' (Pocock, 2003:8). The result of this polarity is that gender inequity remains as a constraint on women's ability to truly choose. Paula England (2010:151) refers to this polarity also, calling it an '*asymmetry*' in gender egalitarianism. According to England women's lives have changed much more than men's because women have had stronger incentives to move into previously male dominated fields in jobs and education, whilst men have had little incentive to take on traditionally female jobs or activities (ibid p149-150) or things culturally defined as feminine (ibid p156).

2.2.3 Choice through a Preference Frame

Aside from the work-life balance literature, choice has been used to explain the cause of women's orientation to work (paid and unpaid), particularly by supporters of Preference Theory. This is a theory that has '*evoked controversy and influence well into the 21st century*' (Reid Boyd and Letherby, in O'Reilly, 2014:438). According to the Preference literature, Western women are not united on work and care issues but display a variety of innate preferences, that is, women make a lifestyle choice for either family, career, or a combination of the two (Hakim, 2006, 2003, 2000, and 1998). Viewed from this framework, individuals choose between three different work-lifestyles: '*to be home centred, work centred or adaptive according to personal preferences*' (Hakim 2000:158). It is claimed that these preferences are found at all levels of education and '*cut across social classes and income groups*' (Hakim 2003:105). For the home-centred women (20% of the population) children and family are the priorities throughout life; for work-centred women (20% of the population) priorities are employment, or other non-family occupation. Adaptives (about 60% of the population) are women who want to work, who adapt to family and work circumstances as they arise; and this group includes '*drifters*' and women whose lifestyles cannot be readily categorized (Hakim, 2000).

Support for choice as addressed by Preference theory has been found in governmental and policy spheres, particularly those concerned with fertility and parenting studies (E.g. child care funding, parental leave). In a series of Australian debates and lectures in 2002 and 2003, Hakim called for greater accountability from policy makers to move away from 'one-size-fits-all policies' and to 'redress the current bias towards policies supporting working women exclusively, at the expense of policies supporting full-time home-makers and full-time parents'. Her call for change received public support from the then Howard government, the Sex Discrimination Commission, and the Australian Institute of Family Studies, but public media criticism from academics Judy Wajcman, Monash demographer Peter McDonald and Anne Summers (The Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March, 2003a).

Academic circles have been generally critical of Preference theory's emphasis on choice as the causal factor, that is, whether or not preferences are actually the cause for a given behaviour (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005; McCrae, 2003; Fagan, 2001; Walsh [J], 1999; Procter and Padfield, 1999). Hakim stipulates that '*lifestyle preferences predict choices, but they do not predict performance or achievement in a role*' (2003:105). Her critics state that causality works in reverse, that is, our personal situations determine both our decision-making and our lives' orientation. Preferences do not cause our behaviour they simply influence our choice making (Fagan, 2001; Crompton and Harris, 1998). In Australia, whilst critical of Hakim's preferences because it places most women in the adaptive category, Pocock (2005:122) states that Preference theory has the '*virtue of emphasising that not all women are the same*' – not homogenous, and that policy must address diversity. She also cautions that Preference theory does not tell us enough about where '*preferences come from*', that is the institutional and social contexts that give rise to those choices.

2.2.4   The role of context and constraint

The importance of context must be emphasised because it is what constrains our choice-making. It is institutional and social contexts that constrain women's choices not only in the frameworks outlined above, but in general. As shown, constraints arise from the resistance (Pocock, 2003) to gender equality in both the 'work' and the 'life' part of the work-life balance equation, as well as women's differing ability to act on their preferences due to the social or institutional environment they may find themselves in (Thomson et al., 2011:276; Corby and Stanworth, 2009; McRae, 2003).

The word choice '*conjures up strong ideas of human agency*' (Hughes, 2002: 83) leading to an assumption that we can freely choose our actions. But when we consider how people's choices or desires might be '*socially constructed*' (Folbre 1994:17) then it becomes clear that complex interdependencies are at play between structural constraints as well as the ability of ourselves as agents to actively engage with our environment. This is a concept Folbre (1994) has termed '*constrained choice*' and she argues that there are four main components to consider in constrained choices: 'asset distribution' (e.g. financial, biological, human capital), 'political rules' (as specified by statute or

contract), 'cultural norms' (implicit societal rules) and finally 'personal preferences'. These four types of constraints become the '*boundaries of choice*' (Folbre 1994:51). A claim mirrored by Weston (1998:85) when she states that '*choices are always constrained, as much socially informed as individually willed [] Historical developments, material conditions, and complex social negotiations inform apparently individual choices*.' To expand on the choice constraints and contextual boundaries discussed above, I move to a discussion of two processes of accommodation - satisficing and life transitions. These I view as more holistic models for explaining not only women's work/care behaviour in general, but the specifics of SAHMs' positions.

2.2.5 Accommodation frameworks – Satisficing and transitions

Satisficing is also a concept in use for explaining women's work-lives (Corby and Stanworth, 2009). It is a term based on Herbert Simon's (1982 and 1991) work where he proposed that human rationality and our decision-making processes have boundaries. Rational choice theory explains choice and preference by assuming that we are rational beings. Therefore in a rational choice model we would look at our available options, categorise those according to preference, value or usefulness and make a choice to maximise our preferences. This is deemed implausible in modern organizational studies (Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyubomirsky, White and Lehman, 2002:1179) because a rational choice model assumes that individuals have access to all the information necessary to make informed choices. Simon proposes a model of 'bounded rationality' instead of classical rationality. In this model the aim is to satisfice our needs rather than optimize our choices, where '*one must consider both the task environment and the limits upon the adaptive powers of the system*' (Simon 1991:36). Thus '*satisficing aims at the good when the best is incalculable*' (Simon, 1979:3). The focus of Simon's model is to satisfice rather than maximise. Individuals assess not only the options and choices available to them over a particular situation, but also the motives that underlie those choices. The goal is to '*pursue not the best option, but a good enough option*' (Schwartz [B] et al., 2002: 1179).

More recently satisficing has been applied as an alternative to the choice concepts discussed previously as a '*more appropriate and nuanced concept to explain women's*

working lives' (Corby and Stanworth, 2009:1). This is a model that argues for convenience versus satisfaction. It accommodates claims that work/care decisions are affected by personal and situational family circumstances and that tradeoffs are made in that '*women attempt to achieve success in both employment and family life goals without maximizing either'* (Crompton and Harris, 1998:126). Thus satisficing is about making compromises in different life spheres. Chafetz and Hagan (1996) had previously proposed that, faced with the two somewhat incompatible roles in life, such as mothering and paid market work, women will increasingly opt for a satisficing approach, managing both roles in an attempt to satisfice both. They cite as examples mothers working part time or working from home, thus allowing them to spend time with their children. For women involved in career roles, following a more traditional and linear employment path, satisficing may involve leaving a role for a period of time, refusing promotions, extra hours or travel, so as to accommodate their mothering needs. Similarly, in a study of female career journalists, Aldridge (2001) models her case on Crompton and Harris's (1998) discussion of satisficing as a behavioural strategy. Aldridge poses that satisficing is a way of reaching a form of 'existential settlement' where satisfaction is reached via the private and not the public world of work. Her research in journalism leads her to conclude that this is achievable when happiness with life balance and with one's self-set personal goals becomes more important than workplace forms of recognition such as pay and senior positions. More recently, in a study of women in diverse roles through different organizations, Corby and Stanworth (2009) found that women a) do make choices about their work/private lives, b) that there are structural and normative market constraints and that c) satisficing leads to acceptance of the realities of the market. They conclude that the concept of satisficing, '*is a more appropriate way to view women's working lives than are either choice or constraint theories'* (ibid 2009:1).

Within this framework it is plausible to consider that women become stay-at-home-mothers as a way of satisficing within their family's circumstances. For them it involves leaving professional career paths for 'a time', to focus fully on the emotional, social and educational care of their children. As will be addressed in Chapter 6, what distinguishes the SAHMs in my research from other stay-at-home-mothers in published literature sources is the amount of time that is spent in the role, since the majority of at-

home-mothers return to the paid workforce once children enter school (see as examples Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Vejar et al., 2006; Johnston and Swanson, 2006).

The process of satisficing implies then a temporal factor, in that we accommodate our behaviours according to the events and circumstances we encounter at different stages of our lives. For mothers, this factor is very much driven by children's ages and the exigencies particular to their different age groupings. For example: a woman enters motherhood and exits her career to nurture a newborn; or a child begins formal schooling and the mother may return to paid work; or, as children age, their extracurricular activities increase, the family logistics become too demanding and both parents can no longer commit to full time professional careers thus one parent exits their career/professional role.

It is life events such as these that cause gradual shifts in a woman's social identity, a process addressed in the literature as transitions (Hatch, 2000); labour/care transitions (Pocock 2003:32);   processes of transition (Hughes 2002: 103); or biographical transition (Beck, 2000: 139).

Models of transition endeavour to address peoples' responses to changes in their various life spheres, (such as their personal domestic lives or their public work lives). Behavioural psychology literature recognises that transitions are naturally occurring features in people's lives caused by significant life events - marriage, birth of a child, a new job. These are life events that are typically accompanied by gaining or losing a role (Settersten and Hendricks, 1999) and often require a restructuring of the views individuals have of themselves and their environment (Williams [Dai], 1999). The concept of transitions also draws on work carried out on transitional labour markets where it is used to examine changes in patterns of employment throughout lifecycles, the boundaries of paid work and unpaid care work and the choices that are made within them (Giddens, 2007; O'Reilly, 2003; Schmid, 2002 and 1995). In discussing Hakim's Preference model for example, Pocock (2003) refers to Schmid's (1995) notion of 'transitional labour markets' as a more appropriate model of labour analysis rather than one based on personal preferences and orientations. When people move between paid and unpaid work/care roles during their lives – this is a process of transition – a model that is dynamic over time. It is this dynamism that is missing from Hakim's process of

preference typing. A point supported by Pocock who claims that '*total labour is best understood in terms of a series of labour/care transitions rather than static personal types*' (2003:32) and cites the growth of casual part time work as an accommodation of women with care responsibilities who are transiting back into the workforce.

Hughes' (2002) discussion of women 'having it all' is of particular pertinence to SAHMs. Having it all refers to a process of transition from one stage of life to another and contains an element of 'downshifting'. This is a term Hughes employs to describe the giving up of high-powered jobs for a more balanced life; a process of satisficing or accommodation where '*one can have children and career and husband and independence…though not necessarily all at once*' (pp 94-95). Hughes elaborates on the concept by referring to transitions as metaphorical journeys – that is, journeys from one sense of self to another (p 103), or routes to new identities and new ways of life (p 96). This journeying involves a process of relocation versus dislocation, that is, we undertake new roles whilst leaving old roles aside. This is helpful in understanding a process where women dislocate with their career/professional identity and relocate as SAHMs, or when leaving SAHM-hood and re-entering careers. When women dislocate and relocate in this manner, they are like a feminist 'nomad', agentic and autonomous and therefore able to enact purposeful choices. Such a metaphoric nomad is '*the agent par excellence, always in transit and constantly transgressing boundaries*' (p 103).

I have here addressed various choice-making processes and the relevance of constraint on women's ability to freely choose their care/work arrangements. I highlighted satisficing and life transitions as useful models for understanding how women arrive at a decision to undertake the role of SAHM - that motherhood and career are not an either/or scenario, they are both, but each at different times in life cycles, each constrained by the context of individual lives. SAHMs have experienced Hughes' (2002) relocation and dislocation when moving from professional careers into motherhood, and will no doubt experience them again if re-entering the labour-force. The narratives participants share in this study (Chapter 5) provide much detail of their individual processes of relocation and dislocation, as SAHMs explain the motherhood and career phases of their dynamic life transition processes.

2.3 Different views on motherhood and mothering

2.3.1 Introduction

In this next section I review literature that informs our understanding of why SAHMs are SAHMs – that is, why SAHMs practice mothering the way they do. As shown at 2.1, academic literature on motherhood/mothering is characterised by a '*surprising paucity*' of literature over the last decade (Kawash, 2011: 971) thus I draw on the wave of scholarship from previous decades. Firstly, I investigate motherhood as an ideology as defined through the intensive mothering literature. Given my study's focus on women who have been mothering full time for up to two decades, I give some attention to literature pertaining to the nurturing of adolescents. Secondly, I explore material that addresses the centrality that paid work has assumed in our society, and highlight the non-work status that mothering work engenders in society. Then in the context of family, I give some attention to interdependency within familial structures.

2.3.2 Motherhood and Mothering – discourses and ideology

I firstly investigate motherhood as ideology, and précis the paradigm shift that has evolved from models of intensive mothering. Eagleton (1991:1) presents a useful definition of ideology which states that ideology is not easily defined but rather that the term has a range of '*useful meanings*' woven from various '*conceptual strands*'. It is a process through which individuals or social groups produce meanings and values that are motivated by social interests and subject positions (p 2). Ideologies are additionally described as systems of attitudes and values that are organised around a theme that help explain or justify a particular social arrangement (Maio, Olson, Bernard and Luke, 2003).   This reflects a general agreement in the literature that an ideology is a body of ideas involving epistemological questions concerned with how we construct our knowledge of the world and are made up of both theoretical and practical elements. Ideologies then, are concepts that can help us '*map*' our '*political and social worlds*' (Freeden, 2003: 2) and are useful both in constructing the meanings of facts and in the way we organise what we experience (ibid).

2.3.2.1 Different meanings

There are numerous, and at times opposing, 'maps' then or discourses of women's experiences of motherhood and mothering (Stephens, 2011; Lupton, 2000; Hays, 1996; Gilligan, 1993; Oakley, 1986). Chodorow and Contratto (1982) claim that ideas about motherhood have been articulated through a prevailing hegemony of what they termed the fantasy of the perfect mother, yet Schwartz ([A] 1994:253) tells us '*being a mother is a subjective experience rather than an objective category of definition*' and occurs '*in a continuum of multiple subjectivities and relations*'. In a more recent overview Goodwin and Huppatz (2010:1) claim that representations of '*the good mother*' are as '*prevalent as ever*' but these are not '*uniform*' or '*stable*'. Motherhood is at times regarded as a form of '*personal indulgence*' (Greer 2000:250); generally not considered real work (Gatrell, 2005); and encompasses notions of women's primary role as a domestic one rendering them '*marginal to the wage economy*" (Jackson, [S] 1998:16) or to disappear from public view (Standing, 2011 and 2003). It has been noted that when mothers are 'in view' such as in print media, myths abound– '*employed mothers are busy, tired, and guilty [] and at-home, mothers are confused, overwhelmed, and interested only in superficial topics*' (Johnston and Swanson, 2003:21). There is no single meaning to describe motherhood, no universal ideal (McMahon, 1995). Even though there have been many explorations of the various meanings that are commonly associated with the term motherhood, today there is an agreed understanding that motherhood is a social construct (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010: 4) rather than an essentialist biologically determined state (see also Chapter 4).

2.3.2.2 Historical development

Historical social developments have influenced not only how we define but also what is expected of mothers. First wave feminism was characterised by 'rights based' models of womanhood and did not challenge the gendered ways of social roles. It assumed that woman would exercise her right to choose between a public life following civic pursuits, or a private life as wife and mother and assumed that most women would choose motherhood (Robson and Robson, in Hughes, 2002). In the prominent view of the day, motherhood was shrouded in sanctity and motherhood was every woman's natural calling (Hughes, 2002). Mothering was synonymous with domestic labour and

was seen as non-productive. It was also a period where feminist maternal scholarship was characterized by what Snitow (1992) has labelled the 'demon texts' of the 1960s and 1970s[3]. A generation later, second wave feminism was characterised by debates over 'sameness vs difference' and essentialism. Sameness debates claimed that motherhood was an oppressive institution (Richardson, 1993) and argued for women forgoing their maternal duties and engaging in the work sphere in equal competition to men (Everingham, 1994). Amongst the flourishing feminist maternal scholarship since second wave, Adrienne Rich's (1976) work became instrumental in shifting the focus of analysis away from biology and children and onto motherhood as a social institution (see also Chodorow and Contratto, 1982; Kaplan, 1992). Similarly, Sara Ruddick's seminal work on *Maternal Thinking* (1980) framed motherhood as both productive labour and as a focused discipline and practice. An important legacy from the scholarship of this period is a separating of w*ho* mothers are from *what they do*. This led to Western views that motherhood is both an experience and an institution (McMahon, 1995) and that motherhood is also both a '*site of resistance and a site of accommodation*' (Hughes, 2002:71).

2.3.2.3   Current ideology

The dominant motherhood ideology has been one of intensive mothering (Baker in Vandebeld Giles, 2014; Stephens, 2011; Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996). It is still regarded as the '*norm for contemporary maternity*' (Demo, Borda and Krolokke, 2015:15) and '*has become part of popular discourse*' (Stephens, 2011:107). This is an ideology that has traditionally taken a functionalist approach, focusing on what mothers do rather than on who they are. Terms femaleness and motherhood are interchangeably used (Chodorow, 1989) and little account is taken of individual women's personal histories and societal contexts and circumstances. Discourses of intensive mothering are based on a child focused perspective (Demo et al, 2015; Baker in Vandebeld Giles, 2014; Hays, 1996) rather than centering on the individuality of the woman doing the mothering (Marshall [H], 1991). At the core of this ideology are the views that: a good mother is one who puts her children first, submerging her own identity and needs in the task (Wearing, 1984; Rich, 1976); good mothering requires a labour intensive child

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[3] E.g.: Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963) and Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex (1970)

focused approach (Baker in Vandebeld Giles, 2014; Hays, 1996); mothers are predominantly responsible for ensuring the physical, psychological, emotional and social well-being of their children (ibid) and good mothers love their children unconditionally (Rich, 1976).

Wearing's (1984:50) study of Australian mothers identified the three most important characteristics of good mothers as: 1) always being available, giving time, listening; 2) love affection and understanding; and 3) patience and self-control. Subsequent Australian studies concur with Wearing's findings (see Vandenbeld Giles, 2014; Lupton, 2000; Richards [L], 1985) and confirm that good mothers *are selfless, able to give unstinting love and time to their children and have the ability to regulate their emotions'* (Lupton, 2000:55). Within this framework, mothers are accountable for raising moral, responsible and well-adjusted children and if they are seen to fail in this they end up shouldering the blame for a range of societal ills (Gatrell, 2005). As an example of this, Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1985) reported that a review of 125 clinical journals held mothers responsible for behavioural problems such as sleep walking, poor language development, schizophrenia, aggression and learning difficulties. Overall, this 'super-mum' ideal of motherhood sets standards, which are impossible to fulfill and have the power to make women feel inadequate (Pocock, 2003). Conversely, '*mothers who do display 'unbroken one-to-one attachment' are blamed for dominating their children – ensuing in attachment disorders*' (Greer, 2000:253). The prescriptive nature of what society has deemed to be good mothering '*poses* [an] *insoluble dilemma of reaching perfection in imperfect circumstances'* (Oakley, 1981:86).

Different periods in history place different emphasis on what constitutes good mothering and we have moved beyond the 1950s Parsonian model of nuclear families and housewives. Significant social changes to women's lives have not lessened the fact that women remain the primary carers of children (Stephens, 2011; Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Hays, 1996; Ruddick, 1994; Wearing, 1984). New family arrangements have however developed as women progressively take up more market work (Thomson et al., 2011; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Richards [L], 1985) thus calling to question what the newest expectations of good mothering might be.

2.3.2.4 Capitalist individualism

The concept of 'capitalist individualism mothering' has been introduced in an attempt to incorporate women's movement to market work (Hughes, 2002; Hays, 1996). 'Capitalist individualism mothering' is a form of economic rationalism, which assumes mothers act partly in their own self-interest. That is, that they base their decisions on considerations of personal preferences and constraints (Hughes, 2002; Marshall [H.], 1991; Hays, 1996). Whilst intensive mothering is focused predominately to the home environment, capitalist individualism mothering adds and incorporates interests from the paid employment domain (Hughes, 2002) and gains dominance as mothers increasingly enter the paid workforce. In taking up the best of both worlds, having a career might be a key aspiration of contemporary women, but being a mother also remains a primary objective, as motherhood remains central to women's identity (Phoenix, Woollett and Lloyd, 1991).

There has been a shift then from the traditional perceptions of intensive mothering, in what constitutes a good mother – either as stay-at-home or in paid employment. They acknowledge their own needs and have those met, they do not always live vicariously through their children, and good mothers no longer need be selfless (McMahon, 1995; Kaplan, 1992). Following women's increased participation in paid work, a prevalent trend has been for mothers to maintain a psychological connection with children even though they may not be physically available through the day (Hughes, 2002). This is a way in which women are able to demonstrate a commitment to good mothering without being engulfed by the role of mother (McMahon, 1995).

The rise of work/life balance debates highlights women's preoccupations with trying to be involved in both mothering and paid work activities. As discussed previously, in balancing work/family mothers choose occupations that accommodate care responsibilities and tend to self-select into jobs that make employment and mothering easier to balance (Feiner and Roberts, 1990; Hall, 1986; Polachek, 1981). This self-selection is what Hughes (2002) refers to as accommodation – women finding ways to accommodate their mothering responsibilities with their need for the fulfillment a career or job may provide – they look for or create alternative ways of participating in the paid

market place. In an accommodation model, it is possible to consider that SAHMs accommodate mothering and career/professional needs at different times.

Thus notions of motherhood have undergone a '*paradigm shift*' (Pocock, 2001: 4) where traditional intensive mothering has '*given way to a much more diverse set of possibilities*' (ibid p5). Part of this diversity of possibilities includes women who choose to (as discussed) satisfice, accommodate and transition according to different foci in various life stages. That is, women who transit from full time careers/professions to full time motherhood, and at a later stage, transit from full time motherhood back into careers/professions. My research endeavours to identify, through the SAHM narratives, the personal and social factors, which motivate these transitions and processes of accommodation.

2.3.3   Mothering adolescents

Given my study's focus on women who are currently mothering teenagers, it is appropriate to review literature pertinent to the mothering of adolescents. This is important because as Ribbens (1994) tells us it is essential that we not only '*hear what women have to say*' about bringing up children, but that we also '*need to fundamentally conceptualise issues from within private settings, rather than concerns that originate from more public spheres*'(ibid 189). This is very pertinent in the context of my work for one overriding reason. The care 'concerns' that originate from the Australian 'public sphere' focus almost exclusively on young children: neonates, preschoolers and school entry. This focus is driven by current sociopolitical agendas over issues such as family friendly work arrangements, maternity/parental leave, and childcare funding (HREOC, 2007; Pocock, 2003; Brennan, 1998). There appears to be a scarcity of 'public sphere' concern aimed at the care needs of adolescents. Thus to understand SAHMs, it is necessary to conceptualise from '*within the private setting*' (Ribbens, 1994); because '*women's lives with their children constitute important features within which women develop their childrearing concerns and perspectives*' (ibid). I begin with a general introduction to adolescence to highlight the developmental differences at this life stage and follow with an exploration of mothering activities which are at play in nurturing teenagers.

Adolescence causes change for both children and parents. For the child it is a time of rapid and deep emotional and physical development (Bailey and Shooter, 2009) as well as behavioural and social changes (Collins and Russell, 1991). Changes to the nature and consequences of parent-child relationships are especially apparent (see Maccoby, 1984) and as teenagers develop relationships outside the family, they begin to psychologically distance themselves from parents (Bailey and Shooter, 2009). During adolescence children are exploring life, but they still '*need a base to come back to* [and home becomes] *somewhere they feel safe to come back to, where they will be protected, cared for and taken seriously*' (Bailey and Shooter, 2009). Teenagers require less physical care than when they were younger however; they have a greater need for social, emotional and cognitive care. The mother-child interactions and the way mothering is done with this age group, also changes and becomes particularly '*concerned with care-giving and intimate exchanges* [that] *emphasize achievement, mastery and skill development*' (Collins and Russell, 1991: 106).

The above changes in care-giving due to a child's developmental stage are mirrored by the changes that have occurred in mothers' identities in the current generation (Griffith and Smith, 2005). According to the literature, mothers have become preoccupied with the micro-details of their children's lives, including academic performance, emotional states and friendship relationships (ibid p 90). Mothers are especially responsible for their children's intellectual growth (ibid p 83) and in addition to nurturing they are now also expected to provide opportunities for cognitive development. This shift of emphasis from providing for physiological needs, to providing for psychological needs, significantly increases a mother's duties and obligations. It is a move that has had a '*particularly strong effect on [] upper middle class mothers*' (ibid; see also Lareau's input in Garey and Hansen, 2011: 43-59). A point which becomes particularly pertinent to my work given that the requirements to qualify as a participant in this study include trademarks of middle class status, such as an advanced education, professional experience and financial security.

The role middle class mothers play in mediating their children's lives is further developed by the work of Lareau (2002, 2003). She argues that a family's social class

creates distinctive cultural parenting styles, which she defines as either 'concerted cultivation' or 'natural growth'. These follow a '*cultural logic of child rearing that tends to differ according to families' social class positions… social class* [having] *a powerful impact in shaping the daily rhythms of family life*' (2003:8). Lareau's concept of 'natural growth' is a strategy used by 'working class or poor parents' (2002:748) who 'provide love, food and safety' (ibid p749) and do not involve their children in many organised activities. Middle class parents on the other hand promote 'concerted cultivation' by playing an active role in their schooling; encouraging their children to develop language, negotiation and reasoning skills as well as encouraging and facilitating involvement in extracurricular activities. These organised activities 'dominate family life and create enormous labor, particularly for mothers' (ibid p748).

Mothering is more than an emotional relationship. It is also working hard at managing a range of child-centered activities and being involved with the institutions at which those activities take place (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Griffith and Smith, 2005; Lareau, 2002), such as children's schools (Griffith and Smith, 1987). Aside from enabling their children's activities, mothers of older children are expected to offer emotional support (Collins and Russell, 1991), to provide an environment where confidences and safety are encouraged – in short, to 'be there' (Reid Boyd and Letherby, in O'Reilly, 2014: 442-443; also in Polatnick, 2002 and Ribbens, 1994).

2.3.4   Mothering in a societal context

Decisions and choices about how to mother, how to participate in the workforce, and the amount of time chosen to work, are generally understood to be '*made in the context of social and economic opportunities and constraints*' (Glezer and Wolcott, 1997:1). These are socioeconomic factors that have undergone numerous changes during our current generation (and are addressed further in the following chapter).

They are changes that have led to a socioeconomic environment increasingly accepting of the pursuit of, and the rewards from, the public sphere of work, to the devaluation of the creation and nurturance of children (Gaze, 2001). Paid work has come to assume a central dominance in our society which impacts heavily on our capacity to care, not only

how we care for our children, but also our communities (Stephens, 2011; Pocock, 2006; Hochschild, 1997). My concern with the central role paid work has come to assume in our lives is very much driven by the concluding line in Barbara Pocock's *The Work/Life Collision* (2003). Hers is a call '*to - over the life-cycle – combine paid work with care of oneself, one's loved ones and dependents, nested in an enabling community, and to make better lives*' (p 263). That one line encapsulates for me why I am a SAHM and what being a SAHM has enabled me to be. It is a position that incorporates Hughes' (2002) concept of life transitions discussed earlier. The elements of self, loved ones, community, paid work and care work, all in and through the transience of time over a life cycle – not all rushed, juggled and squeezed together all at the same time. However, the overriding theme for Pocock's argument, which led her to the above conclusion, is a broader concern with work/care collisions that disadvantage women, men, children and community (Pocock, 2003:8).

This is a theme in which '*claims that women's liberation lies down the road of paid work has unraveled as the superwoman myth has soured in the face of unchanging work practices [and the] unchanging burden of domestic work*' (ibid p7; see also DeMeis and Perkins[4], 1996: 777). It is a view that poses that our current quality of life comes at a high cost to workers and carers. A cost measured in longer working hours, lack of appropriate child-care, diminishing birth rates, and on-going gender inequalities in both home and work. In this - a labourforce environment where women's participation rates have increased dramatically - care for children, is still predominantly done by women who now work a double shift (Hochschild, 1997 and 1989; Ribbens, 1994). Gender stratification in the home has changed little (Baxter, Hewitt and Western, 2003:2) and division of labour in households remains highly unequal. Women still do more housework and engage in more childcare than their partners regardless of their level of education, their income levels, or the hours they devote to paid employment (Chesterman and Ross Smith, in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Crittenden, 2010; Craig, 2003). Women are now expected to cope with two full time jobs, one outside and one inside the home, '*instead of having it all, women are doing it all*' (Fitzgerald and Harmon, 2001: 215).

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[4] DeMeis and Perkins (1996) present the concept of the 'supermoms' as women who are heavily involved in both family work and paid work

This is a scenario that values labour only for its ability to produce and make profits, views care work as altruistic (Folbre, 2001, see also 2006) and where being a full time mother is no longer regarded as one of the '*standard occupations*' (Bech 2000: 63). It is an argument taken up by Guy Standing (2011, 2008 and 2003; and similarly in Fudge, 2013) who claims that the work '*done by more people than any other*' has become non-work (2003: 5). He cites the exclusion of reproductive/care work from labour statistics and censuses as evidence of care work's disappearance from public view (2011:61). These views lead me to a burning question - why is it that our society places such an emphasis on defining ourselves through market work? Why is it that the economist Ulrich Beck is moved to mockingly write:

> *Everything is work, or else it is nothing. [] Along which coordinates can people's lives be structured if there is no longer the discipline of a paid job? [] How will people's social identity be determined, if they no longer have to tell themselves and others that 'what they do in life' is one of the standard occupations?* [If they] *believe instead in the godlike powers of work to provide everything sacred to them: prosperity, political cohesion. Just name any value of modernity, and I will show that it assumes the very thing about which it is silent: participation in paid work.* (Beck, 2000: 63).

These god-like, sacred qualities Beck assigns to paid work are mirrored by others. For example, workplace culture is described as a religion of capitalism imbued with '*symbols*' and '*rituals*' (Hochschild, 2003: 143); and market work has assumed a '*sacred centrality*' in every facet of our lives where we now not only '*worship at work's inanimate shrine*' but we also invest work '*with magical powers*' (Pocock, 2006: 47).

It is claimed that a feature of the twentieth century has been to '*put as many people as possible into jobs and out of reproductive work*' (Standing, 2003:5) and further, that this focus on paid work has now become a '*fetish*' (ibid). This fetish is described as a phenomenon that has moved market work from a simple exchange of time/effort for wages, to becoming the major construct of our identity (Pocock, 2006: 47). Work is thus '*naturalised as a defining basis of identity, of access to citizenship and [] as an organising axis for social standing*' (ibid). This focus on the centrality of work in our

modern lives has led to a preoccupation with money '*as the source of happiness, self and a good future*' (ibid p 49).

Work's centrality in the sociopolitical scenario is dichotomised by a distinction between paid and unpaid work (Stephens, 2011:128; Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Vejar et al., 2006). A perspective that treats only paid work as real (Fletcher, 2000; also Fudge, 2013) and separates care work to the private arena from paid work in the public. Such a division is also gendered and reflects how non-paid forms of work such as child rearing are not treated as work. It is a division that '*perpetuates a schism, leaves the feminized sphere of work open to marginalisation, and sustains gender-based inequalities*' (Palladino Schultheiss, 2009: 30; similarly in Fudge, 2013).

2.3.5   Mothering in a Familial context

I have discussed that the material prosperity we enjoy in today's environment is based on market competitiveness and individualism and these features, have been beneficial to women who have entered the labour market (Folbre, 2001). And this is important because not all women '*find happiness for themselves and their children by staying home full-time*' (Buxton, 1998: 17). However, this same competitiveness is driven by individualistic market norms that regard social investments such as the care of children as an anathema to the ruling ideology (Folbre, 2001). This creates states of tension between career mothers and those who choose to stay at home – or the mother wars (Reid Boyd and Letherby, in O'Reilly, 2014; Buxton, 1998; Hochschild, 1997). Such arguments privilege an ethic of paid work at the expense of the values of unpaid care work, which is given no considered attention and which is positioned only as a barrier to paid work. It gives, '*primacy to wage-work, however useless, over other forms of work, however useful*' (Leira, 1992: 171). Folbre's (2001) argument is that even if only viewed from a purely economic perspective, children are public goods and the benefit of raising children advantages all of society. She claims that unpaid care labour, what she terms 'the invisible heart', makes the market economy efficient and viable in the long run.

If we consider Folbre's raising of children as social investment with the call from Pocock to 'combine paid work with care of ourselves, and our loved ones over a life cycle' further, it becomes apparent that women's decisions to mother full time are made from a position other than individualism and competition. Decisions to mother full time are not made competitively and individualistically as in a labour market context, but rather cooperatively and interdependently within familial networks. That is, that the decision on how we mother is made within the context of familial constraints and priorities (which in turn are constrained by the societal context) - the working arrangements or long hours of a partner for example, or the after school activities of children in the home. Latta and O'Conghaille (2000: 14) cite an example from Western Europe where '*half of 'single breadwinners' work between 40 and 50 hours per week,* [and] *a further one in four work 50 hours or more each week. In these cases, one could hardly talk about a balance between paid work and family life – for either the woman or her partner'.* (The impact of 'extreme jobs' are discussed further in Chapter 3).

In Friedan's later work (1981: 70), family is referred to as the '*new feminist frontier'* in the struggle to '*live the equality we fought for'.* She criticises some feminists' denial of the '*power of family and motherhood as a positive, desired and desirable choice for women*' (ibid p77). Friedan claims that we will '*come to a dead end'* in feminism if we continue talking in terms of '*women alone'* (ibid 73). Her work encourages women to live their personhoods without excluding '*all those emotions that have to do with having babies, mothering children, making a home, loving and being loved, dependence and independence, softness and hardness, strength and weakness, in the family*' (ibid). According to Friedan (1981, chapter 3) what feminism has given women is choice – but we have lost the perspective of the value and power of our difference. Recognising and exercising our difference is what gives us the ability to choose.

When a woman chooses to stay home to mother, this is a way of exercising her difference. What her work contributes to the family is nurturance and care, complementing the contributions of her partner (usually financial), for the overall wellbeing of both parents and the children. My argument here is that by considering care work, paid work and choice within a familial context it is possible to see that family members specialise. That is, they adopt different but interdependent roles in

support of the family unit as a whole, rather than in support of themselves as an individual (see Fudge, 2013). This is a position of '*interconnectedness*' (Friedan, 1981). It recognises caregiving and waged labour as essential roles within an integrated family system, which is carried out by different family members in support of each other (Palladino Schultheiss, 2009). This interdependence in relationships can also provide meaning and purpose in life (Jordan, 1991).

2.4 Defining an identity whilst mothering

This centrality of work in our society, and the real vs non real work tensions – these are arguments that perpetuate the popular view that women need paid work for socialization and validation. This is a view that assumes that there is no other way to define a woman's (who mothers) identity or find a meaningful existence.

The broader field of identity studies is vast and according to Côté (2006) it is also the fastest growing area of research in social sciences. Thus I offer the caveat that my review of the literature on identity extends no further than to offer sufficient support in contextualizing SAHMs' use of the term 'identity' because as will be seen in Chapter 5, SAHMs speak at length on perceptions of self and their sense of identity.

According to the broader literature, definitions of the concepts of identity and self are generally considered fuzzy (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) and multifaceted (Leary, 2004:2). Contemporary discourses on notions of both reside mainly in the field of Social Psychology and originate from Erik Erikson's work through the 1960s. According to Schwartz [S] (2005:306) who follows on Erikson's work, the concept of identity is most useful in applied terms because it is central to how we discern and choose our place in the social world. Additionally, Millward (2006) tells us that both concepts are about self-definition, are very context and domain specific 'with important implications for personal meaning'.

According to more specific literature on motherhood, women achieve characteristics of giving and caring through motherhood (Chodorow, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Gilligan, 1993) and those experiences '*are a crucial part of identity formation*' (Fudge, 2013:4). Williams [F] (2001:74) concurs stating that our actions '*based on care*' inform our '*sense of self*' enabling resilience, commitment and interdependency (see also Fudge, 2013). In this manner, identity is framed as a '*category of practice*'[5] allowing '*lay actors in some everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with and how they differ from others*' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 4).

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[5] Note that here again we have mothering referred to as practice, similar to Ruddick's thesis

Those subjective and heterogeneous differences in the process of identity construction within the practice of mothering are well demonstrated in an Australian study of 569 women which examined attitudes toward women and motherhood (Holton, Fisher and Rowe, 2009). The research (following Kaufman's work, 2000) examined how women construct their identities as mothers along a continuum from traditional attitudes through to egalitarian attitudes. Like Kaufman, they too find that mothers' perceptions of self and identity vary from traditional attitudes where motherhood is regarded as central to how women construct their identities, through to women with more egalitarian attitudes where motherhood is regarded as but one part of their identity (Holton et al., 2009:9).

2.4.1   Creating a *space* for self within mothering practice

How SAHMs may construct images of self and identity can further be explored through a consideration of Wearing's (1998) theorisation of 'space' as a form of resistance that can lead to the creation of new or alternate positions or identities (Wearing, 1992).

Betsy Wearing's work after her seminal *The Ideology of motherhood* (1984) (as referenced earlier at p 38) turned to the field of urban sociology and explored public places for leisure as sites of resistance and opportunities for the creation of gendered spaces. She theorizes on a feminine concept of space and its role in enhancing '*a sense of self or identity*' (1998:127). In doing so, Wearing incorporates Foucault's ideas of power and resistance and furthers Foucault's concept of heterotopia, as a gendered space of otherness. According to Wearing (1998:146):

> [S]paces can act as heterotopias for struggle against resistance to domination of the self and inferiorised subjectivities. They also provide a space for reconstituting the self and rewriting the script of identity.

The concept of 'space' as developed by Wearing can be either '*physical or metaphorical*', and a key component she identifies is the element of control; thus space needs to be one's own and one '*over which one has control to fill with whatever persons, objects, activities or thoughts that one chooses*' (p149).

Literature by and on Foucault is extensive and I limit reference to that body of work to providing a skeletal summary as contextual background for my referencing Wearing's use of power and resistance. In very broad terms, Foucault's work on power rejects it being only a repressive condition and looks more to how power is produced and exercised. His works' greater foci are on considerations of the exercise of power rather than an all-encompassing theory of what power is (in King and Lawley, 2013:431). An insight into what Foucault meant generally by power can be gleaned from his statement that it '*is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; [] a way of acting upon an acting subject [] by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions*' (Foucault, 1982:789).

A Foucauldian notion of power is not coercive for as he claims '*power should not be understood as an oppressive system bearing down on individuals from above*' (Foucault, 1988a) and though he acknowledges that power can be oppressive, he argues this is where productive resistance can occur. Another relevant characteristic is that power is not owned but rather it is practiced and it is productive. According to Foucault power '*traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.*' (Foucault, 1980: 119).

Pertinent to a consideration of Wearing's work is the characteristic of Foucault's writing which explores the space in which people exercise their power. Those he defines as the networks and capillaries in society. This element aims to explain the role of individuals within ever changing power relationships across social networks and as he writes, '*I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination*' (Foucault, 1988b: 19). For Foucault power needs to be considered analytically rather than theoretically, that is, in the context or situated-ness within which it is exercised. Thus power is omnipresent in the actions of free individuals and their social relationships and '*it takes place when there is a relation between two free subjects and this relation is unbalanced, so that one can act upon the other, and the other is acted upon, or allows himself to be acted upon*' (1988). Correspondingly because we are all linked in relationships with others, we are

simultaneously individually subject to another's control as well as have the capacity to control another.   This is where Foucault's notion of our ability to resist can be positioned, for as he writes '*where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. [] points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network*' (1978: 95). Foucault's overall thesis is that there is '*a plurality of resistances*' (1998:95) which is at play wherever individuals encounter norms, controls or forms of dominance.

It is generally accepted that Foucauldian literature on power and sexuality has had enormous influence on feminist scholars who have both critiqued and furthered his work. According to Deveaux (1994) the impact of Foucault's body of work (on power) on feminist scholars can be viewed in three distinct '*waves*' (p 223). Borne from her 'Critical Reading of Foucault' (ibid) the thematic key points of each wave can be summarised thus:

The first wave is a 'surveillance and biopower' paradigm' which 'refers to state regulation of the population'. Feminist scholars work with this paradigm in explaining women's '*acquiescence to and collusion with, patriarchal standards of femininity*' (p 225). The third wave is a truth/power paradigm (p 237) and has been used by feminists to consider issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. The second wave as analysed by Deveaux falls under the previously noted maxim from Foucault 'where there is power there is resistance'. This is a paradigm where individuals can resist in the everyday, 'contest fixed identities' (p 231) and where power is exercised not possessed. Here then is where Wearing's application of Foucauldian concepts of power and resistance sits within the feminist literature.

Wearing's treatment of urban and leisure space as places for resisting what is and for 'reconstituting the self' and one's identity provides a useful framework against which to consider SAHMs' phenomenology of mothering. Not only in their creation of identity and a personal space within their SAHM-hood activities, but also in their refusal of, or resistance to, particular pre-ascribed motherhood positions and pre-existing ideologies of motherhood. A concept which I further address (in Chapter 6) along with the notions of identity and accommodation presented earlier in this chapter.

A substantial contribution of my research rests in identifying how SAHMs exercise their personal power and take control – in how they find meaningful purpose and define their identities in activities other than paid work. Just as there are mothers who engage in different types of paid work and balance work/care commitments, there are those who combine mothering time with other meaningful but un-remunerated activities around their care-spheres. Though these activities are not remunerated and not what is popularly referred to as work (see Fudge, 2013:3) nevertheless, they are productive, and lead to fulfillment, self-esteem and personal capital growth. My research contributes to filling a '*gap in feminist discussions*' such as identified by Ribbens (1994: 6) '*where women's everyday experiences in their lives with their children have been largely overlooked and have certainly not been considered in their own terms*'. Investigating SAHMs everyday experiences, locating the narratives that ascribe meaning to what they do – with and around their children – this is a major contribution of my research.

Chapter 3: The Literature Review – Part Two

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review literature relevant to conditions that affect women's employment. Specifically, I review material pertinent to two spheres. In the first, I consider the national environment in which organisations operate. That is, some notable economic, legislative, demographic and social developments over the last generation that have contributed to changing the nature and composition of Australia's workforce. In the second, I review the work environments themselves. I focus on the gendered nature of organizations and work, and investigate changing concepts of career, skill and work practices. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework for the research.

3.2 The Australian environment for its workforce – numbers and trends

3.2.1 Political changes

The last three decades have been a time of private companies downsizing, outsourcing and relocating, matched by a national decline in trade union activity. During this time, Australia's economic focus shifted from an economy based on primary industry to one based on the competitive exporting of manufactured goods, telecommunications and educational services (Dalton, Draper, Weeks and Wiseman, 1996: 31-32).

Concurrent changes to Australia's industrial relations system through award restructuring enterprise bargaining and deregulation (Hancock, 1999), and new or amended legislation paved the way for the growth of both part-time work and the unprecedented increases of women participating in the workforce (Campbell, 2000; Baxter, 2002). The legislative changes that have had a most direct impact on today's labourforce are:

- Sex Discrimination Act, 1992;
- Affirmative Action Act, 1986;
- Prices and Income Accord;

- Ratification of ILO 156 (prohibiting discrimination on the basis of family responsibilities);
- Equal Opportunity Amendment (Family Responsibilities) Act 2008
- Industrial Relations Reform Act (parental leave basic right)
- The Fair Work Act 2009

3.2.2 Ageing population

This has also been a period marked by Australia's population ageing and the associated shifts in the age structure of the workforce (Intergenerational Report [IGR], 2010 and 2015; Skills Australia, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2013), resulting in greater numbers of older people with lower workforce participation rates. Three main factors are contributing to these population structural changes: increased life expectancies, declining fertility rates, and the 'baby boom' generation reaching retirement age (i.e. persons born between 1946 and 1965 and who are now 50 to 70 years old).

As in all OECD countries, the median age of our population has been increasing – for example from 31.1 years in 1986, to 35.7 in 2001 and to 36.8 in 2009 (ABS, 2010). Forecasts indicate that proportionally Australia's population faces a 'demographic time bomb' (Skills Australia, 2010) and governmental economic projections (IGR, 2010 and 2015) point to changes such as:

- The proportion of people 65 to 84 years old will rise from its present share of 16.7% of the total population to 20% by 2025 and more than double its present share by the year 2051 (IGR, 2010)
- The number of people 85 years and older will more than quadruple in the next 40 years (IGR, 2010)
- During the same period the under 15 years of age population will fall to 14.4% in 2051 (compared to 20.7 % in 1999).

This trend in ageing is linked to prolonged life expectancy, which has risen to 79 years of age for men and 84 years for women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2009). The ageing of our population is also linked to the nation's changes in

fertility rates. Australia's standard population replacement fertility rate is 2.1, however, the accompanying trends in delayed childbearing and bearing fewer children have resulted in Australia's fertility levels falling to 1.81 (ABS, 2015c).

Women are having babies later in life compared to previous generations, bearing their first child at a median age of 30.1 and there has been an accompanying increase in the proportion of births to women 40 years and older (ibid).

The second fertility factor - fewer children, is characterised by the growing number of one-child families and the increasing proportion of women who are remaining childless, typified by:

- The average number of children per family falling to 1.5 children (based on data from the 2009 Census showing a decrease from 1.9 in 1986 for example)
- Projections indicating that one in four women will remain childless (ABS, 2012);
- Reports that 8% of women 40 years and over have remained childless (AIHW, 2009).
- Birth statistics showing that over one-third (35%) of mothers aged 45-49 years who registered a birth in 2009 recorded no previous children. This was a higher proportion of first births than mothers aged 35-39 years (28%) and 40-44 years (27%).

3.2.3 Ageing workforce

These trends in ageing, delayed childbearing and declining fertility rates are clearly major contributors to the changing structure of Australia's population. Thus with the age structure of our population being skewed to older people, there is also a decline in our working population age. Like many OECD countries, Australia faces not only an ageing population but also an ageing workforce accompanied by severe skills shortage (Skills Australia, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2013; DEWR, 2005). Australia's labourforce, particularly the full time workforce 'has been ageing at a rate faster than the general population' (Parliament Research Note, 2005, No 35), and is more recently characterised by factors such as:

- Almost a third of our workforce is now over 45 years old and it is projected that over 80 percent of the expected increase will occur in this age group (Productivity Commission, 2013).

- the aggregate workforce participation rate is projected to fall from its present level of 65.1% to 63.9% in 2025 and 60.6% by 2050 (IGR, 2010)
- Our aged-dependency ratio (the number of people of working age as a ratio of the number of Australians aged 65 and over) is also projected to decline in the years ahead – from the current 4.11 workers for every older dependent person over 65, falling to 3.04 by the year 2025 (Skills Australia, 2010 based on IGR, 2010).

3.3 Composition of the workforce

3.3.1 General characteristics

In 2011 there were 22,665,028 people living in Australia (ABS, 2011 population clock) 11,447,500 of whom, were active in the paid workforce (ibid). According to 2010 national statistics, approximately (70%) 6.4 million people were employed and they showed the following employment-type characteristics by age groupings (ABS, 2011):

- In the 15-24 years group - 95% of persons were employees, 4% were independent contractors and 1% were other business operators;
- In the 35-44 group - 78% of persons were employees, 11% were independent contractors and 11% were other business operators; and
- In the 65 years and over group - 50% of persons were employees, 19% were independent contractors and 31% were other business operators.

In Australia, overall labour force participation rates grew from 61% in 1986 to 65% in 2006 and have remained at a similar level since. There are participation rate differences however, amongst different population groups (ABS, 2009) and I draw specific attention to patterns in women's participation since their experience of work and employment are substantially different to men's.
- Women now constitute 45.4% of the Australian workforce
- The proportion of women with tertiary qualifications has increased four-fold since 1991, from 6.9% to 26.6% surpassing the men's level of 22.7% (Premier and Cabinet, 2011:6)

- Women's overall labour force participation rate has grown from just under 44% in February 1998 to nearly 60% in December 2010, while men's participation rate over the same period fell 7% to 72% (ibid).

3.3.2 The rise of Part time work

Over the last decade approximately 30% of employed Australians habitually worked less than 35 hours per week on all jobs, almost double the rate of part-time employment thirty years ago (based on HILDA, 2009). During the 1990s alone, 75% of employment growth in Australia was in part-time jobs (Gregory, 2002) and this increase has been met predominately by women. Some key factors of the part time workforce are that:

- Female full time participation remains below that of men and is overrepresented in casual, part-time and low-skilled jobs.
- 13.8% of working women work part time as opposed to 2.2% of men (Premier and Cabinet, 2011)
- 9.3% of women work full time as opposed to 26% of men (ibid)
- 55% of women between the ages of 30 and 64, and who are primary carers, do not participate in the labour force (Nepal et al., 2009)
- 24% of female primary carers employed part-time, worked an average of 15 hours per week as opposed to non-primary carer women (ibid)

Overall, women's labour market participation has been less than men's reflecting the influence of women's caring responsibilities.

3.3.3 About Older workers

3.3.3.1 Older workers - The Numbers

As stated earlier, age is a significant factor in considerations of the composition of Australia's current and future labourforce. Given the ages of the participating SAHMs in this study, it is of added significance to highlight the labourforce characteristics of this age group – the baby boomers. Literature exploring the characteristics of older Australians generally separates the group in two – working and non-working baby boomers (see as examples Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Gong and McNamara, 2011). In some of the literature, these two groups are further separated into two age cohorts, the

45-54 cohort and the 60-64 cohort (see Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Gong and McNamara, 2011:12) because as people approach retirement, patterns of work change not only within age groupings but substantially also between males and females.

The trend is for both men and women to progressively move out of the workforce as age increases. There is a narrowing of labour force participation differences between males and females as people move through mid-life. In the 45-54 age grouping (where SAHMs in this study fall) the proportion of women who are not in paid employment is 24.6%. In the same age group, the proportion of men not in paid work is approximately half of the number of women at 12.8%. By the time of retirement age (65 years) over half the 60-64 cohort, both males and females are not in the workforce.

A third (36.6%) of baby boomers is currently working full time (35-40 hours per week) and according to a 2011 (Gong and McNamara) survey of baby boomers, over half the men and one fifth of the women surveyed worked more than 40 hours a week. After reaching age 60 however, the proportion of men and women working these hours decreases sharply and there is a pronounced increase in the proportion of both men and women working short part time hours.

For older Australians who are in paid work, part time work is more common for women than for men in all age groupings. In the 45-54 cohort work patterns between men and women are quite different. In the 60-64 cohort men's work patterns change and become more similar to women's with approximately half the men not in the workforce. According to a Productivity Commission working paper (Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010) the specific figures were as follows:

In the 45-54 group the employment rates as a proportion of the population
- 31.9% part time employment rate for women and 7% rate for men
- 43.3% full time employment rate for women and 78% rate for men

In comparison the 60-64 group rates are:
- 22.4% part time for women and 12.7% for men
- 17.8% for women and 44.1% for men

3.3.3.2 Older workers - The characteristics

Aside of these labourforce statistics, there are two other factors associated as characteristic of this age group that are of particular reference to my research: their time use preferences in employment and negative attitudes and stereotypes.

The first factor associated as characteristic of older workers pertains to this age group's work-time or time use preferences. Research shows that flexible working arrangements are of particular significance to, and a preference of, mid age women and older workers (DEEWR, 2011; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [ACCI], 2012; National Seniors Australia, 2012; Productivity Commission, 2010 and 2008). This I address in greater detail under the heading of flexible work at 3.5.5.

The second factor pertains to attitudes towards and perceptions about older workers. What is clear from the literature is that there are no significant differences found in job performance effectiveness between older and younger workers (see Chiu, Chan, Snape and Redman, 2001:634). What extant research does tell us, however, is that the differences rest in stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about older workers (ibid). Stereotypes are shaped '*partly as a product of societal culture and partly from our individual experiences with members of stereotyped groups*' (Schneider, in Marcus, Fritzsche, Le and Reeves, 2016: 989).

Harper, Hafiz, Khan, Saxena and Leeson, (2006:32) summarise that age discrimination against, and attitudes towards older workers are also '*embedded in the cultures, policies and practices of organisations*'. Within organisations, attitudes towards older workers are also found to be shaped by three characteristics. These are the nature of the industry and client base within which an organisation operates; the size of the organisation; and the existence or lack of diversity policies relating to age (Chiu et al., 2001:636).

Earlier research had identified that positive attitudes to, and stereotypes of, older workers included that they had a stronger work ethic (than younger workers), were more committed and reliable (Arrowsmith and McGoldrick, 1997). They were also found to be more experienced, conscientious, effective in their roles, and interpersonally skilled (Metcalf and Thompson, 1990). The negative attitudes and stereotypes found included that they are more accident prone, less interested in technological change, and less trainable (Arrowsmith and McGoldrick, 1997); and they are less ready to grasp new

technology, or adapt to change, or learn new ideas, and are less interested in training (Metcalf and Thompson, 1990).

More currently, the work of Marcus, et al., (2016) emphasises that there are still very few measures for age based stereotypes specific to work contexts. However in developing a 'work related age-based stereotypes (WAS) scale', the authors find that all existing negative stereotypes fall within two categories: incompetence and inadaptability. Under the first they cite '*weaker and more frail, less healthy, more vulnerable to work-family imbalances, less motivated to work, less energetic, less productive, less active, less ambitious, less creative, less competent, and less productive*'. Under the second category: '*resistant to change, less flexible, less willing to participate in training and career development, and less interested in technological change*' (ibid p 990).

Almost the same stereotypes identified by Marcus et al. (2016) were also considered in an earlier study which analysed 400 case studies. Ng and Feldman (2012) examined six stereotypes believed about older workers: less motivated, less willing to train, resistant to change, health issues affecting work, vulnerability to family/work stressors. What the researchers found is that only one held true – older workers are less likely to engage in organisational training.

In Australia, the Human Rights Commission investigated stereotypes of older Australians in a business context (AHRC, 2013). The report finds that negative attitudes and discriminatory practices towards older people are prevalent, with 60% of all respondents aged 18-54 years holding predominantly negative attitudes (ibid p 40). For example, one in ten business respondents will not recruit above an average age of 50 (ibid p12). Additionally, one in five respondents responsible for strategic decisions, including recruitment, concur with the following stereotypes: older people do not like change; are likely to be forgetful; do not like being told what to do by someone younger; have difficulty learning new things or complex tasks; do not want to work long hours; don't like change; prefer not to use technology (ibid p 42).

The finding by the AHRC (2013) that older people are not interested in technology and similarly the lack of interest in technological change noted by Marcus et al. (2016) is at odds with other findings. A report by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and

Industry states that the presumption that older people are lacking in up-to-date skills in ICT and technological development is incorrect. The report finds that '*older people are the fastest growing group of internet users'* with many having '*well developed technical skills and can adopt easily to new technology'* (2012:8).

Regardless of the persistence of negative stereotypes, the overall position in the literature confirms that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the stereotypes that older workers today are any '*less able to perform modern economic activity'* than younger counterparts (Harper et al., 2006:32).

Negative attitudes and practices against older workers are also being challenged and responded to, at governmental levels. For example the Australian Law Reform Commission (2013:11) specifically identifies recruiters as problematic. The report notes that recruiting agents are '*key gatekeepers in the employment process'* of older workers and states that '[*e]nsuring that they are aware of their obligations and appreciate the value of mature age workers is essential'*. There have also been calls from representative bodies for more targeted reporting to counter such recruitment obstacles and discriminatory recruitment practices. As an example, National Seniors Australia (2012:29) has made a number of recommendations to government, including:

- That recruitment agencies report publicly on their efforts to address discrimination and age diversity with both their clients and their own staff, and
- That a recognition programme be established for recruiters and employers who show leadership in employing mature age people

3.3.4   Volunteer workers

A fourth segment of the workforce for consideration in the context of my research is the volunteer workforce. As the literature reflects, this is a sector that is increasingly being recognized as a workforce. Furthermore, it is a sector that has strong associations with both women and mature people.

Internationally, volunteer work can be broadly defined as falling in one of three categories, either 'unpaid work or service'; 'civil action', or a 'discretionary leisure' activity undertaken in free time (Volunteering Australia, 2014:3). Volunteers in

Australia however are described by the first category, and are deemed to be persons who willingly give '*unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group*' (ABS, 2015a). The *State of Volunteering in Australia Report* (2012) identifies volunteering as work and notes that '*volunteering is an integral part of work in our society*' and that the idea of volunteers as workers '*is relatively new*' (in Volunteering Australia, 2014:8).

Volunteering in Australia has been labelled the '*community's most valuable asset*' (Flick, Bittman and Doyle, 2002). This is a sector that according to extant literature has changed markedly. One distinct change has been the move away from a charity model with its strong focus on religious affiliations, care of the needy and moral values, to a community management model that is more flexible and responsive to community needs and inputs, as well as the political environment within which it operates (Leonard, Onyx, and Hayward-Brown, 2004).

A second distinct change over the last twenty years has been the growth in numbers in the sector. According to research carried out by at the University of Adelaide there were 6.4 million people volunteering in Australia in 2012, and this is double the numbers from 1995 (O'Dwyer, 2012, in Rogers and Noble, 2013). This research also links the close relationship between volunteering engagement and ageing. It estimates that volunteer numbers will continue to rise rapidly, paralleling baby boomers' progression towards retirement. This estimated rise concurs with an earlier study which finds that volunteering is highly valued by people at '*a time of change in their life course*' (Leonard et al., 2004:5).

The highest number of volunteers is in the 40-54 age category and there are more women volunteers (40%) than men (37%) (Volunteering Australia, 2015). The economic significance of volunteers' work or outputs is conservatively estimated to be \$200 billion[6] a year, and this is based on a \$7 per hour rate (O'Dwyer, 2012, in Rogers and Noble, 2013). This is noted as being greater than revenue generated from mining, agriculture and retail sectors in Australia (ibid). The Australian Bureau of Statistics

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[6] Dr O'Dwyer re-evaluated her study in 2014. The new data shows an increase in the value of volunteering from \$200 billion in 2011 to \$290 billion a year in 2014. October 31, 2014 online at: http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-a-year/

reports that 743 million hours per year are contributed to volunteering. Additionally, the figures point to sustained commitment from these volunteers with half having worked long term, for 10 years or longer, and 20% working more than 200 hours per annum (ABS, 2015b).

The benefits of volunteering at a community level are linked to increased connectedness between people and to growth in social capital. Greater volunteer engagement is found to lead to greater cohesiveness for society (Flick et al., 2002; similarly in Onyx and Leonard, 2000). For volunteers themselves the motivations and benefits are reported as being either altruistic or instrumental (in Flick et al., 2002: 20). The first refers to the desire to want to help others, the second refers to self-interest. The latter may involve wanting to develop skills, social contacts or to prepare for future employment (ibid p 64). Of particular relevance to my research is a point identified in this study that volunteering is useful to women '*investigating opportunities for paid work after child rearing'* (ibid p21). Also of pertinence is O'Dwyer's assertion that a broad range of new skills can be gained from volunteering which have transferability to the workplace (in Rogers and Noble, 2013).

Similarly relevant is the study of the management of middle aged and older women volunteers by Leonard et al., (2004:14) who find that there are a number of factors that affect women's level of engagement with volunteer roles. These include: the opportunity for social connection with both clients and other volunteers (p 13), the flexibility of work schedules, type and practice (p 15); the opportunity to try new roles (p 16); and 'formal and informal opportunities for skill development and general education' (p 14). The more recent study by Warburton (in Rogers and Noble, 2013) finds that flexibility continues to be important to volunteers, a decade on. Flexibility along with respect is reported by this researcher as being the two most important factors sought by older volunteers, from their volunteering engagement.

3.4 Women and the workforce

3.4.1 How the female workforce has changed

Australia's female paid workforce has also undergone marked changes with a resultant overall participation rate increase of 12% in 20 years. That is, from 44% in 1980 to 56% in 2010 (Premier and Cabinet, 2011). Three employment trends that have contributed to changing the composition of Australia's female workforce in the current generation are: the number of women entering the labourforce; the growth of part time employment practices; and what has been dubbed the 'quiet revolution' (Goldin, 2006) which refers to the overall increase in mothers participating in the labourforce. The repercussion of these trends has had a vast effect on the composition of Australia's female workforce.

This restructured female workforce has two main parts: a core workforce of skilled or specialist full time workers and a peripheral workforce of less skilled and flexibly timed workers (Wigfield, 2001). It must be re-emphasised that the increases have been substantial in part time, not full time roles (Clare, 2001; Ginn, Street and Arber, 2001) and in the peripheral not the core groups (Wigfield, 2001).

3.4.2 Women at different points of the workforce spectrum

3.4.2.1 Women Part timers

In Australia 60 per cent of working mothers work less than 35 hours per week (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010:9). In comparison, 13.8 per cent of all working women work part time (Nepal et al., 2009). According to the literature the majority of women with children engage in jobs that accommodate family responsibilities and tend to self-select into roles that make employment and motherhood easier to balance (Premier & Cabinet Office for Women's Policy, 2011; Feiner and Roberts, 1990; Hall, 1986; Polachek, 1981). It is generally accepted that part-time work provides a means for many women to manage caring responsibilities whilst also providing some of the benefits of paid employment (Glezer and Wolcott, 2000) allowing women to maintain job skills, earn an income and continue to utilize their human capital whilst raising children (Rodgers, 2004). For example, in Australia, mothers with children under five

years of age work an average of 20 to 25 hours per week (Social Policy Research Paper Number 30 – 2009[7]).   More inclusive figures compiled from the 2007 HILDA survey (Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010:60) show the number of all women who cite 'caring for children' as the main reason for working part time are:

- 61% of women aged 25-44

- 19.9% of women aged 45-54

- 1% of women aged 55-64

According to Goodwin and Huppatz Australia has '*a notoriously gender segregated workforce*' (2010:9). Some jobs, such as clerical or services jobs are recognised as being more adaptable to part time work hours, and women, especially those with care responsibilities, are more frequently represented in these jobs, thus the rise of occupational, industry and wage segregation and the continued undervaluing of traditional female jobs (Premier & Cabinet Office for Women's Policy, 2011; Pocock, 2003 and 1998).

As already highlighted, the participation of women in the paid labour sphere generally has grown by 19 per cent in the last 35 years particularly in the 30-54 age bracket when family responsibilities for dependents is at its highest (ABS, 2009). However, contrary to Australian predictions 35 years ago (see Gregory, 2002), women's increased levels of education, and changing societal attitudes towards married women participating in the paid labour force, there has been no significant increase of women in full time jobs:

 What becomes important to reinforce is that the majority of the part time jobs women are involved in, are not career or professional roles. The growth in part time employment has been in the 'adaptable jobs' (Wolcott and Glezer, 1995), those deemed to reflect women's family roles and confined to occupations that are 'appropriate' (Henderson et al, 1996), not the 'career track jobs' (Gaze, 2001). It is generally accepted that the reduced hours offered in part time work go hand in hand with reduced conditions and are typically cut off from career structures (Probert, 1995; Deery and Mahony, 1994) leading to concerns about the overall quality of part time jobs (see Pocock, 2003; Victorian Government, 2003; Watson, Buchanan, Campbell and Briggs,

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[7] Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

2003; Fagan and Burchell, 2002; Buchanan and Thornwaite, 2001; Rubery, 1998). Reduced hours and conditions are in turn linked to disproportionate representations '*in positions of power and authority*' and in '*economic and social rewards*' (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010:9).

It is feasible to speculate that the nature of part time jobs themselves poses an unattractive option for some women, who until the onset of motherhood would have been involved in careers and professions in the core workforce.

3.4.2.2 Women not attached to the paid workforce

Concurrent with the increased number of females participating in part time employment and the relatively static numbers of women in the full time labour market there remains a third grouping – women who are not active in, nor seeking paid employment. They are the stay-at-home-mothers or women who have off-ramped careers for home.

Glezer and Wolcott (2000:170) tell us that 44 per cent of women with a youngest child under 18 years are not in paid employment. National statistics show that in 2008 one third of Australian mothers with children under the age of 15 were not employed due to caring activities (ABS, 2009). This percentage appears to have remained relatively steady since. As I have previously shown (2.1) Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) find 37 per cent and Baxter (2017) finds 31 per cent of mothers with children under 15 are not in the workforce.

There appears to be no further break down of these figures by children's ages, nor for women caring older children. Information available seems to be further blurred by the parameters different research agencies and researchers allocate to categories in their data. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics incorporates some figures for 15year olds and older, amongst data for adults; they also differ from the OECD on parameters applied to measures of 'unemployment' or 'not in the workforce' categories. Glezer and Wolcott incorporated children up to 18 years whereas Goodwin, Huppatz and Baxter did so up to age 15. This leads to difficulty in gauging just how many women in Australia are caring for teenagers on a full time basis.

The significance of this lack of data in the context of my work is that it highlights that the participants in my study are indeed an under-researched minority. Such lack of information clarity draws attention to the importance of researching and documenting the experiences of SAHMs - members of an estimated one third of Australia's mothers.

3.4.2.3   Professional mothers who Exit

There is however a growing body of literature pertinent to a specific type of at home mother: women who are deemed to *opt out* (Lovejoy and Stone, 2012; Cabrera, 2007; Stone, 2007; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006a) or *off-ramp* (Hewlett, 2007), or *quit* (Cha, 2010) the workforce. These are terms that have been applied more recently to refer to professional women who exit their careers for family related reasons.

The issue of dropping out of careers is addressed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2006a) through their Kaleidoscope model thesis. A central tenet of this model is that work, family and self are interwoven, related and need to be treated as part '*of the same gestalt*' (ibid p240) and not as competing spheres of life. The authors propose that '*separating out career decisions from other life decisions is a relic, an artefact of twentieth-century old-line manufacturing thinking*' (2006b, p6). According to their research involving close to 2000 respondents and five separate studies, it is the structure of corporate life, not women's level of ambition that causes women to make 'mid-life course corrections', that is, to opt out. The researchers find that discriminatory and exclusionary old-boy practices, and boring or repetitive work is what drives women out of organisations to find new challenges through mothering or a combination of that and other types of activities (2006a, p238). They conclude that career decisions are made through a more holistic approach where a person's notion of career is not divorced from the rest of their life. According to these researchers, individuals today seek three key elements to their careers:

– Balance between work and the rest of their lives
– The need for authenticity
– A need for challenge.

These are what the researchers label the ABCs of the Kaleidoscope model. Their online manifesto summarises it thus: '*just as a kaleidoscope uses three mirrors to create*

infinite patterns, kaleidoscope careerists focus on three "mirrors" or parameters (authenticity, balance, and challenge) which combine in different ways throughout the lives of individuals' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006b).

This research echoes the findings of a study some two decades earlier by Granrose and Kaplan (1996) who had investigated the career/life decision processes of over 200 professional women.   Granrose and Kaplan found that women then, based their career/life decisions on three main areas of consideration:

– Ability to pursue their personal values
– The presence of supportive social/familial networks
– Employer organisation level of support of families

The researchers found that women also had a strong belief in their abilities but that the overarching barriers or obstacles they experienced in balancing work and families stemmed from a lack of acceptance and support by both managers and organisational policies.

Other researchers have addressed this career exiting phenomenon from a more general perspective of it being a response by professional couples, to extreme work conditions or overwork impacting family life (Cha, 2010; Hewlett, 2007; Stone, 2007; Pocock, 2003; Charlesworth, Campbell and Probert, 2002; Gatens, 1998; Powell and Mainiero, 1992).   For example the research carried out by Cha (2010) found that professional mothers whose husbands work 60 or more hours a week have an 112 per cent greater probability of quitting careers than professional mothers whose husbands work under 50 hours a week.   In the influential book *The Price of Motherhood*, author and journalist Ann Crittenden (2010) writes that a 60 plus hour a week is the norm in senior professional jobs and concurs that a "*full time 'wife' is often the only thing that makes family life possible*" (p17).   The author illustrates by quoting statistics from the United States where she finds 80 per cent of male CFOs are found to have stay at home wives and 64 per cent of male executives with children under 13 also had non-working partners (in Crittenden, 2010:18; similar also by Chesterman and Ross-Smith in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Crompton, 1986).

Professional mothers exiting careers is closely connected to an emerging, and as yet little researched area of career resumptions, or 'opting-in' (Hewlett and Luce, 2005). As example, Lovejoy and Stone (2012) conducted a study of 54 women who had opted-out to find out why women had redirected away from former careers. The study finds that the majority intended to return to work but to pursue alternative careers in traditionally female-dominated professions, or that they were uncertain about direction. Although some findings of this study are of comparative value to my research, there are some key differences. Namely, their study pertains to women who have been at home mothers for about 5 years, caring for children with an average age of 7.

3.4.3   The Motherhood penalty

3.4.3.1   Penalty as Financial loss

When child rearing limits a woman's full and continuous participation in the paid workforce, her ability to follow a career as well as her earning potential is constrained (Jarvis, 1999; Hanson and Pratt, 1995). In Australia, caring for children reduces the hours worked by mothers resulting in both financial and attitudinal repercussions on a woman's lifelong earnings due to motherhood. Reduced employment and/or lower earnings whilst mothering lowers a woman's potential life earnings (Breusch and Gray, 2004; Chapman et al., 2001) accrued wealth (Warren, Rowlingson and Whyley, 2001) and post retirement earnings (Evandrou and Glaser, 2003; Davies et al., 2000). These together with lost work experience, contribute to what is termed the 'motherhood wage penalty' (Budig and England, 2001; Dex and Joshi, 1999). It is a factor considered to be the major determinant of a continuing gender wage gap (Blau and Kahn, 2007).

The financial effects of the motherhood penalty have been highlighted in numerous international studies. Rose and Hartmann (2004) estimate that women who take a two to three year break in careers lose thirty percent of lifetime earnings (for other examples see Buligescu et al., 2009 for Germany; Drolet, 2002 for Canada; Waldfogel, 1998 for the United States). In Australia, significant wage-penalties are also found for women taking career breaks for childrearing (Arun, Arun and Borooah, 2004) and earlier research shows that women's earnings are reduced by four to five percent per child (Baxter, 1992). Similarly, other Australian studies have estimated the foregone lifetime

earnings associated with childrearing, comparing the earnings of mothers and non-mothers. It has been estimated that mothers' accumulated lifetime earnings are reduced by 19 percent (Breusch and Gray, 2004) through to 27 percent (Chapman et al., 2001).

3.4.3.2   Non-monetary - Other loss

Various authors refer to not strictly financial, but more attitudinal type penalties associated with motherhood (Crompton and Lyonette, 2009) such as perceptions of 'career death' (Chesterman and Ross-Smith in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010). In taking significant career breaks for mothering, women can be regarded by employers as less dedicated, less professional or more 'time deviant' (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky and Saute, 1999). More recently it has been claimed that employers have difficulty in predicting the human capital held by women who have not participated in the paid labour force for some time (Theunissen, Verbruggen, Forrier and Sels, 2011). Whilst those who take advantage of flexible work opportunities such as part-time work to accommodate their caring responsibilities, often do so in the knowledge that their employment arrangement is career and promotion limiting (Crompton and Lyonette, 2009:15; see also Probert, 1995) even when well qualified (Crompton, Dennett and Wigfield, 2003).

3.5　The Organisational Environment

To understand women's place in, and their relationship to, the workforce it is of value to consider the organisational context within which women's careers operate in or stall. Organisations and organisational processes are regarded as gendered by many scholars (as shown in the work of Ely and Padavic, 2007; Calas and Smircich, 2006; Acker, 2006 and 1998; Wilson, 1996; Gherardi, 1995; Kanter, 1977). In this next section I provide some background to highlight where organizational research began to consider gender as subject; follow with a précis of key gender-related directions that have taken place in organisation studies over the last generation; and then consider the structure of work, careers and skills themselves as gendered.

3.5.1　Gendered organisations – the background

Towards the end of the last century, studies of organisations were characterised by a focus on individuals within specific contexts (E.g. Powell and Dimaggio, 1992). Research ranged from anthropological (E.g. Van Maanen, 1988) and ethnographic studies (E.g. Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevon, 1995) to survey studies (E.g. Hofstede, 1980) and strategy arose as a dominant paradigm in management discourse (E.g. Prahalad and Hamel, 1994), specifically in areas of competitive strategy and competitive advantage (see Porter, 1980). It was claimed that positivist epistemologies were inadequate in explaining what happens in organisations and that the diversity and complexity of organisations called for multidimensional viewing in today's society (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004; Deetz and Alvesson, 1996; Kelemen and Hassard, 2003). There was a '*shift towards paradigm plurality*' (Kelemen and Hassard, 2003:74) advocating dialogue between paradigms and between researchers. This call for plurality is reflected in Flyvbjerg's (2001:1) criticisms of the 'mudslinging' and 'science wars' between the natural and social sciences at that time; Calas and Smircich's (1999) call that the modern versus post-modern debates be dispensed with; and Weick's (1999) call for an acknowledgement of multiple viewpoints within the field of organisation studies. These theorists amongst others, concurred that it was time to move beyond paradigm wars, that social science's emulation of the natural sciences was misguided, and that

'*social theory and social science methodology* [stood] *in need of reorientation*' (Flyvbjerg, 2001:4).

This multi-paradigm view of the 1990s not only advocated a challenge to '*entrenched research practices*' that had been held as best practice (Kelemen and Hassard 2003:81) but importantly and most relevant to my research it asked also '*why certain voices and positions were absent from the conversation of research and what is being suppressed as a result of our theorizing*' (Calas and Smircich, in Kelemen and Hassard 2003:80). According to Wilson (1996:825) '*organizational theory* [was] *tenaciously blind and deaf to gender*' and it was gender and women's voices specifically that were identified as being missing from organisational discourse and research (Acker, 1998; Calas and Smircich, 1996 and 2006; Gherardi, 1996; Wilson, 1996).

Gender had previously been '*seriously neglected in analyses of organisation*' (Hearn and Parkin 1983:351). Interest in gender and its role within organisations then emerged as an integral part of organisational analysis (Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980; Crompton and Jones, 1984; Riley, 1983; Smircich, 1985) and feminist critiques were instrumental in highlighting the problems of gender blind analysis within organisational studies (Mills, 1988). Although organisations' cultures and structures have been recognised as being gendered relatively recently (see Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004; Calás and Smircich, 1992), the origins of these perspectives can be traced to a concern with gender in organisations that began to evolve in the 1970s - a focus that began then by questioning the inequities inherent in systems of stratification and power relations. Thus it is useful to review some key shifts in perspective that have accompanied gender in its relation to women, work and organizations.

3.5.1.1   From biology to social construct – 1970s

At the onset of this decade, gender relations in the workplace were the recipients of a male dominated legacy left by organisational theory's founding fathers (Wilson, 1996). Terms such as 'organization man' (Whyte, 1956) 'corporate man' (Jay, 1972) and 'bureaucratic man' (Kohn, 1971) were the norm (these three in Kanter, 1977).

Calls for transformation of the legal and political structures, and the social and cultural institutions of patriarchy during this period, led to a major shift in feminist scholarship where sex was posited as a physiological/biological category and gender became a constructed social category. Whilst the 19th century political feminist emphasis had been on the attainment of universal suffrage as a basic human right, the major policy/political paradigm shift of the 1970s arose out of the UN National Assembly's (1967) declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women charter. Theories of legal equality and contract-based rights ensued, though as Ferguson states, still '*mask*[ing] *the coercive dimensions of administrative (bureaucratic) society*" (in Donovan 2008:204). Ferguson's critique of this most pervasive form of dominance – bureaucracy - added further to the growing number of standpoint theorists of the time (E.g. Sandra Harding, Hilary Rose).

The 1970s was a time where liberal feminism transited from a focus on equality (to men) to a focus on difference (from men) and a period when theorists (such as Acker and Kanter) advocated for gender to be classified as an important and separate category of analysis in organisational studies rather than an addendum. A time when there were calls for recognition of the claim that women's work experiences differ from the work experiences of men.

3.5.1.2   From equality to difference, 1980s

During the 1980s amidst the repercussions of Equal Employment Opportunities legislation implementation, Affirmative Action Programmes and women increasingly entering managerial roles, organisation studies' worldview was yet to be enlightened on issues of gender. With the exception of a few women who conformed to the organisational mores, men occupied most positions of power and influence (Sorenson, 1984). In reviewing developments over this decade, Acker (1990) claims that organisational theory was giving 'some' consideration to women and gender (and refers to Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980; Mills, 1988; Morgan, 1986), but the treatment of gender issues was still superficial (Hearn and Parkin, in Acker, 1990). Nonetheless, feminist social scientists were beginning to produce gender specific organisational research (Acker makes reference to Kanter; Feldberg and Glenn; MacKinnon; Ferguson).

Similarly, Fiona Wilson found little change in organisational research practice, stating "*half the population of organizations has been ignored, left on the edge or just tagged onto OT texts*" (1996:825). She claims that at the onset of this decade organisational theory and behaviour were devoid of discourse on the barriers confronting women (ibid). Gender divisions were largely ignored and she notes that no real research occurred to recognise the position of women at work, specifically no addressing of the gender power imbalance and most importantly, men were still "*the norm against which women are measured*" (Eichler in Wilson, 1996:826). There were calls for organisational theory to be revisited and for the finding of a new paradigm, which would benefit both men and women, who were termed 'prisoners of gender' (Scott, 1986; Flax, 1987).

By the end of the decade, there is an emerging literature on women in management, characterised by an 'otherness' that did not fit previous mainstream theory (Wilson, 1996). This perception of female 'otherness' was to be found in every field: science, law, medicine, history, economics, literature and art (Tavris, 1992). There were also studies showing that women have a high need for achievement (Boardman, Hartington and Horowitz, 1987); studies showing that women's motivation is not fundamentally different to that of men; and studies on women in management and their need to achieve (Alban, Metcalfe and Nicholson, 1984; White, Cox and Cooper, 1992). House and Singh (1987) suggest that where there is variation to be found, is in the stereotypic sex-role expectations of women that cause the variation, and Smircich (1985) states that women in management research was still treating sex/gender as a variable not as an analytical framework.

This was a decade where both theoretical and empirical gender related investigations of organisational aspects, structures and processes were undertaken (Izraeli, 1983; Martin in Acker, 1990), but women's experiences were still being examined through traditional male-dominated lenses (Dexter, 1985; Wallace, 1982). There was a call for the promotion of women's voices and points of view, at the same time rejecting male definitions of what constitutes worthwhile activity (Gilligan, 1993) - a call to '*celebrate*[s] *women in their feminized difference rather than devaluing them as imperfect copies of Everyman*" (Di Stefano, 1990:67, in Ely and Padavic, 2007).

3.5.1.3 Focus on difference - since the 1990s

Legal equality between the sexes and greater female participation in the paid work force at the end of the twentieth century was characterized by men continuing to monopolize senior levels of power, and an intactness of patriarchy's material and institutional structures. However, a substantial shift can be observed in the 1990s. Many organisational feminists' work during this decade was in seeking answers to questions such as: '*how can we begin to understand the persistence of sexual inequality within an explicit framework of equality*?' (Wajcman, 1998:1) and how to '*explain the persistence of male dominance and female disadvantage, in spite of years of attempts to implement gender equity policies*' (Acker, 1998:197) and why '*after two decades of equal opportunity policies, women are still expected to 'manage like a man'*' (Wajcman 1998:160).

Early women-in-management research '*epistemological premises show a marked functionalist/positivist orientation*' (Calas and Smircich, 2006:291). Through the decade however, we see a shift away from the functionalist paradigm and a proliferation of interpretive gender research in organisational studies, including a greater focus on woman's way of managing, '*bringing emotions, sexuality and bodies into organizational analysis*' (Acker 1998:195). According to Donovan (2000) feminist theory became '*more specific paying more attention to the differences among women*'. The ascendance of women-in-management research and literature was accompanied by a growing acceptance of women's difference being beneficial for organisations and advantageous for corporate effectiveness (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990). Thus the manner in which research was carried out shifted focus, aiming to reveal the micro-processes and practices in organisations. Studies of individual managers' experiences and their identities are illustrative of this shift to a subjectivist analysis of individual micro-scenarios (see Linstead and Thomas, 2002 for examples of studies in the UK; also Chapter 7 in Martin, [J] 2002).

Changing household patterns and workplaces during this period led to changes in market work and unpaid care work (for example see studies carried out by the Centre for Labour Research at Adelaide University, 2000-2007). The inter-connections between work and home also became an area of study focus, and academic research on

work/family issues experienced major growth during this period (Calas and Smircich, 2006:293). Preoccupations with the interconnectedness of power relations and sexuality (Weedon, 1997), and the interdependence between work and family domains, and whether work/family hinders or enriches organizational and individual outcomes have also been explored (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).

3.5.2   Work as gendered construct

Concerns with interdependencies between work and family domains and the ongoing intactness of patriarchy's institutional structures have been characterised by researchers continuing to question what constitutes the nature of work itself.   To some '[w]*ork comprises all the activities we do to be creative, productive and reproductive, not just employment*' (Standing, 2008: 365). Yet for others, such as the authors of The Australian Charter of Employment Rights[1] (AIER, 2007) who use 236 words to define 'worker', none of their description addresses unpaid care/mothering work.

Though there has been all the previously presented scholarship, theorizing and paradigm shifting over the last generation, the practice of work within organisational employment relationships continues to be based on a dominant paradigm of *standard work* (as described by Pfeffer and Baron, 1988) where standard or normal work is characterised as work '*that a) is performed full time, b) continues indefinitely and c) is performed at an employer's place of business*' (Kalleberg, 2000:341).   The dominant ideology of work remains one where '*real work is that which is done in exchange for pay'* (Pettinger et al., in Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Lindsey, 1996) and workplaces are structured around an ideal worker norm (Taylor, 2003:57).

Importantly for my research, ideal workers in turn are defined as persons '*who work at least forty hours a week year round'* (Williams, in Taylor, 2003:2) and if they are '*serious and committed members of the workforce* [they] *do not have primary*

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[1] The Australian Charter of Employment Rights (AIER, 2007) Developed by the Australian Institute of Employment Rights (AIER), is claimed to be the collaborative effort of seventeen of Australia's leading industrial relations practitioners, lawyers and economists. It was written as an alternative to Australia's previous Coalition Government's Work Choices laws.

responsibility, or even shared responsibility, for the rearing of children' (Okin, in Taylor, 2003:5). The ideal professional worker in particular continues to be an unencumbered male supported by a stay at home partner (Moen et al., 2013; Chesterman and Ross-Smith in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Crittenden, 2010; Williams, [J.] 2000; Acker, 1990; Crompton, 1986).

Even though the women's movement has gained entry into this male dominated structure of work, they have done so by adopting stereotypical male behaviours (Martin, [J] 2002; Wajcman, 1998; Still, 1993) and transforming the feminine to fit into a masculinist model of work, rather than by having women's experiences validated in their own right (England, 2010;Vejar et al., 2006). This has had two major gendered outcomes:

> a) Care work continues to be excluded from considerations of work (Fudge, 2013)

> b) Women's involvement in the workplace continues to follow traditional male pathways and male dominated hierarchies (Moen and Roehling, 2005; Vejar et al., 2006, amongst many others).

This is what Itzin and Newman (1995:83) had earlier referred to as the '*male chronology of continuous employment*' – a pattern of employment that does not allow for the discontinuity caused by child bearing, rearing and domestic responsibilities typical in female chronologies, causing women to move in and out of employment. The impact of the birth process itself is well illustrated by Martin's (2002:77) re-telling of how management '*helped a woman about to give birth'* by installing a '*video player in her hospital room so she could watch the launch of a product she managed'*. The author notes this would not have happened if it was a male '*undergoing a heart bypass*' and that the company's focus was on its own self-interest not the pregnant employees.

According to Williams [J.] (2000), it is ideal male worker norms that continue to underpin the glass ceiling (p 20) and continue to impede women's entry and/or progression to high paying managerial and professional roles (p 68). Additionally, Summers (2003b:186) claims that gendered and discriminatory practices have gone

'*underground*' and have become '*less overt and harder to detect*' than they were in the 1980s.

More recently gendered ideologies, practices and structures have continued to '*shape gender identity negotiation processes at work*' (Ely and Padavic, 2007:1134; similar in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010:9). Processes which have resulted in Australia being reported by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as the country to have the lowest number of female managers out of the world's industrialised nations; and ranked 24th in terms of economic participation and opportunity, after countries such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi, 2010). Our gendered work environments and practices are further demonstrated in a more current Australian study by CEW[8] and Bain (2011) where they surveyed 842 business professionals. Their report finds overall that professional Australian women do not believe they have equal opportunity to be promoted into senior roles or at the same rate as male peers. More specifically, 78 percent of the women participating believe that gendered approaches to management are the biggest obstacle to women's advancement, yet only 39 percent of the men agreed with this rationale. In contrast, the majority of men surveyed (61%) believe competing work-life commitments are the major factors hindering women's rise to senior roles. This concurs with two earlier studies by Catalyst (2003) and by Burton (1997) where it was also shown that women and men attribute different causes to women's low attainment of managerial/leadership roles.

The continuance of gendered work practices is further reflected in national figures released in 2015. For example, 58 percent of Australia's university graduates were women, yet only 4 percent of CEOs in ASX 200 organisations were female and men are still deemed to have 9 times better likelihood of reaching executive levels than do women (WGEA[9], 2015). Additionally and perhaps most alarmingly, pay equity in Australia does not appear to have evolved much in the 108 years since the determination of the 1907 Harvester[10] case which had set women's wages at 54 percent of their male counterparts. Through most of 2015 the gender pay gap stood at 18.2 percent, the highest it has been in 20 years (see WGEA, 2015 and 2014a and 2014b; DCA, 2015) and by November of the same year it had risen to 19.1 percent (ACTU, 2015). A year

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[8] Chief Executive Women
[9] Workplace Gender Equality Agency
[10] Landmark case in Australian Labour Law (Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration) advocating for fair living wages

later (November 2016) the gender pay gap in 'key management' roles had climbed to 26.5 percent equating to more than $93,000 difference in remuneration (Cassells, Duncan and Ong, 2017:7).

3.5.3   Changing concepts of career

Within the above dominant ideology of work which favours a male chronology of continuous employment, it can be seen that gender affects not only organisational structures and work practices but also how the concept of career is considered, defined and practiced. Watts (1998:2) tells us that the term *career* is in itself ambiguous and Collin (1998) that the literature on careers is lacking in definition and clarity of basic concepts. It is a term however, that generally refers to professional work in a given field (Arthur et al., 1989); and it is a concept that has undergone marked theoretical and practical changes over the last generation. As Arthur and Rousseau (1996 b: 28-29) summarise:

> **Career**: Old meaning: a course of professional advancement; usage restricted to occupations with formal hierarchical progression, such as managers and professionals. New meaning: the unfolding sequence of any person's work experiences over time. (Arthur and Rousseau's original formatting).

Early theoretical work on the concept of career and career development is exemplified by Schein's (1978:2) definition of it being a process of interaction between an individual and an organisation '*over time'*.   The focus then was firmly on the organisation and long term contractual relationships between employer and employee and implicit duty of care and loyalty binds. The archetypal career was termed traditional, organisational, hierarchical or linear (Callanan and Greenhaus, 1999; Arthur, 1994) and was characterised by '*vertical processes of advancement within one organisation*' (McMahon, Patton and Tatham, 2003:5). Additionally these bureaucratic processes ensured a clear divide between work time and personal time (Blair-Loy, 2009) and time out for family formation and care signalled diminished career or organisational commitment (Williams, [J.] 2000). This was a career model that was predominately driven from within organisations and as I have shown earlier, styled on an unencumbered male employee model (Moen et al., 2013; Chesterman and Ross-Smith

in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Crittenden, 2010; Williams, [J.] 2000; Acker, 1990; Crompton, 1986).

In a lecture in 1987, Charles Handy (1988:90) identified four elements that would define the career models of the 21st century: *Discontinuity* (marked by change and organisations' and employee's mechanisms for coping); *Markets* (greater organisational sensitivity in responding to customer needs); *Credentials* (greater need for a greater number of professionals to have formal qualifications); and *Portfolio lives* (more than one career in life in concert with multiple other activities that may or may not generate income). Socio economic changes and effects of trends such as globalisation, rise of knowledge work, and women's uptake of employment have resulted in a conceptual move away from the organisation-centric traditional career structures, giving rise to new forms of employer-employee relationships. The career literature points to the shift that did occur in the latter part of last century from the traditionally linear, one organisation career patterns, to careers characterised by flexibility and mobility, non-linear progression, and a multiplicity of organisational or industry settings (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). The new career models augur '*the death of the linear career*' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006a:8) and are the '*opposite of organizational careers* [that] *unfold in a single employment setting'* (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996:5). These new career types are termed *boundaryless careers* (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Within this construct, protean (Hall and Mirvis, 1996; Hall, 1996 and 2004) and portfolio (Handy, 1991 and 1999; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996 Littleton, Arthur and Rousseau, 2000) career models have emerged as related variations. Both of these have strong pertinence to encapsulating women's career patterns, as I discuss further on.

3.5.3.1   Boundaryless Careers

Theoretically, the boundaryless career is deemed to be the subjective construct of an individual (Collin and Watts, 1996) where the careerist takes ownership of their career growth and direction and regards his/her career as personal property (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). The focus changes from traditional employment marked by longevity and security within an organisation to fluidity, transferability and employability across a

broader field or multiple organisational, occupational or geographical sites (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Hall, 1996 and 2004). It is marked by '*a sequence of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting*' (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996:116) or provides for an opportunity for inter-organizational mobility rather than explicit changes of employer (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005:181). Within this model, the mobility or boundary crossing may be either physical (behavioural) or psychological (attitudinal). The first refers to physically crossing work site boundaries; the second refers to the careerist's openness, ability or capacity to cross (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006).

It is this latter psychological attribute that is most characteristic in the protean career construct (Greenhaus, Callanan and DiRenzo, 2008), a derivative of the boundaryless career model. Whilst boundaryless careers tend more towards navigating organisational structures and boundaries, protean career models additionally incorporate the careerist's identity, personal values and self-drive (Hall, 2004). The emphasis in this model is on creating a career path that is personally meaningful to the careerist and inclusive of contextual elements in that person's life (ibid). Additionally, protean careerists take ownership of their own professional development and training (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006a).

Another concept found within the boundaryless career literature is that of portfolio careers, introduced by Handy (1988). It refers to highly skilled employees who move from organisation to organisation. Portfolio careers are associated with flexible work, freelancing and consulting work practices and the work style of portfolio careerists is characterized by three main elements:

– Time defined – careerists work for a number of clients on successive work projects
– Sole operator – careerists behave as though self-employed
– Autonomous – careerists freely pick and choose both clients and projects

The element of flexibility inherent in portfolio work has been reported in a UK study by Kerry Platman (2004) as being particularly attractive to older professionals as it is deemed to offer '*unrivalled opportunities for individuals wanting to tailor-make late life careers*' (p 590).

3.5.3.2   Women's careers still gendered

These new types of career frameworks are of particular interest to the consideration of women's careers, particularly in light of the following two points.

Firstly, as I have shown previously, traditional concepts and practices of career are heavily gendered and do not allow for the variations in labour force attachment that characterise many professional women's lives. As Hewlett (2005a) states, '*some 60% of highly qualified women have non-linear, non-standard careers'*. Yet we continue to analyse and measure women's careers against a traditional, linear and male model where measures of success such as higher status/managerial levels and increased salaries, do not apply because such measures are based on career structures which are not germane to these women (Moen et al., 2013; Moen and Roehling, 2005; Williams, [J.] 2000).   How career success is measured is particularly problematic for women who take career breaks or exits.

Success in career has typically been measured against a tournament model of organisational success (O'Neill and O'Reilly, 2004; Sullivan, 1999) focusing on *how* we choose to play *throughout* the tournament. This is a model where rewards (salaries, promotions) are directly linked to human capital acumen at the start of a career path but changes to ability and effort later along the career path, whilst human capital becomes less relevant. Thus career attainment viewed through a tournament lens reflects almost no difference between men and women at the start of career paths (Lyness and Judiesch, 1999; Sullivan, 1999). The differences appear later in mid and senior career tracks when there is greater variance in workforce participation by women and men and when women begin to trade career advancement for flexibility or family (Lyness and Thompson, 2000; Judiesch and Lyness, 1999). According to O'Neill and O'Reilly (2004:24) those most likely to experience career success are the '*contestants*' that '*put in the effort*' and '*those who choose to put the effort elsewhere [ ] are not likely to succeed by the narrow criteria of income and promotions, but may succeed in personal terms*'.

Secondly, as I have previously shown (Chapter 2) research and literature on women's careers has been heavily focused on the work-family nexus, placing the emphasis on family as the source of strain on women's careers. The result is that we are not treating

women's career structures themselves as unique and stand-alone frameworks or entities of analysis. This is (in part) what Moen et al., (2013:42) refer to as the '*career mystique*' of women's working lives. It is a mystique that continues to relegate stressors from the work-family clash to the private domain (ibid p 104), and thus excludes the issue of family care and formation as a reality and key component of working women's career model formulations or analysis.

Scholars have long argued the need for a different framework of career, based on the particularities of women's career patterns and notions of success. According to Sherry Sullivan (1999:461), research specifically on women's careers does need to happen and more specifically it needs to consider the interaction of five key elements: Timing of family formation; Family responsibilities; Career stage of partner; Organisational support structures; and Work-place discrimination.

More recently the Diversity Council of Australia (2014) released a report on current organisational norms or practices that are working or not working for career women. What is found to not be working is: the pipeline theory – which poses that gender balance will be achieved over time as more women enter the workforce; formal talent development programmes that do not specifically address gender; a focus on rewards based on meritocracy; and asking women to lean in more. What the Council reports as working well however is: gender targeted recruitment and development; active sponsorship rather than mentoring of women; moving organisation cultures away from a deficit model which presupposes women are the problem; gender targets and accountability measures and a dedicated diversity function.

3.5.4   Changing Concepts of Skill

It is not only how career success is measured and rewarded that needs consideration but also what is actually being measured and rewarded. Thus skill emerges as a pivotal element of enquiry.

Defining skill however, is a problematic and '*difficult task*' (Adler, 2004: 242). According to Grugulis, Warhurst, Grugulis and Keep '*extreme complexity*' is involved in '*unpack[ing] the simple word 'skill''* (2004:28). This is a complexity that according to extant literature is compounded by not only descriptors used, but by how skill is

measured or by the context within which a skill is present (see also Green, [Francis] 2011; Grugulis, et al, 2004; Stasz, 2001; Attewell, 1990; Vallas, 1990; Spenner, 1983). Additionally notions of skill are very domain or occupation specific, and different disciplines define/measure skill in domain/occupation relevant ways (Green, [Francis] 2011:18). The complexity is illustrated in varying discourses within different fields and I précis the more relevant ones to my research next.

3.5.4.1   Skill in Social Sciences related discourses

Broad descriptions are to be found in different social science disciplines, and these revolve around notions of skill being an '*understanding or knowledge*' (Attewell, 1990:423); the '*ability to do something*' (Green, [Francis] 2011:15) or a demonstration of a '*repeatable intelligent act*' (Dalmiya and Alcoff in Alcoff and Potter Eds., 1993: 236). According to Green ([Francis] 2011:21) skill '*is at once held to be a pivotal object for modern social and economic life, while also a concept with no consensus as to what exactly it refers to*'. Attewell (1990) refers to skill as both a '*common sense concept*' that is also '*complex and ambiguous*' (p 422) but encompasses '*competence or proficiency*' as a core idea across all explanations of the term (p 423).

Adding to the lack of clarity in definition the terms skill, aptitude and ability have often been interchangeably used (George and Jones, 2005:53) as have skill and competency (Field and Mawer, 1996:11). This interchangeability between terms is a point well illustrated in Green's (2011) synthesis on the subject where he states that '*skill is one of those social science words in common parlance with many meanings, numerous synonyms such as "ability", "competence", "knack", "aptitude" and "talent", and varied imprecise translations in other languages.*' (p6, author's formatting).

An associated difficulty stems from skill measurement practices for as Spenner states both '*our conceptualisation and measurement of skill are poor*' (1983:825). Vallas concurs and explains that part of the reason for this difficulty has been because researchers use various conceptions and measures of skill, resulting in a literature that is '*rife with inconsistent and contradictory findings that point in several directions at once*' (1990:379). As a very broad, general summary, in economics skill is viewed as

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an individual's attribute, in sociology skill is treated as an attribute of jobs or work structures rather than of the person doing the job, and in occupational psychology skill is dealt with as quantifiable and teachable competence (see Green, [Francis] 2011 and Attewell, 1990 for more).

Following on Spenner's (1983) work, Attewell (1990:424) proposes that the difficulties with measuring skill arise from a lack of answers to two overall questions: a) do we measure skill as a person attribute or as a job attribute and b) how do we create a common '*yardstick*' (ibid) to measure the various types of skills. The end result some two decades since Spenner's work is that the term skill remains '*a slippery concept*' to define (Green, [Francis] 2011:21) and '[b]*ecause skill is difficult to quantify, proxies are used* [but] *the proxies are not always reasonable substitutes for the skills they are intended to represent*' (Grugulis, et al, in Warhurst, Keep, and Grugulis, Eds., 2004:5).

In response to that 'slipperiness' Green ([Francis] 2011) advocates a functional, interdisciplinary concept of skill aimed at integrating common traits of skill that would be valid across the social sciences. He labels it the PES concept. Under this more contemporary multi-disciplinary model, skill is defined as a personal quality containing three elements: skill is *Productive* (produces value); skill is *Expandable* (can be added to through training); and skill is *Social* (it is socially determined) (ibid, p 5).

3.5.4.2   Skill in Employment related discourses

That is largely the definitional position in social science discourses. I now address areas of the skill literature that are more directly relevant to an employment arena: employability and soft skills.

The rise of employability skills

In career, management, and employment related literature and practice it is common for skill to be considered in conjunction or inter-changeably with *competencies*. In these workplace contexts, competency refers to the level at which knowledge or skills are exercised or demonstrated in an employment setting or as Thomas and Velthouse (1990: 672) state, the '*degree*' at which a task is performed.

Career specific competencies have also been labelled by De Fillippi and Arthur (1996) as ways of knowing. The authors identify three skill groupings: Knowing why (identity and motivators) competencies refer to an individual's personal drive and how they identify themselves in various work settings; Knowing how (expertise) competencies refer to skills and experience required to carry out specific jobs; and Knowing whom (connections) competencies refer to the relationships and networks developed at, and needed for, employment (see also Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). These ways of knowing support the concept of skill as a marketable commodity that augment an individual's skill portfolio in an age of boundaryless careers.

In Australia, the *National competency standards: policy and guidelines* first drafted in 1991 described competencies as '*knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation or industry to the standard of performance required in employment*' (National Training Board, 1991:18). This is a definition that has endured through a number of government and industry policy and training initiatives leading to the current 'employability skills' focus and agenda throughout educational institutions, and industries (See as examples: *Employability Skills for the Future* report, ACCI/BCA[11], 2002; *Employability Skills, from framework to practice,* DEST[12], 2006 guide; *Australian Qualifications Framework*, AQF[13], 2013).

The common goal of those initiatives has been to establish a recognisable and transferable set of generic skills to support '*task based activities central to any job role*' (DEST, 2006:8). As a result, employability has emerged as an explicit end-point of higher education in Australia (similarly overseas); a position premised on the view that graduates were deficient in skills required to 'make them more operationally relevant in an enterprise context' (Smith, Ferns and Russell, 2014:138).

The key competencies identified in the 1991 standards have since been revised through consultative processes involving peak employer bodies and jointly managed by the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce. The *Employability Skills framework* (of 2002) was deemed to be more industry context

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[11] Australian Chamber of Commerce and the Business Council of Australia
[12] Department of Education, Science and Training, Commonwealth of Australia
[13] Australian Qualifications Framework Council www.aqf.edu.au

specific than the earlier *Key competencies* (in ACCI/BCA 2002: 10) but this too has subsequently evolved after consultation with a further 800 individuals from various sectors and is now called the *Core Skills for Work Framework* [CSfW] (DIISTRE and DEEWR[14], 2013:3). According to this newest framework, the generic skills in use in Australia, now addressed as *employability skills* are ten skill areas grouped under three clusters. These are shown to the right of the table below, alongside the earlier versions of competencies and skills:

Key Competencies 1991	Employability Skills 2002 - 2006	Employability Skills 2013 - current
Communicate ideas & information	Communication	**1 – Navigate the world of work**
Work with others & in teams	Teamwork	a. Manage career & work life
Solve problems	Problem solving	b. Work with roles rights & protocols
Use technology	Technology	**2 – Interact with others**
Collect, analyse & organise information	Planning & organising	a. Communicate for work
-	Initiative & enterprise	b. Connect & work with others
Plan & organise activities	Self-management	c. Recognise & utilise diverse perspectives
-	Learning	**3 – Get the work done**
Use mathematical techniques & ideas		a. Plan & organise
		b. Make decisions
		c. Identify & solve problems
		d. Create & innovate
		e. Work in a digital world

Fig 3.1: Table showing the evolution of skill language over the last two decades in Australia[15]

The CSfW framework defines employability skill as '*a set of non-technical skills, knowledge and understandings that underpin successful participation in work*' (ibid, p1). Two further points identified within the scope of this framework that are of

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[14] Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
[15] Sources: Employability Skills, from framework to practice (DEST, 2006:10); Core Skills for Work Framework DIISRTE and DEEWR (2013: 1-2)

particular pertinence to my research relate to what is addressed by the word 'work'. Firstly, work is referred to as an '*activity that is directed at a specific purpose, which involves mental or physical effort*' and secondly, participation in work encompasses volunteer work (ibid). The inferences of these will be addressed in Chapter 6.

Even though the CSfW framework is in play nationally, extant literature points to some problems conceptualising 'employability' and therefore what ought to fall under an 'employability skills' category (Jackson, [D.] 2010). Jackson's own research for example identifies 41 skill areas under 'employability'. Again here, as in the social sciences (discussed earlier), conceptualising, defining and measuring skill is found to be difficult within the employability discourse. According to Smith, Ferns and Russell, (2014) there are three overall problems with the employability construct. Firstly there is no theoretical framework underpinning the construct, no agreement from researchers on a clear definition and consequently no measurement is possible at an operational level. Secondly, it is a politicised construct making it susceptible to addition/deletion of categories by parties with vested interests (government, industry and education). Thirdly, the term itself is too broad and they affirm that '*it should be no surprise that just about every ability, capability and pro-social attitude ever identified eventually should be brought within its folds*' (ibid. p 143). Thus, many of the skills found within the employability 'fold' can be found in taxonomies and lists under different topics/areas, and in particular what is generally addressed in the literature under soft skills.

Changing Focus to Soft skills:

In management literature and business sources relating to employment, skills are at times categorised as being either hard or soft. At their very core hard skills pertain to what one knows and soft skills to how one acts. As with the broader concept of skill addressed earlier, soft skill is equally complex to describe (Grugulis and Vincent, 2009). What constitutes or classifies as soft skill is contentious and authors such as Hurrell, Scholarios, and Thompson, (2012: 162) question whether soft skill is '*just a meaningless humpty dumpty term*[16]'. Grugulis, Warhurst and Keep (2004:15) explain

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[16] Hurrell, Scholarios, and Thompson, (2012: 162) use this term in their article "More than a 'humpty dumpty' term: Strengthening the conceptualization of soft skills" to reflect Lewis Carroll's character, Humpty Dumpty's use of nonsensical words regardless of their actual meaning.

that '*one of the most significant problems is the extreme inexactitude of nomenclature adopted by many of those who seek to label and define different types or forms of generic skill*'. The authors claim that this is exemplified in a growing trend over the last two decades '*to label what in earlier times would have been seen by most as personal characteristics, attitudes, character traits, or predispositions as skills*' (ibid, p 11). A point re-iterated by Payne (2000: 354) when he states that the concept of skill has '*expanded almost exponentially to include a veritable galaxy of `soft', `generic', `transferable' , `social' and `interactional' skills, frequently indistinguishable from personal characteristics, behaviours and attitudes, which in the past would rarely have been conceived of as skills*'.

The summative end point is that whilst hard skills are characterised by technical knowledge, profession specific experiences and qualifications; soft skills variously refers to generic, non-cognitive inter and intra personal behaviours; social competencies (Marks and Scholarios, 2008); or forms of practical intelligence (Joseph, Ang, Chang and Slaughter, 2010).

Regardless of the nomenclature difficulties, the consensus through the literature is that in an employment context soft skills have become necessary for success across all industries (Gibb, 2014; Hurrell et al, 2012; Schultz [B], 2008). For example, '*business knowledge and 'soft skills' have been found to be more important than advanced applications or traditional languages for success in IT professions*' (Noll and Wilkins, in Marks and Scholarios, 2008:99); and '*teamworking and problem solving*' are claimed to be '*two of the skills most prized by employers*' (Grugulis et al, 2004:3); and having the skills that enable one '*to work with other people*' (Dickerson and Green, 2004: 371) have gained prominence in the workplace.

Significant concordance is to be found away from the academe, at an organisational or operational level. Employer commentators too agree, that '*soft skills are the new hard skills [] how you collaborate, solve problems creatively and authentically lead people, will matter more*' (as was stated by Susan Ferrier, National managing partner, KPMG; in Elder, 2015). Australian educational institutions are also proactively catering for the trend. Two examples are: Graduate schools such as University of Melbourne devote 20 percent of some Master's programmes to teaching soft skills to their graduates (Elder,

2015); and Open Colleges Australia[17] offers an online segment of the ten soft skills new graduates need to develop for employability and tips on how to develop them. (See their list below at Fig 3.12).

The rise in importance of soft skills in the employability scene is very clearly highlighted in popular, contemporary, online sources relating to recruitment and employment. According to the SEEK Group, a leading on-line employment marketplace (handling 3 million job opportunities and 100 million job seeker profiles at any given time) soft skills are identified as one of the six attributes that characterise the workforce of the future and they will continue to grow in demand with skills like *empathy, flexibility* and how we *interact with others* gaining importance (Whalan, 2015). Similarly, according to about.com/careers, a leading online job forum and marketplace, the most sought after skills managers look for when recruiting are seven soft skills (Doyle, 2016). (These too are listed in Fig 3.12, for ease of comparison). In recent research carried out by the professional social network LinkedIn, 1402 managers from Fortune 500 organisations were surveyed, to identify what skills they deemed most important when hiring young professionals (Schnidman, 2014). This research identified eleven soft skills as being important to managers with *team work* and a *strong work ethic* being the most desired by a very wide margin.

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[17] Open Colleges Australia http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/careers/top-10-interpersonal-skills#.V5BYx7h97IV

Open colleges Australia[18]	About.com careers[19]	LinkedIn[20]	CSfW[21]
Self confidence	Team player	Collaborative, team player	Manage career & work life
Positive attitude	Flexibility	Hard worker, strong work ethic	Work with roles rights & protocols
Communication	Effective communication	Positive attitude & energy	Communicate for work
Team player	Problem solving & resourcefulness	Passionate about work	Connect & work with others
Critical thinking & problem solving	Accepting feedback	Organised, prioritises	Recognise & utilise diverse perspectives
Time management	Confidence	Resilient	Plan & organise
Coping with pressure	Creative thinking	Leads, inspires & influences	Make decisions
Flexibility		Challenges assumptions	Identify & solve problems
Accept feedback		Punctual	Create & innovate
Strong work ethic		Takes direction	Work in a digital world
		Compassionate & sees other perspectives	

Fig 3.2: Summary and comparison of Skills identified as important for employability now and into the future, garnered from four different contemporary sources

3.5.4.3 Skill in management related discourses

The changing nature of the skills landscape to a greater focus on employability/soft skills to better cater for a knowledge and globalised workforce is being paralleled by movement away from traditional management skills towards skills required for enacting effective leadership (Ford, in Ali-Metcalfe Ed, 2004). I review this literature next followed by a section addressing gender stereotyped skills.

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[18] http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/careers/top-10-interpersonal-skills#.V5BYx7h97IV

[19] http://jobsearch.about.com/od/skills-employer-want/fl/Top-7-Soft-Skills.htm

[20] https://blog.linkedin.com/2014/10/10/what-it-takes-for-a-young-professional-to-get-hired-today
[21] Core Skills for Work Framework [CSfW] (DIISTRE and DEEWR , 2013:3)

The shift from management to leadership is a shift addressed by Cloke and Goldsmith (2002:3) when they contend that '[m]*anagers are the dinosaurs of our modern organizational ecology'* and the '*age of Management is finally coming to a close'.* What the authors refer to is the waning of command-and-control, hierarchical managerial models and the rise of more democratic, collaborative organisational practices, with a stronger focus on leadership. This is a view reflected in much of the literature on leadership. It is exemplified by Mullins (2005: 217) when he states that a '*new breed of managers'* and '*new methods'* are needed for our changing future work and organisational environments. Hill (2007: 48) cautions however that managers will only be able to lead effectively when '*they give up the myth of authority for the reality of negotiating interdependencies'.*

Managing - as a leadership practice - is addressed by Carlopio, Andrewartha and Armstrong (2005: 12) thus: management is what individuals do '*under conditions of stability'* and leadership is what they '*do under conditions of change'.* The authors claim that for organisations to survive into the future, executives need to both manage and lead because '*effective management and leadership are inseparable. The skills required to do one are also required of the other'.*

As in the previous section, defining what those leadership skills are is difficult, and two factors stand out from the reviewed literature: research on leadership skills has been ongoing for over a century; and there is still no clarity or consensus on what constitutes leader skills. According to Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe and Waters-Marsh, (2001) the vast amount of research on leader skills and traits began over 100 years ago. In 1985 Bennis and Nanus identified '*over 350 definitions of leadership'* gleaned from 75 years of academic analyses (in Ford, 2004: 388). More recently, Yukl (2006: 197) described the cumulative literature on what constitutes leadership skills as '*massive and confusing'.* The author states that although there are many taxonomies in use for classifying manager/leader skills, a commonly accepted method of classification is a *Three-Factor Taxonomy of Broadly Defined Skills* (précised from Yukl, 2006, Table 7-1, p 181):

> *Technical skills* (E.g. methods, processes, equipment, etc.)

Interpersonal skills (E.g. behaviour, feelings, communication, social norms, etc.)

Conceptual skills (E.g. analytical, logic, problem solving, conceptual, etc.)

In an Australian context, the Karpin Report of 2011 (DEEWR) finds that the important skills required of leaders and managers are the '*values, skills and deep knowledge required to fulfil a senior role* [the] *capability to identify strategies, tasks, measures and culture/behaviours* [and] *the ability to not only model and formulate a strategic path forward for an organisation, but also to lead the full implementation of such strategy*' (p 8). The report identifies nine areas (p 8) that are deemed necessary skills for managers/leaders to develop over the 20 years beyond the Report's release:

1. *'Staff engagement*
2. *Knowledge and capability*
3. *Strategic networking*
4. *Personal and emotional qualities*
5. *Change management*
6. *Move away from Traditional concepts of leadership and management*
7. *Information and communications technologies*
8. *Ethics and integrity*
9. *Creativity and innovation'*

Robbins et al. (2001) assert that though the literature does not clearly predict which traits culminate in leadership success per se, through seven decades of research, eight traits that consistently differentiate leaders from non-leaders can be identified (p 404):

1. *'Honesty and integrity*
2. *Intelligence*
3. *Self-confidence*
4. *Emotional maturity*
5. *Stress tolerance*
6. *Task-relevant knowledge*
7. *Ambition and high energy*
8. *The desire to lead*
9. *Emotional intelligence'*

Based on indications from other studies, the authors have added the ninth element (emotional intelligence) which they state '*more than any other single factor, best predicts who will emerge as a leader*' (p 405).

This concept of Emotional intelligence (EI) is strongly linked to overall success in life (Carlopio et al, 2005). There have been three models developed since the 1990s, but it is Goleman's model which is applied in organisational (Goleman, 2001) and leadership (Goleman, 2013) related contexts. The core principle of Goleman's EI theory is that 'attention is the basis of the most essential of leadership skills—emotional, organizational, and strategic intelligence' (ibid). The author refers to that 'attention' as a well-developed and balanced 'triad of awareness' where leaders focus fully on the self, others, and their surroundings[22]. Accordingly, this tripartite focus is identified as the crucial skill for good leadership (ibid).

Thus it can be seen that the skills identified in management related discourses closely resemble those under soft skills taxonomies.

Gender stereotyped skills

I have previously shown how the reviewed literature addresses gendered ideologies, practices and structures that influence organisations (at 3.5.1), the nature of work (at 3.5.2) and careers (at 3.5.3). Similarly, in management/leadership discourses we find that historically, various skills have been ascribed stereotypical gender role characteristics that is, addressed as feminine or masculine skill or trait. .

This is anchored in the historical notion that promoted the work of men as being based on skill and the work of women as being based on natural attributes or talents (Jenson, 1989: 149); or by employers regarding women's skills '*as 'natural' female attributes rather than skills developed through training and experience*' (in Wajcman, 1998: 30). Since the 1970s three prominent schools of thought and literatures have addressed the relationship between leadership and gender-role stereotypes. They are *Think manager, think male; Think manager, think female;* and *Think manager, think non gender specific*. A precis of these is valuable because they have had, and continue to have, great

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[22] "in the proper balance, because a failure to focus inward leaves one rudderless, a failure to focus on others renders one clueless, and a failure to focus outward may cause one to be blindsided" (Goleman, 2013)HBR

influence on the women's-voice literature on gender in organisation and management research (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011: 472).

The first school (*Think manager, think male),* was initiated by the work of Virginia Schein (1973, 1975), who developed the Schein Descriptive Index (SDI) to study psychological barriers preventing women taking up managerial roles. Key findings in Schein's (1973) research were that: women were perceived as less qualified than men for senior roles; successful managers displayed behavioural characteristics used more often to describe men rather than women; and women actively promoted feminine self-images by subsuming leadership to men[23]. Another significant researcher at this time was Sandra Bem who developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to study the impact of sex-typed (feminine/ masculine) characteristics on mental health (Bem, 1974). Two major outcomes of Bem's work were a) she expanded gender-role definition beyond masculine and feminine, by introducing androgyny as a third gender-role category[24]; b) Bem's work was used extensively over the next two decades by researchers exploring the link between leadership and gender-roles. Although the SDI and BSRI have been very influential on leadership studies, social constructs and conditions have changed since they were first designed. Additionally, their use of task-related rather than relationship-related measurements has become progressively less applicable to modern leaders and organisations.

This period of scholarship culminated in the 1980s on two themes. The first: women managers' ascendency up the corporate ladder was dependent on behaving as men. Rosen encapsulated this view in her *Women, work and achievement: The Endless Revolution*, (1989: 210) by claiming that '*women had to change*' from traditional '*feminine   passivity, compliance, and dependence*' and replace them with '*masculine traits of competitiveness and aggressiveness*'. The second theme: good management was deemed to be androgynous in style, positing that all managers should have both feminine (communal) and masculine (agentic) traits. In *The Androgynous Manager* Alice Sargent (1981: 50) describes it as a '*balance between personal attitudes, emotions and expressions*' mixed with masculine traits of '*self-reliance and independent decision*

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[23] It is interesting to note that Schein's 1973 publication was based on a field study she had carried out some 15 years earlier. By the time Schein replicated the study in 1975, social conditions had changed and the effect of the "think manager think male" wave had lessened.
[24] Bem claimed that "rigid sex-role differentiation [had] outlived its utility" and advocated for more "flexible sex-role concepts" such as androgyny (1974: 161)

making' and '*feminine interpersonal skills of being trustful and open and possessing self-awareness*'.

The '*Think manager, think female*' period followed in the 1990s, marked by a move away from androgyny to a position of women's difference or what Sally Helgesen (1990) termed '*the female advantage*'. Research of the time was characterised by salient themes such as: Rosener's (1990) – defining women's leadership style as 'interactive' and positing that women leaders are more transformational in style than their male counterparts; Helgesen's (1990) - finding that women perceive organisations as networks of relationships with the leader in the centre, whereas men think of organisations as pyramids with leaders at the top: and Alice Eagly who co-writes with numerous others - promoting a women-centric style of leadership based on deployment of collaborative/participative skills rather than autocratic/command skills associated with a male style. Eagly and Karau (1991) advocated for women to cease acting as men and that instead they focus on changing the model of leadership itself, so that it include the social and the interpersonal. It was further argued that women's innate affinity with the skills required for transformational leadership was advantageous over those leading in a (male) transactional style (Eagly and Carli, 2003 and 2007; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen, 2003).

In contrast, the '*think manager, think non gender specific*' scholarship follows a general theme of there being no distinguishable or significant gender based differences in the style of men and women leaders. Many have challenged the notion that leadership is consistent with stereotypical gender-specific traits, and consider that view as a retrograde step (Vecchio, 2002). Attitudes, behaviours and motivators have been found to be similar between successful women and men managers (Harriman, 1996:157). In studying the influence of gender on leadership specifically, Wajcman finds that both men and women do believe that there are differences between sexes. Her research identified typical descriptors used by both men and women, which include: For a female style: participative, collaborative, cooperative, coaching style, people oriented, caring. For a male style: directive, self-centred/self-interested, decisive, aggressive, task oriented. Wajcman goes on to conclude however, that men and women in senior and equivalent positions are '*indistinguishable*' from each other and she argues that '*there is no such thing as a 'female' style of management*' (Wajcman, 1998:56).

Regardless of the '*think non gender specific*' literature, there is evidence showing that gendered stereotypes have persisted. According to Appelbaum, Audet and Miller (2003:4), women continue to be portrayed '*as less capable leaders than men*' (and similarly in O'Neill and O'Reilly, 2004: 8). A point supported more recently by England et al (2007: 25) who explain that jobs, positions, industries and '*all things associated with the feminine*' continue to be '*devalued or stigmatised*'. However, not all literature devalues the stereotypically feminine, or presents it as problematic. As an example, in a review of research on gender stereotypes and negotiation performance, Kray and Thompson (2005) find that gendered characteristics are linked to overall effectiveness in negotiations. The authors find that feminine traits such as empathy and listening skills are shown for example, to strengthen negotiation effectiveness (p 162).

In literature outside the academe, we find a useful indicator of contemporary views on the relationship between gender, traits and leadership. A 2012 study by Gerzema and D'Antonio, surveyed 64,000 people from government, business and not-for-profits, in 13 culturally diverse countries, representing 65 percent of world GDP. They published their findings as *The Athena Doctrine* (2013), a book mainly concerned with leadership (p 21). The research aim had been to ascertain what people around the world believed to be feminine or masculine skills, traits and attitudes – in 'an understandable way'. The authors did not seek the '*politically sensitive definitions*' but rather the views people held '*based on their subjective interpretations*' (p 7). They found that two thirds of respondents - the majority of whom were men - felt that the world would be better if men thought more like women (p 7) and met the '*challenges of life with a predominantly feminine set of skills, traits, and attitudes*' (p 23). The authors synthesised their findings to one overarching message: the qualities of an '*ideal modern leader are considered feminine*' (p 11) and are characterised by the following:

1. '*Connectedness (ability to form & maintain networks)*
2. *Humility (an approach to life that allows for listening, learning from others & sharing credit)*
3. *Candour (a willingness to speak openly and honestly)*
4. *Patience (a recognition that some solutions emerge slowly)*
5. *Empathy (a sensitivity to others that promotes understanding)*

6. *Trustworthiness (a track record and strength of character that inspire confidence*

7. *Openness (being receptive to all people and concepts*

8. *Flexibility (the ability to change and adapt when circumstances require*

9. *Vulnerability (the courage to be human and make mistakes)*

10. *Balance (a well-rounded sense of purpose)'*

(ibid p 21-22)

Eighty one per cent of respondents were found to believe that both feminine and masculine skills are needed by both men and women in today's world and this, the authors deduce, can be a '*competitive advantage'* or a '*new form of innovation for today's world*' (p 256). Gerzema and D'Antonio conclude '*that the essence of the modern leader is feminine*' (p 257).

The notion that leadership characteristics of the future will be feminine is also reflected in other research derived literature. As examples: Alimo-Metcalfe (2004) analysed 360 degree feedback from 3500 individuals in 600 (UK) organisations to examine gender differences in approaches to leadership. The resultant paper *Leadership: a masculine past, but a feminine future?* also positions leadership characteristics of the future as feminine. In a more recent review of gender and management research trends over the last generation, Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) note a current trend in media representations also includes the '*future as female'* (p 471).

3.5.4.4   Crossing over skills – from home to work

Skills developed in, and exercised through parenting, have been found to be not only meaningful to - but also transferable to - employer sites (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Cox and Leonard, 1991). Conversely, it has also been argued that when women take time out of the labour force to raise children, their human capital and re-employability skills or prospects are diminished (Probert and Murphy, 2001:31).

Within the feminist literature, the activities involved in caring for families are generally deemed as '*skilled and significant work'* (DeVault, 1994:240-241). Wajcman's (1998: 33) research finds that many of the qualities that both men and women consider to be

feminine are '*associated with mothering*' and more importantly, that the better managers are those who operationalise these particular skills (notwithstanding the author notes the ongoing absence of mothers from senior management).

An Australian research project conducted by Cox and Leonard (1991) audited women's perception of skill development as a result of engagement in unpaid work. The women studied were found to have fostered '*technical, management, finance, interpersonal and organizational expertise*' through their involvement in family formation and unpaid community pursuits. Such skills the researchers state, are '*transferable into paid work situations*' (p 5). A more recent study by O'Dwyer in 2012 also asserts that a broad range of skills can be gained from volunteering which have transferability to the workplace (in Rogers and Noble, 2013) and this is further supported by the volunteering literature (Volunteering Australia, 2015; Leonard, Onyx, and Hayward-Brown, 2004; Flick, Bittman and Doyle, 2002).

Links between the skills developed through caring for family and the applicability of those skills to managing and leading in the workplace have also been drawn by Crittenden (2004). Her work is based on a study of 100 professionals who have been the primary carers in their families. It identifies four categories of skills (p 8-9) that interviewees have learnt through parenting which they believe cross over to professional work:

> *Multi-tasking* (prioritise, maintain focus, manage complexity, handle crises)
>
> *Interpersonal skills* (handle irrationality, negotiate, patience, empathy, respect differences)
>
> *Growing human capabilities* (mentoring, bring out the best, positive reinforcement, inspire, letting go, provide structure and feedback)
>
> *Habits of integrity* (steadfastness, courage, humility, hope, selflessness, creativity, self-mastery)

In employment discourses, however, (with historical foci of recognising something as skilled if it could be technically determined) women's skills in nurturance and caring (which are socially determined) have not been valued or understood as skilled. This

according to Wajcman, (1998) is further exacerbated because the home as '*the place in which these skills are often acquired [] or developed in the course of childrearing, is not recognised as a valid training ground'*. The devaluing of women's skills is furthered by Fudge (2013) when she notes that unpaid reproductive and care work are so profoundly gendered that they are not covered by labour law.

Some cursory support for the notion that skills useable in an employment setting can be acquired in a multitude of sites can be found in Green, Ashton and Felstead (2001:408). The authors state that those sites can include '*educational institutions, [] the family and other external institutions'*. Additionally, as noted earlier (at 3.5.4.2), volunteer work has also been identified as a site of employment-applicable skill acquisition.

The organisational literature does not assist my work on this point of skills transference. There appears to be an extreme paucity of research and business/organisational literature addressing the cross-over of skills from the unpaid towards the paid work domains. This presents as being at odds with that which may be best described as the lay-person's career-self-help genre.

I refer to the proliferation of online forums, books, resume writing and career re-entry coaching services – all aimed at women returning to the workforce. The extent of this genre can be gleaned from a Google search based on any permutation of the words *women, mothers, skill*, and *return to work*, which generates over a million entries. A common theme through these sites appears as a quest for the manner in which to best represent the at-home time and activities into 'employer-speak'.

What is glaringly missing from the employment and skills literatures is the scholarship that studies and theorises on the transference of skills which emanate from the care sphere, or what Wajcman (1998) referred to as the 'valid training ground' of home.

3.5.5   Changing Work practices

3.5.5.1   Rise of flexible work

A strong trend that emerged during the 1990s economic shift towards globalisation was the rise of flexible working arrangements as part of the Work-Life balance rhetoric.

Flexible work practices are progressively being accepted as good business practice and have now become a reporting measure for organisations surveyed by government bodies such as the WGEA.

Flexible working arrangements are of particular significance to both working women and older workers. Current research shows that both mature age job seekers and people with caring commitments are more likely to seek jobs with flexible work arrangements (DCA, 2012a; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [ACCI], 2012; National Seniors Australia, 2012; Productivity Commission, 2010 and 2008).

The uptake of flexible work is also seen by Government as important for Australia's economic well-being. Flex work is deemed a critical enabler for older people's participation in the labourforce - a participation that is necessary if we are to minimize the impact of population ageing on the economy (IGR, 2010). In support, eligibility to request flexible work from an employer (under the Fair Work Act of 2009) was extended to those aged 55 and over, in 2013.

Flexible working can encompass a variety of different arrangements, including: flexible start and finish times, flexible rostering or scheduling, flexible leave arrangements, regular part-time work, make up time, rostered days off, regular or occasional working from home, job-sharing, or nine day fortnights/compressed working week and shorter weeks (AIM, 2012; DCA, 2012a; DEEWR, 2011).

In Australia, a National Work/Life Benchmarking Study (Holmes, 2007) found that
- 75% of Best Practice Organisations agree that the availability of flexible work arrangements impacts their ability to retain talent and 19% agree that lack of flexibility in the workplace leads to increased turnover
- 39% of respondents agree that work objectives are achievable in an environment where workers have input into planning and managing their work schedules
- 57% report that flexible work options have assisted in managing their staff more effectively
- 35% report an increase for flexible work arrangement requests from mature aged employees

Flexible work arrangements particularly part time hours and non-rigid work start and finish times are some of the conditions that have been reported in Australia as preferred by women over 45 (Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010). It is also shown that flexible work options are important in attracting women back into the workforce after child care responsibilities decline as well as retaining mature women in the workforce longer (ibid) and this is of specific relevance to the SAHMs in my research. Similarly in Europe, it is reported that 35 percent of all people not working could be encouraged back into work if more flexible working opportunities were available (Hurrell, Botcherby and Darton, 2007).

In Australia, an early report on work and family trends highlighted a gap between the availability or provision of flexible work and the actual uptake of those provisions (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004). A study conducted a decade later by the Diversity Council of Australia (2012a) demonstrates that progress has been slow since. It finds that whilst many employees now have access to basic flexibility, meaningful flexible careers are not yet standard business practice in Australian organisations. According to other literature, this may be the result of a continuing association between flexible working arrangements and caring responsibilities or what has been dubbed the 'mummy track' (WGEA, 2013; UK Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007). It is a gendered association that is still viewed by managers as being typical of those who are less career minded, less committed and continues to relegate flexible employment opportunities to lower organisational levels or poorly paid positions (WGEA, 2013; AIM, 2012; DCA, 2012a).

This presents at odds with the literature that demonstrates that the uptake of flexible work practices positively affects business performance (Bloom, Kretschmer and Van Reenen, 2011:8; and similarly in DCA, 2012a; AIM, 2012). Furthermore, the assumption that the uptake of flexible work is taken up by those with caring responsibilities has been found to not always be the case. For example in a recent Australian survey of 1671 mature age professionals (aged 45 and over) 60.6 percent of non-employed respondents are found to be keen to rejoin the workforce if flexible professional work was available (Professionals Australia, 2015). The WGEA (2013:2)

also reports that 79 percent of young Australian fathers would like to work flexibly if it was not to the detriment of their careers. In Britain, Hurrell, Blotcherby and Darton (2007) found that of those individuals taking up flexible work arrangements, 2.9 million were parents but the majority of 3.6 million were non-parents. Interestingly, another British survey (Holmes, Ivins, Hansom, Smeaton and Yaxley, 2007) has found that a higher proportion of employed men than of employed women would like to work more flexibly.

According to the DCA Report (2012a) the majority of the flextime used in Australian organisations is limited to options on start/finish times and options for working from home, but these roles are still structured around the requirements of standard full time work. For flexibility to really work in Australia, organisations are being urged to introduce quality flexible work and careers as standard business practice across all levels, for both men and women (ibid). There are still, however, cultural obstacles to implementation of flexible work as standard business practice in Australia, and managers' skills and attitudes are '*make or break*' factors in the implementation process (AIM, 2012:5).

3.5.5.2 The growth of extreme jobs

Work intensification, work overload and long working hours have been shown to have contributed to a demand for and supply of, more flexible work arrangements (WGEA, 2013; Holmes et al, 2007). This is linked to a second key trend resulting from global economic environment changes, and that is the growth of what is termed in the literature as extreme jobs.

Extreme jobs are generally high level, high impact roles characterised by long hours, high salaries and overwork (see Burke and Cooper, 2008; Green, [Francis], 2008; Martin, [J] 2002; Sullivan, 1999; Hochschild, 1997).

For example, Brett and Stroh (2003) define extreme jobs as those requiring 61 hours or more of work a week. They developed a four pronged framework based on a 557 respondent study to explain the phenomenon. Extreme work according to their research contains elements of:

- work leisure trade-offs (the more money earned the less hours spent on leisure);
- social contagion (hours worked reflect what others in an organisation are working);
- work is an escape from home;
- work is rewarding (financial and psychological rewards).

Hewlett (2007) bases her definition of extreme jobs on the results of a survey of 1564 of the top 6 percent of earners in the United States. She states that extreme jobs are characterised by their '*challenge and intensity*' and for the '*sheer hours spent at work*' (p 60), which she finds to be between 60 to 120 hours of work a week (also in Hewlett and Luce, 2006)[25].

The literature also points to the negative repercussions of extreme work engagement. It is generally claimed that the characteristics of an extreme job model promote a culture of midnight oil; pose danger to individuals and society; and that it is a work practice that is wreaking havoc on private live' (Hewlett and Luce, 2006; and similarly in Burke and Cooper, 2008 and Martin, [J] 2002).

The ramifications of the work conditions inherent in this model are very pertinent to my research and I discuss these in Chapter 6.

3.5.6 Organisational responses to an ageing workforce

I have previously discussed demographers' projections of world-wide ageing populations; comprehensive skills shortages; and further drops in fertility rates (see ABS 2012; OECD, 2013). In such a climate, some employment policy and business-led-research literature points to a growing need for a cultural shift, where older workers become recognized and valued for the depth of life experiences they can bring to a business (see as examples Professionals Australia, 2015; McKinsey and Company, 2010; Credit Suisse Research, 2012; Page Personnel Australia, 2014). It has been estimated that the Australian economy loses $10.8 billion a year by not utilising the skills and experience of people over the age of 55 (National Seniors Australia, 2016)

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[25] Martin [J], (2002) suggests '80-hour workweeks [are] the norm in some high tech companies' and with 'untenured professors' (p 357).

The literature also highlights the need for employer bodies to recognize and understand the specific characteristics and preferences of this demographic (Professionals Australia, 2015; Diversity Council of Australia, 2012b; Productivity Commission, 2010; EOWA, 2008; Hurrell, Botcherby and Darton, 2007; Shacklock, 2004 and 2006; Hewlett, 2005; Hudson Report, 2004).

In the context of an ageing population, the Australian Commonwealth government has established new policy goals aimed at reversing the trend in declining labour force participation rates and extending the working life of older workers. (Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; EOWA, 2008a; House of Representatives, 2000). These policy directions, together with changes such as the enactment of the Age Discrimination Act 2004, appear to point to a future economic environment, more receptive of, and indeed in need of, older workers where 'getting mature age people into the workforce should be a priority for all employers' (Holland and Davies, 2006). A trend supported earlier by commentators such as Steve Dowrick and Peter McDonald of the Australian National University who forecast that: those reaching ages of 55 to 64 in future will be better educated; that older workers will be better placed in a knowledge economy; and that with healthier aging, employment beyond age 65 is feasible (in Colebatch, 2003).

The approaching labour and skills shortage has implications for organisations and their human resources strategies, particularly in attracting and retaining personnel. Alongside governmental initiatives, employers are being urged to find practical ways of encouraging the labourforce participation of older workers (Professionals Australia, 2015; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [ACCI], 2012; AIM, 2012; Productivity Commission, 2013 and 2005; Hewlett, 2005; Shacklock, 2006 and 2004).

The SAHMs who took part in this study are middle-aged women, well educated, experienced, and potentially capable of re-entering organizations at career/professional levels. They are members of what has been called 'generation F' (EOWA, 2008a) that is, 'women in the Australian labour force, including women wishing to return to work, who are aged between 16 and 65 years. Present across the Baby Boomer, X and Y Generations, Generation F are employers' main solution to the nation's proliferating skills shortage. Harnessing their skills, commitment and experience will help

organisations to secure effective and sustainable workforces' (ibid). This call for better utilisation of women in the workforce of the future is also addressed by Austen and Giles, (2003: 260-261) who write that the '*major reserve of potential labour in Australia is found amongst non-employed or 'jobless' women or women who are employed part-time'*. This literature places SAHMs in a unique and favourable category as labour force re-entrants. A bonus to organizations it would seem in Australia's ageing climate (EOWA, 2008a).

However, a review of the business literature on employer's responses to the ageing workforce situation is not as fruitful. To date, there have been limited responses and implementation programmes to engage or retain older workers (ACCI, 2012; DCA, 2012b; Treasury Department Report, 2011; Dunemann and Barrett, 2004: 1; Hudson Report, 2004). The results from more recent business research show that only 20 percent of Australian organisations have mature age specific strategies in place (Chandler Macleod, 2013). Furthermore 44 percent of the 480 employers surveyed believe that the ageing population will have 'little or no impact on their organisations' (ibid p 4).

There are calls to be found in academic literature for the examination of barriers that impede women's fuller integration into the paid workforce (Shacklock et al., 2007 on both older men and women; and Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004:13). Similarly, various government agencies are officially reporting on the need for organisations to adopt strategies that attract skilled employees, including professional women re-entering the workforce (EOWA, 2008a); and to consider the '*importance of women's workforce participation to Australia's future* [where] *the ageing of the population, combined with the fact that women will eventually hold the majority of post school qualifications, means that we need to remove all barriers to women working'* (House of Representatives, 2006:141).

Regardless of these calls, findings from business/industry led research indicate that the current emphasis in Australia remains on retention rather than attraction strategies. A recent employment forecast survey finds that 62 per cent of employers believe that more attraction targeted strategies need to be developed, to counter the imminent skills shortage (Page Personnel, 2014).

3.5.7   The Conceptual Framework

The reviewed literature (Chapters 2 and 3) illustrates that there are a number of positions from which women may make decisions about and around careers, motherhood and mothering. To be able to explore SAHMs' perceptions of skills and organisational practices that would affect their future re-integration to the workforce we need to understand the background. In particular, the contexts and influences that shape SAHMs' decisions around career and motherhood.

The Conceptual framework (Figure 3.13) is a roadmap of the five areas that are investigated in this research.

The first part (box 1) sets out the elements that are explored to better understand why SAHMs became SAHMs. This is about understanding the familial, social and employment contexts that shaped and influenced SAHMs' decisions to initially become stay at home mothers and their continuance in the roles.

What the women do in those roles is the substance then of the next part (box 2). Here, SAHM-hood as practice is defined and the cohort characteristics identified. This is also where SAHMs' future time use aspirations appear, and the possibility of re-integrating to the professional paid workforce (Chapters 5 and 6).

The organisational perspective on the plausibility of SAHM re-engagement is considered next (box 3). Current employment conditions and managers' opinions are explored to assess SAHM re-engagement (Chapters 7 and 8).

Points of fit and misfit between SAHM (box 2) and manager (box 3) perspectives are considered next (box 4). The framework leads to a discussion of the implications of the research findings (box 5) in the final chapter (Chapter 9).
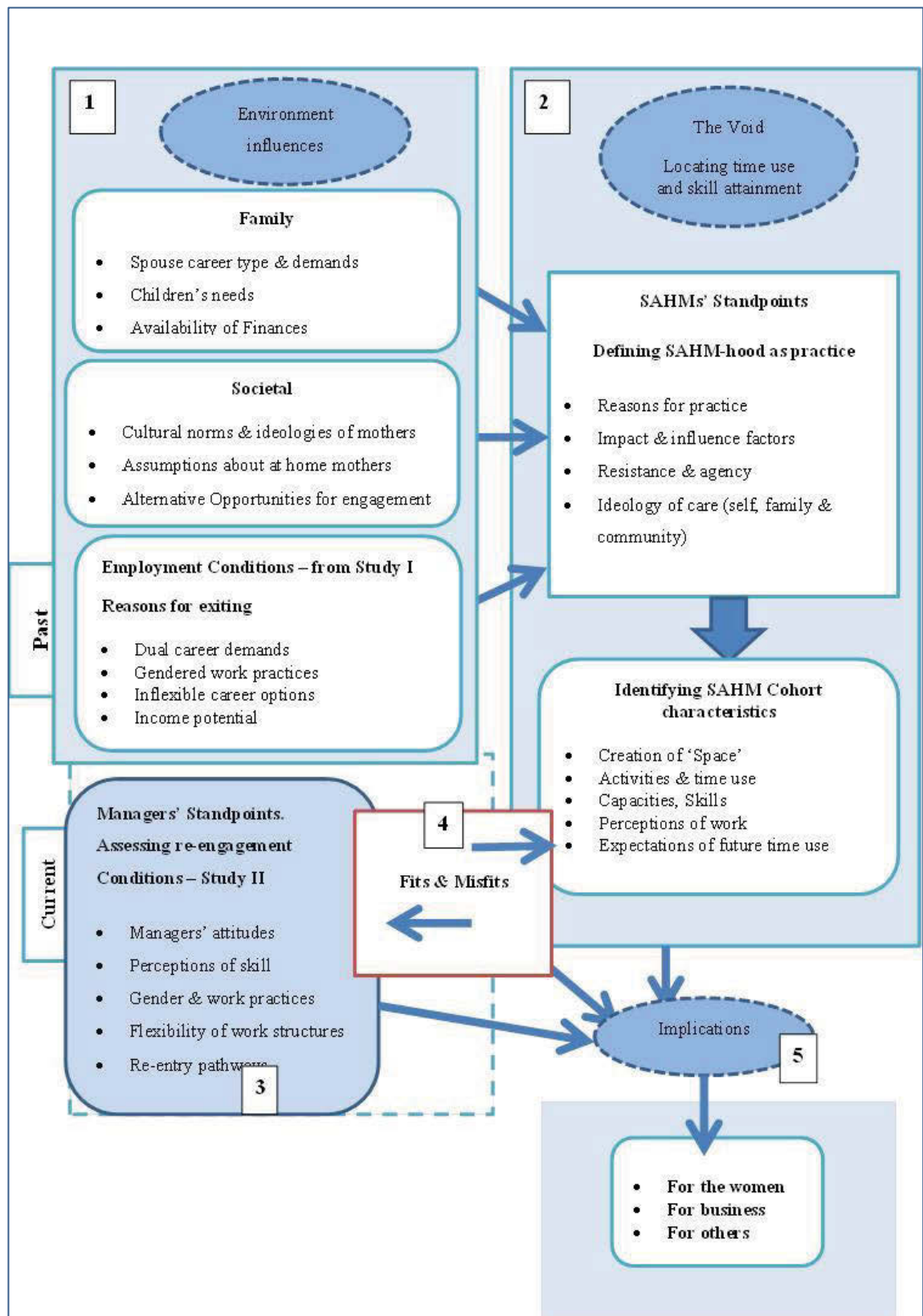
Figure 3.3: Conceptual Framework for locating SAHMs' time-use and skill related characteristics and influences

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Motherhood was the divide: Before it, you could pretend you were just like everyone else; afterward, you were a species apart – invisible and despised.

Ann Snitow (1990: 32)

Women are not discriminated against equally and mothers are an example of a group most discriminated against and least likely to be doing research on and theorizing about organization.

Hearn and Parkin (1983:235).

4.1 Introduction

The subjective experiences of mothering remain a largely unexplored area in academic research. This is particularly the case in organizational and management studies, where there appears to be no research on the experiences of long term SAHMs. As a new area of research limited to a focused sample of marginalised women, the primary objective of this study is twofold: Firstly – to better understand the lived experiences of long term SAHMs, both as mothers and as professionals. Secondly - to explore organisational practices and managerial perceptions, on the employment of older workers, and in particular professional women re-engaging with the paid professional workforce.

I expect that such understanding will contribute to organizational and managerial theory and practice in Australia's ageing socioeconomic environment. In carrying out my research, I employ relational research methods (see De Vault, 1999) that reflect and respect participants' ways of sharing their stories as well as methods that privilege positionality and subjectivity (see Riessman, 2000). This is a collaborative manner of working between researcher and participants that begins with our situated experiences. That is, our direct experiences of the everyday become the primary ground of our knowledge (Smith [D], 1987 also 2004). Further, this is a methodology that considers the lived experiences of the researcher, not as a contaminant or barrier to knowledge but rather as a window to knowledge – a 'point of entry' (Smith [D], 2005:10).

This chapter outlines and justifies the methodological theories and concepts I employ in the 'doing' of my research. The chapter is laid out in three parts:

    i.   Methodology (the theoretical and philosophical frameworks)

    ii.   Methods (the tools employed)

    iii.   Research Design (the action plan)

In the first section (Methodology) I address my research approach and the theoretical and philosophical perspectives that inform how I work. Specifically, I address feminist and phenomenological theories and the concepts of voice and standpoint. The second section (Methods) deals with reflexivity, praxis, as well as the narrative methods that were used in undertaking the research. The third section (Design) is concerned with outlining the research plan, and how the data was gathered and managed.

4.2   Methodological Research Approach

If you want to know me then you must know my stories, for my stories define who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I too, must come to know my own stories.

<div align="right">McAdams (1993: 11)</div>

My aim is to both focus attention on and capture the conditions that underpin and give meaning to the situations that are at the core of my inquiry. It is essential then, that the methodology I employ in this study be capable of identifying the complex, relational, situated and interconnected ways that constitute and define SAHMs' identities and environments; that my research methods allow for a focus on the importance of the actors themselves, their agency and the structures and narratives they create; and that my methods of '*inquiry reflect the standpoint of* [myself] *the inquirer'* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002: xiii).

This thesis aims to create a dialogue between the practice of mothering and business. It aims to fuse a micro with a macro level of inquiry. I begin by exploring SAHMs' experiences from their own standpoint as mothers and exited careerists, and seek to elucidate a relationship between their experiences (the micro) and employer

organizations (macro). This results in highlighting the unique position of SAHMs as a potential cohort of re-entrants to the professional labour force in Australia's ageing environment.

My way of 'doing' research is through an explorative, qualitative feminist approach. An approach where Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 10) tell us, 'qualitative' emphasises the qualities of entities, the processes and the meanings that are derived from non-experimental and non-measured research practices. Thus a qualitative approach enables a phenomenological form of enquiry, and allows for a reflexive investigation of meanings and the relationships from which they stem (see Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005; and for research in business Myers, 2009 and Mumford, Friedrich, Caughron and Antes, 2009). Such an approach facilitates my examination of meaning making through narrative analysis as the main research method. It is an approach that allows for a conceptualisation of women's everyday experiences from within their '*private settings rather than concerns that originate from more public spheres*' (Ribbens, 1994: 189). Working in this manner I address the '*gap in feminist discussions where women's everyday experiences in their lives with their children have been largely overlooked and have certainly not been considered in their own terms*' (ibid p6).

I now wish to draw attention to how I use the terms 'methodology' and 'method' within this study. Hardings' (1987) identification of distinct levels of methodology is influential to my feminist way of working. Harding claims that methodology is the level at which theory and analysis show how research should proceed, and she suggests that it involve concepts of reflexivity, explicitly recognizing the researchers' involvement in the social world being studied, as well as the relationship with our readership. She stipulates that method is the level at which information is acquired: listening to or questioning participants, observing behaviour, or examining historical records. Additionally, Harding's description incorporates a factor common amongst feminist researchers, and that is our authority as author or researcher, in defining and interpreting the meaning of the data and thus our (researcher) role in socially constructing knowledge.

Following Harding's feminist differentiation between methodology and method, I work from a philosophical perspective informed by feminist and phenomenological theories. I analyse situated stories that stress the importance of gender, author, reflexivity and emotion (Fonow and Cook, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Finally, I use narrative methods as many feminist researchers before me have done, relying on my personal experiences as the departure point from which to work. For as Walsh ([R], 1995: 335) states, researchers who begin their research with the data of their experience seek to '*embrace their own humanness as the basis for [] understanding.*' My own experiences as a career woman, as a scholar and as a stay-at-home-mother of adolescents provide not only the impetus but also influence the nature of this study and the methodology I employ.

My methodological style is greatly influenced by Adrienne Rich. When she wrote *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976, [1986 ed.]) she explored motherhood as a female experience. An institution she claims, which is created within boundaries that are set by patriarchal structures and attitudes. A female institution that women themselves did not research nor theorise about. By integrating her academic research with her own personal experiences of motherhood, Rich pioneered new feminist forms of maternal discourse and methodology, leaving current feminist scholars a legacy – a legacy that allows for personal experience to be treated as a valid object of inquiry. Rich writes '*[i]t seemed to me impossible from the first to write a book of this kind without being often autobiographical, without often saying 'I''* (ibid, p 15).

Three and half decades later, as beneficiary of Rich's methodological legacy I not only inherit, but appropriate the style she pioneered, for my research on SAHMs. In my exploration of a specific type of motherhood – an experience and institution still firmly bounded by male organizational mores – I write as both scholar and mother and borrow Rich's statement to claim for myself that 'it seems impossible to me to write a thesis of this kind without reflecting on the biographical and without often saying I'. The methods I employ in this study sit then within a feminist methodology and aim to allow for the narratives of the SAHMs to be told in their own voices and I make use of the first person voice in the re-telling - my voice - intentionally and subjectively.

4.3   The Methodological Frameworks

When women speak as women they run a special risk of not being heard because the female voice is by our culture's definition that-voice-you-can-ignore.   But the alternative is to pretend that public men speak for women or that women who speak inside male-female drums are heard and heeded as much as similarly placed men.   Few women feel satisfied that this neutral (almost always male) public voice reflects the particulars of women's experience, however varied and indeterminate that experience may be.

Ann Snitow (1990:13)

In situating the above research approach within a feminist framework, I draw from the work of feminists in various fields of scholarship in areas as diverse as philosophy, sociology, psychology and gender.   Sourcing insights from such different fields facilitates my arrival at a conceptualisation of a suitable theoretical and methodological framework within which to position my own research on SAHMs' personal and situated experiences of mothering and career re-entry.   I employ feminist and phenomenological frameworks to investigate women's personal experiences, as both phenomenology and feminism are capable of accommodating descriptive and experiential research practices. In this section (Methodology) firstly I address feminist theory and methodology and the close connection between the two.   Secondly, I review phenomenology's applicability to my work.   I address the pertinence of 'standpoint' and 'voice' to my research in particular.

4.3.1   Feminist Framework

Feminist research in essence, seeks social justice, enhances women's voice and explores alternative ways of understanding the world through women's experiences (Baker, 2006; Mies, 1991; Harding 1987).   The belief that women are subordinated to men to a degree that is morally wrong and unnecessary is a shared commonality to virtually all

feminist views (England, in Ferber and Nelsen, 1993). This results in the diversity that constitutes feminist thought (Jaggar, 1983) and an array of feminist research styles (Fonow and Cook, 1991). There is much diversity to be found amongst feminist scholars ourselves, which inevitably leads to dissonance when we presume to speak for other women, or all women's interests. Resultant discord characterises and has characterised feminism in scholarship and practice from the first (see for example Echols; Snitow for 1970s issues and Warhol and Herndl; Hirsch and Keller for 1990s). Lennox (1992) in reviewing Hirsch and Keller (1990) refers to such disagreements as being not over feminism per se, but over feminist theory.

Whilst on the one hand feminist theorists operate from a belief that they ought to represent what women's different voices say (Spelman, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Lugones and Spelman, 1983), when theorising, some theorists cling to the notion of 'women' as a single homogenous group. For example, rigorous critiques of biological determinism have always accompanied feminist theorising - just as focusing on the specifics of female bodies has traditionally risked being relegated to a sexist domain. Efforts to celebrate the uniquely feminine such as Ruddick's (1980) theorizing on 'maternal thinking' have met with criticism for endorsing existent power relations. Gilligan's (1993) work on 'ethic of care' has met with heated debates from those that criticise her for reifying femininity (and in the process obscuring her intentioned focus on woman's 'difference' - see Bordo, 1998). Statements made during the second wave about the universality of gender, are being criticised for their failure to recognise the specificity of women themselves. There are others who suggest a method for theory that does not focus on a single shared criterion but highlights dissimilar elements as points of connection (Heyes, 2000; Young, 1997).

Young (1994) for example, warns against theorising about women as a single entity and writes that '*feminists do not need and should not want*' one all-encompassing category of femininity since '*the search for the common characteristics of women or women's oppression*' (ibid: 718) may lead to omissions or standardisations in our theorising. Rather, she advocates for '*pragmatic theorizing*' which is '*driven by some problem that has ultimate practical importance and is not concerned to give an account of the whole*' (ibid: 719) that is, an account of all women. As advocated by Young, my work is

concerned exclusively with theorizing about a specific group of women - SAHMs – and the pragmatic, practical problem is the identification of time use and skill base with a view to the plausibility of organizational re-engagement.

> *It certainly does not follow that there is an essential 'woman-ness'.*
>
> Spelman (in Mikkola, 2006: 77)

The above difficulty with theorizing about woman-ness itself has been to date, central to feminist debates on essentialism and nominalism. In attempting to understand the key features of the debate, I have found it useful to re-visit definitions of gender and sex. I follow the common feminist usage and employ 'gender' to indicate – being a woman/man, a state imbued with social features; and 'sex' to indicate being female/male, a state imbued with biological features. West and Zimmerman (1987) discuss gender as a socially acquired state, as opposed to a person's trait. They state that '*doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures''* (ibid 126). This conceptualisation places focus on the social interaction not the person doing the interacting, and gender is thus an acquired social state. Gender thus being classified, assists in understanding contemporary feminists' views of gender realism (or essentialism by some feminists such as Spelman, (1990) as referring to the view that women share a common feature that makes them women; and gender nominalism as referring to there being no clearly defined, specific feature that defines women as women (see Mikkola, 2006).

There is a general lack of support for gender realism from scholars such as Spelman (1990), Frye (1996), Young (1997) and Butler (1990). These nominalists hold that it is implausible for realism to hold true, due to individual women's particular and dissimilar traits and experiences (e.g. class, individual experiences, roles in life, race, etc.). They reject the centrality of gender for understanding women's experiences and theorize instead on the multiple axes of difference that shape women's everyday life. Fine poses a pertinent question, '*how can woman be represented as __a__ social and political category if not by camouflaging all the complexities and contradictions among us?'* (1992: 15) [emphasis mine]. Spelman (1990) very emphatically refutes the realist position which

claims that '*underneath or beyond the differences among women there must be some shared identity – as if commonality were a metaphysical given*' (in Mikkola, 2006: 78). Spelman argues instead for gender nominalism on three key points: firstly, the features that realism claims women are supposed to have in common, only some women share; secondly, womanness cannot be separated from other elements of our identity (such as race, culture, etc.); and thirdly, womanness is socially constructed, therefore culturally specific features will vary from culture to culture, (ibid p 79) and I suggest by extension, from one social group to another.

It would follow then that if such discord stems from feminist theory not having developed a coherent theoretical practice to accommodate different women and different voices, 'doing' feminist theory would require that we base our theory-making in the '*variety of real life stories women provide about themselves*' (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 575); or in Young's previously mentioned pragmatic, practical problems; or in the diversity of women themselves.

Feminist scholarship, like theory, is not homogenous in its methodology either. This results in significant debate over the effectiveness of particular methods for feminist goals. Harding has been influential in endorsing methodological pluralism, arguing '*against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research*' (1987:1). This is a methodological pluralism, which I adopt for my work, as will become evident further in my discussion. Furthermore, in delving into the ways in which theory development historically takes male-ness as the norm, or has simply ignored aspects of human existence exclusively associated with women, some feminists have not only rejected the privileging of epistemological concerns over ethical concerns, but hold that these two areas are inextricably intertwined. This has resulted in some feminist scholars applying methodology and approaches from more than one philosophical perspective, resulting in the plurality that constitutes contemporary feminist research in both theory and practice (Reinharz, 1992; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987). The production of feminist research that does not adhere '*to one of the dichotomised models, but instead [requires] detailed descriptions of actual feminist research processes sited around an explication of 'feminist consciousness*'' (Stanley, 1990: 22) is the end result.

4.3.2   The Search for Voice

I have discussed earlier, that there is discord amongst feminist scholars stemming from an inability to develop a coherent theoretical practice to accommodate different women and our different voices. In attempting to find theoretical and methodological coherence for my research, I borrow from Lugones and Spelman (1983), to situate my methodology within their view that for coherent feminist theoretical practice to develop it needs to be aligned and closely linked with feminist methodology.   That is, that feminist theory and methodology should not be independent of each other. This is an approach that stipulates that '*the search for women's voice is central to both feminist methodology and nascent feminist theory*' (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 574). Although situating my methodology within Lugones and Spelman's work, I build on their theory by incorporating a feminist phenomenological perceptual perspective of embodiment in my own research.

Prior to elaborating on a phenomenological discussion, it is valuable to highlight Lugones and Spelman's theoretical position.   Theirs is a view that states nascent feminist theory is characterised not only by (1) a *demand* that women's voices be heard, but also (2) the *search* for women's voices as being central to feminist methodology. According to Lugones and Spelman (1983) both the demand and the search for women's voice are '*central to feminist methodology'*, since they reflect '*nascent feminist theory*' in three areas: empirical theory, political theory and moral theory.   In terms of empirical theory, such demand and search '*presupposes that the silencing of women is systematic, shows up in regular, patterned ways*', and its causes are '*discoverable and observable*' (ibid: 574).   It is political theory in that '*the silencing of women reveals a systematic pattern of power and authority*' (ibid: 574). And it is moral theory '*insofar as it presupposes that the silencing is unjust and that there are particular ways of remedying this injustice'* (ibid: 574).

My feminist research methodology also emulates Braidotti (1994) in its quest to represent female experiences in a manner other than that which fits '*within the parameters of phallogocentric language'* (Braidotti in Conboy et al., 1997: 60).   In so doing, I seek to hear and find the different meanings SAHMs give to their particular

experiences of mothering, in their own feminine language, from their own feminine states. Central to both my feminist methodology and nascent feminist theory is a search for their voices as mothers and as women, as a form of the transcendence discussed earlier, because as Marjorie DeVault states, '*women have been silenced*; [and] *feminism opposes the silencing of women*' (1999: 176).

> *One must listen to her differently in order to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilised. For when she says something, it is already no longer identical to what she means.*
>
> Irigaray (in Weedon, 1997: 64)

Voice – who uses it, for what purpose it is used, who voice is directed at and intended for - this Voice is characteristic of interpretive work (Lincoln, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2002:chp 19). It is also a metaphor common in feminist work to encapsulate issues of silence amongst subordinate or marginalised groups (as examples, *Silence, secrets and lies*. Rich, 1979; *Talking Back,* hooks, 1989; *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan, 1982; *Disruptive Voices*, Fine, 1992).

'[W]*omen's voice literature'* is still prevalent today (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011:472).   Voice as I apply it in the context of my work, and as applied in much feminist scholarship, carries a number of meanings.   Literally, it refers to a representation of speech or a speaker's way of framing ideas and thoughts. Metaphorically, it refers to the manner of the speaker. Politically, it refers to claims that ask for the right to speak, to be heard or be represented. It is this third meaning, the concept of political voice, that is most appropriated by feminists concerned with societal power relations. As Reinharz (1988) states, when we deal in voices '*we are affecting power relations. To listen to people is to empower them [] before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors'* (in Fine 1992: 215). My political agenda for this study is that there are

mothers' (SAHM's) voices that need to be heard by business organisations and my thesis provides a space for their articulation.

Feminist paradigms acknowledge that women have been marginalised and silenced, have been relegated to the status of 'other' in patriarchal structures. They allow for a '*feminist focus on coming to voice - on moving from silence into speech as revolutionary gesture [.] As metaphor for self-transformation, which is especially relevant for groups of women who have previously never had a public voice*' (hooks, 1989: 12). The SAHMs in this study have not previously had a public voice – but by co-creating this project I propose that we are moving into speech. Writing about and from personal experience is important in establishing voice.

But it is not just about establishing voice; it is also about giving true accounts of women's situated lives because 'articulation of experience' is among the qualities of self-determining individuals or communities (Lugones and Spelman, 1983). A sentiment mirrored by Gherardi (2006) who states that '*it would be an unpardonable oversight [] not to recognise the authority of the feminist voice in discussion of 'situated knowledge' and in revealing the androcentrism of both the structures and the practices of knowledge through which social experience has been understood*' (2006: 18). According to Lugones and Spelman, (1983: 574) '*There are not just epistemological, but moral and political reasons for demanding that* [women's voices] *be heard*'.

The private, unpaid, care world of SAHMs needs to be shared with the public, paid world of business organizations. Not only because the former may seek re-entry into the latter but also because this sharing is another way in which the public sphere can understand more about the private sphere of SAHMs; understand how SAHMs experience their embodiment from a standpoint of being bodily in a world of SAHMs; and understand more about '*how much child rearing, housework, and volunteer work contribute to the wealth of nations*' (England in Ferber and Nelson, 1993: 39).

4.3.3   Phenomenological framework

What I now move to is a consideration of how phenomenology can be used as an approach through which to address women's difference and specificity. Many feminist scholars incorporate phenomenological analysis in a multitude of knowledge making processes (for examples see: Alcoff on theoretical systems; Bergoffen on voice and embodiment; Arp on ethics of care; Banchetti-Robino on femininity; Levesque-Lopman on sociology; Johnson on childhood psychology; and Tannen on socio-linguistics; in Fisher and Embree, 2000). By adopting a form of phenomenological inquiry into SAHMs' lived experiences, I facilitate my own knowledge making process. A phenomenological way of working that Stanley (1990:23) tells us shares a concern with methodological issues as well as those of theory and can thus offer '*feminists useful tools for unpacking analytical processes*'.

Such a manner of working is possible due to phenomenology's core concern with the nature of experience, our perceptions of phenomena in our daily lives. The integration of a phenomenological approach with my feminist perspective is further informed by Fisher (in Fisher and Embree, 2000). She states that there is a shared commitment by both phenomenology and feminism towards forms of experiential and descriptive analysis, both focusing on '*the systematic examination and articulation of the nature of lived experience, along with the attendant theoretical and practical implications and leading to reflective discourse*' (ibid 33). It is this emphasis on experiential analysis in particular that serves as an essential commonality between the two perspectives, and I understand it to be the strongest link between phenomenology and feminism. As Fisher adds '[f]*eminism can look to phenomenology in seeking an articulated framework for experiential accounts as well as a mode of expression for the issues of sexual difference and specificity that lie at the core of feminism*' (ibid 33). The two combined, becomes a framework which allows for a more fruitful analysis of '*experiences in the lives of women [] who have culturally constructed ways of reflecting on their lives*' (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 577) and is suited to an experiential accounting and analysis of SAHMs' lived experience.

The world of lived experience is both source and object in phenomenological research. I situate my work in a part of this philosophical perspective where phenomenology's core

concern is with the nature of those experiences. That is, our conscious perceptions of phenomena in our everyday lives, and of specific relevance to my research, the conscious perceptions of the phenomena of being a SAHM.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) writes that our experiences of the world are not just experiences. More specifically they are perceptual forms of experience. He writes '*we must not, therefore, wonder whether we perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive*' (1945/1962: xviii). By focusing on perceptual phenomena, I am able to consider that the outcome of SAHMs' meaningful engagement with the world is a result of both the experience (noema) itself as object and the actual engagement process (noesis). From this perspective, both the mind and the body are important in shaping and understanding experience, and the traditional dichotomy of objective mind / subjective body found in empirical studies, where '*we have become accustomed, through the influence of the Cartesian tradition to disengage from the object*' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945:198) does not apply. The Cartesian separation of mind from the body, so present in positivist and logical sciences, does not exist in experiential investigations.

Led by the writings of feminist scholars (such as Heinämaa, 2003; Vintges, 1996; Arp, 2001) I understand that phenomenology is concerned with an engagement between the world and the self; with lived experience; and with the view that all knowledge is situated.

Merleau-Ponty's work has been of interest to feminist scholars, in particular the importance he places on the role of the body and his claim that the body is a historical or cultural object. This is due to his assertion that we experience the world as it appears to us, that '*we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body*' (in Baldwin, 2004:126). He further states that our bodies are 'lived', and consciousness and experience cannot be separated: '*I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience*' (1962: 13). Merleau-Ponty's concern with the body's experience is accepted and applied by feminists for work on gender and embodiment. For example, Young (1990) develops her theories on female motility from Merleau-Ponty's work on embodiment; Holland (2000) draws on the influence of culture and

language on women's bodily experiences from his work; and Butler (1990 and 1993) praises his work for the interrelationship between language and materiality, that is, how language shapes bodily life and that bodily materiality in turn shapes language. However, Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body, which understands the body as an openness to experience, a way of being-with the world, is based on the privileged male body. Some feminist scholars, even those who incorporate his theories in their own work (e.g. Butler and Young) have reservations with his accounts of embodied existence, finding his theories androcentric in their universalising male embodiedness.

de Beauvoir's phenomenological work on the other hand has become more meaningful and relevant to contemporary feminists. In *The Second Sex,* de Beauvoir (1949) undertakes a descriptive analysis of women's situation and their lived experiences, and her writing on gendered bodies specifically, builds on Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of human bodies as they are subjectively lived (in Heinämaa, 2003). Despite the well-documented androcentric biases within Merleau-Ponty's work, de Beauvoir (as Butler, Young and others have done) shows his arguments and insights can nonetheless be utilized productively both to describe and debate the damaging effects of sexism (ibid).

In *The Second Sex,* de Beauvoir claims that there are multiple ways in which we experience ourselves, our bodies or our minds, and she describes women's experience of bodily alienation in understanding their social bodies, or the bodies known through the experience of a sexist world (in Arp, 1995). What is of particular importance for my research is the distinction de Beauvoir makes between man as subject and woman as 'other'. de Beauvoir's 'other' is fundamental to her work on domination and oppression, she writes:

> *She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other*. (de Beauvoir, 1949: xxii).

All self-conscious human beings are capable of transcendence, but as women we can be compelled into immanence by social and cultural conditions, which deny us that transcendence (ibid). In following de Beauvoir's argument that 'otherness is a fundamental category of human thought', I pose that in being SAHMs, they are further

compelled into immanence by social conditions that stem not only from male patriarchal domains such as organizational settings, but also from within the ranks of women in general. This point is important to my work, because I pose that SAHMs exist in the role of 'other' at least thrice. SAHMs are 'other' as women – in the male/female gender binary; and they are 'other' amongst women, in the stay-at-home mother /working mother binary, and they are 'other' in the unpaid/paid professional binary between the private world of homes and communities and the public ranks of professionals in organisations.

4.3.4   Standpoint theory

Taking women's standpoint and beginning in experience gives access to a knowledge of what is tacit, known in the doing, and often not yet discursively appropriated (and often seen as uninteresting, unimportant, and routine).

Dorothy Smith (2004: 266)

In phenomenological terms, embodiment is an existential state where the body is the source of subjective experience, of perception - thus embodiment is not about the physicality of the body as such. In this context embodiment relates to what the body subjectively experiences. It is about perceptual experience, and how we engage with our environment. It is about our embodied experiences of diverse social settings, from a standpoint of being bodily in the world. The experiences of SAHMs are such embodied experiences. It follows then that a consideration of embodiment from a phenomenological perspective allows for a consideration of SAHMs' perceptual experiences of themselves. It provides a vehicle through which to consider their engagement in the world, from their own individual and subjective perspectives.

A predominant feature of feminist research, especially standpoint positions, has been a strong focus on women's bodies, for example childbearing (Gatrell, 2009; Longhurst, 1995), and objectification of the body by a patriarchal society (Turner [B], 1996 amongst others). For standpoint feminists, the difference in embodiment between

women and men figure prominently in theorising gender (as opposed to equality between the sexes), which is further reason for encasing my research methodology within both feminist and phenomenological perspectives.

Standpoint literature tells us that all descriptions of experience and reality are formulated from a particular standpoint (Smith, 2004 and 1987; Harding 1987, Haraway, 1988). The concrete experiences of women (in this case: women as SAHMs, as marginalised, as 'other') become the ground from which to discover the nature of knowledge and the real, in a SAHM's world. Standpoint scholars represent their researched world from specific socially situated perspectives, and feminist standpoint theorists do so on behalf of the standpoint of women, by privileging the nature of gender relations, and the social settings where these relations occur. It is a phenomenological approach in its experiential-ity, in its situated-ness. This is a position that privileges practical discoveries of morally or politically significant truths over epistemic truth claims (Harding, 1997; Hartsock, 1998).

As I discussed earlier, there is no one specific feminist methodology, just as so, there is no one feminist standpoint position (Collins, 1990, Longino, 1989, Lugones and Spelman, 1983). Women's situations differ according to where we are situated in society, be it class, status, race, or as 'other' from a dominant group (Lugones and Spelman, 1983; Longino, 1989). Feminist standpoint in general acknowledges a multiplicity of scenarios that inform situated standpoints (Harding, 1993 and 1997; Collins 1990). The resultant evolution of feminist epistemology has blurred standpoint, empiricist and postmodernist approaches (Harding, 1993; 1997 and 1998), leading to a feminist practice that embraces pluralism. This focus on pluralism, Wylie (2003: 28) tells us, is reflective of a shift towards a way of feminist research practice that embraces pragmatism and experience by rejecting essentialism (where groups have a fixed nature, similar to Spelman's (1990) previously discussed rejection of all women being alike) and rejecting the privileging of one standpoint position over another.

Feminist standpoint theory displays a number of characteristics useful to my work with SAHMs – in the context of my work, already understood as being marginalised or other. It is theory capable of producing knowledge that is of use to marginalised people in

identifying their problems in socio-structural terms as well as in identifying possible ways to overcome them (Smith, [D.] 2005 and 1987; Harding, 1993; Harstock, 1998). Furthermore, the advantage of standpoint epistemology lies in its '*logic of discovery*', and not so much on its justification (Harding, 1993: 56). '*Marginalized lives provide the scientific problems and the research agendas for standpoint theories*' (ibid: 62). A point further elaborated by Harstock (1998) who tells us that views generated by dominant groups are only partial realities and that the marginalised have access to different realities, (ibid: 236, 240) and therein lies the strength of standpoint research. SAHMs' experiences of SAHM-hood are their reality, not other women's.

Standpoint perspectives are achieved from our socially situated experiences (Hughes, 2002; Harding 1993:58; Harstock 1998:236). They can be seen as phenomenologically experiential states that require us as researchers to: reflect on the social and cultural conditions surrounding the researched; gather the experiences of those being researched; and thirdly think through how theory can be developed or action carried out. What are SAHMs experiences of being SAHMs? What are the social conditions that cause and maintain the world SAHMs live in? What experiences from SAHM-hood need to be identified and developed into collective action for organizational re-entry? These questions – to reflect, to gather, and to think through possible actions - I address through an application of narrative research method, which I outline in the 'methods section'.

I return briefly to Lugones and Spelman's point of 'demand and search' discussed previously. Methodologically, demanding and searching for women's voice is not simply articulating what the voices say for it does not move us beyond phenomenological description. My research process is also about reflecting and finding meaning behind the expressed experiences of women who have given their own '*accounts of what is happening to them or of what they are doing*, [women] *who have culturally constructed ways of reflecting on their lives*' (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 577). Descriptive accounts of SAHMs' lives and experiences alone will not lead me to innovative thought or the creation of new theories, or to mobilise towards some form of collective action towards organizational inclusion. SAHMs' accounts and narratives will need to be critically considered in relation to the social and cultural structures that produced them.

How I consider those accounts then becomes a process of reflection and interpretation. In general terms, when researchers work as subjectivists (that is when they assign primacy to subjective experience), they reject the existence of entities and behaviours as being independent of an agent; thus supporting the stance that different individuals experience different realities, (see Calas and Smircich, 1997). In terms of methodology, a subjectivist approach is manifested in phenomenological and qualitative methodologies, such as ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988) narratives (Czarniawska, 1998; McAdams, 1999) and textual deconstructions (Calás and Smircich, 1991 and 1997). As interpretive researchers, we aim to understand agentic perspectives and build inductive frameworks in accordance with these perspectives. We seek to understand agent's actions based on the actors' own interpretations as opposed to simply their observable behaviour. Working from this perspective it is understood that social science is not and cannot be value free.

Incorporating interpretive inquiry elements to my work's philosophical perspectives aims then to highlight how SAHMs experience the world. That is: to find what Martin (1983: 163) calls the '*significance of daily experience*'. This is a manner of finding meaning in the ways we interact together and the settings in which these interactions take place; and of finding how these experiences of life are '*culturally constructed*' (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 577) because we fashion meaning and interpretation out of ongoing experience, an ongoing process of sense making (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). My approach to research follows Fonow and Cook's four themes: '*an emphasis on researcher and textual reflexivity; an action and praxis orientation; an attention to the affective, emotional components of research; and concrete grounding in immediate situations*'. (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 2-13 also in Denzin and Lincoln, 2002 and Denzin, 2009). The methodology I employ in my work incorporates these four characteristics. I address reflexivity, praxis and narrativity in greater detail in the next section.

4.4   Research Methods

4.4.1   Introduction

This methods section is composed in two parts. Firstly, I address the concept and practice of reflexivity. I discuss it as being a manner of working that contextualises what is being researched through the situating and embedding of ourselves as researchers within the research. Secondly, I explore narrative as method and argue that in the context of my research it allows for the telling of stories of lived experiences of SAHMs and managers. Individual experiences, that as I have previously discussed, garner credibility and meaning from their situatedness or personal embodied standpoints.

4.4.2   Working with Reflexivity

There is no clear landscape of social positions to be charted by an allseeing analyst; neither is there a conscious agent, whether researcher or researched, simply waiting to be reflected in a research project. Instead, researcher, researched and research make each other; research and selves are 'interactive texts'.

Gillian Rose (1997: 316)

My research towards this thesis began (unconsciously at that time) twenty years ago, when I was at a stage of life taken up with much introspection (reflection) on motherhood, personal values, and career progression versus career suicide. A period where my identity was being reshaped by the onset of motherhood, the different interactions I was experiencing as well as the new social relationships upon which I was embarking (see McMahon, 1995). Being reflexive about the thought processes that have pre-empted and led to my current SAHM project strengthens my ability to now critically reflect (see Atkinson, 1990) on my work. That is a critical, embodied and reflexive manner of working that Ribbens (1993:88) tells us, is cognizant of our subjectivities thus enabling us to view '*society … not out there … but* [rather] '*inside our heads*', that is, in our socially located and structured understandings of '*my-self*', '*my-life*', '*me-as-a-person*'. This is a manner of working where we as researchers are

not the knowing scholar but '*a material body through whom a narrative structure unfolds*' (Bruner, 1986: 150).

But what exactly is reflexivity? And furthermore what constitutes feminist reflexivity? And how may reflexivity be enacted as part of my research practice? At its simplest, reflexivity can be considered to be '*disciplined self-reflection*' (Wilkinson, 1988: 493); a way of positioning ourselves in relation to the object of our study so that we may assess knowledge claims in terms of their social situated-ness (Maton, 2003). Reflexivity is a salient feature of qualitative research (Banister et al., 1994) and by working reflexively from within a feminist phenomenological paradigm (Harding, 1997; Lather, 1991; Haraway, 1988), I utilise it as a stance that allows me to produce relational and reflective knowledge; specifically knowledge that centres on the lived body and the '*necessary interconnectedness*' of the mind and body (Grosz, 1994: 86).   This '*relational knowledge [] comes from connecting and leads to further connecting [i]t is reciprocal*' (Park, 2001:88).   The process of reflexivity requires reflecting on the manner in which the research is conducted – the how, as well as appreciating how the way we research influences the end result (Hardy, Phillips and Clegg, 2001; Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008). In this manner, reflexivity becomes then an interpretation of interpretation (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

Wilkinson (1988) elaborates further to claim that as a feminist concept, reflexivity can be viewed in three distinct parts: personal, functional and disciplinary.
Personal reflexivity refers to ourselves and our own identities as researchers. It is a concept, which acknowledges that our personal interests and values direct what we study. Our personal traits and circumstances affect what we research, what we find and how we carry out the research (ibid 494).   This is illustrated by my choice of research topic - my situated self, living as a SAHM amongst other SAHMs has created what Moustakas calls an '*intense interest*' and '*passionate concern that calls out to [me as] researcher*' (1990: 27).
Functional reflexivity refers to the research process itself; the theories and methodology we choose to employ, the manner in which we interpret data. This is a focus on the procedural - on the form of our research, which is in turn reflexibly informed by our *personal* identity (Wilkinson, 1988: 495) addressed above. Given that I begin my

research process from a phenomenologically subjective and personal-reflexive position, this has dictated the functional-reflexive methods I employ in my study. Methods that allow for the construction and analysis of the narratives SAHMs tell.

And finally d*isciplinary* reflexivity (which cannot be separated from personal and functional forms of reflexivity) pertains to the research contexts imposed by dominant paradigms within which our work exists, such as scholarly communities and academic institutional practices, within disciplines (ibid 496).

As I discussed previously, feminist research is characterised by complexity, the manner in which it contextualises what is being researched through the situating and embedding of ourselves as researchers within the research, by an emphasis on embodiment and our lived experience, and by a unique relationship between ourselves as researcher and the co–producers of the research – in this instance the SAHM-participants. This is a reflexive way of working which leads to multiple interpretive stances (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Gilligan, 1997). Such manner of doing feminist research Stanley (1990) tells us, this coming together of researcher and those being researched, is reflexivity.

A salient feature of doing feminist research reflexively involves a reframing of power between researcher and researched (Finlay, 2002; Wilkinson, 1988; Reinharz, 1992). The reframed emphasis rests on non-hierarchical interaction and pays attention to the dynamics at play whilst conducting fieldwork and other research processes (Riessman 1993); it calls for an awareness of our positionality and situated-ness (Hertz, 1997; Richardson, 1994); and it allows for our own humaneness, subjectivities, emotions and intuitions to become part of our research processes (Finlay, 2002; Walsh [R], 1995; Moustakas, 1990 and 1994).

Feminist reflexivity and reciprocity recognise then that knowledge is situated with, and shaped by, both researcher and the researched, what Stanley and Wise (1993) refer to as knowledge <u>of</u> the world. This is a position that understands that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1991) and rejects the traditional binary between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. If we are to move our research practice beyond descriptive accounts of researcher-researched situations and relations however, towards situations requiring action - this becomes then a concern for feminist praxis. A position

where we enact reflexivity, where we seek forms of empowerment and emancipation and where knowledge can be created <u>for</u> acting in the world and causing change (Stanley and Wise, 1993). According to theorists such as Lather (1991), Fonow and Cook (1991) and Stanley (1990), the features constitutive of feminist praxis include foci on reflexivity in our research practice, and the situated-ness to our different ways of knowing and the different knowledge that produces. Thus feminist praxis is driven by agendas for social change and an engagement in situated research (standpoint positions).

Thus, after applying a phenomenological approach to highlight participants' embodied experientialities, standpoint theory for highlighting different ways of knowing and different types of knowledge, and utilising the concept of voice to enable participants to speak for themselves, what remains is a search to find what knowledge of SAHM-hood and management practice can and should be developed for collective action.

To operationalise such praxis, self-disclosure, reciprocity and reflexivity in my 'doing' of research, I use a narrative method. Employing this method, allows for a manner of 'doing' research that enables a garnering of information without placing myself in an authoritative, authorial role. This enables a process that allows for interaction and co-production of SAHM-hood and management narratives. For as Richardson states, there is no one, single method, theory, discourse, genre, or tradition that 'has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge' (2000: 8).

4.4.3   Working with Narratives

We are the storytellers, and we are the stories we tell.

McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich (2006: 3)

My methodological responsibility as researcher, and my responsibility as a feminist therefore rest in utilising reflexive research methods that will not only celebrate SAHMs' voices in a reciprocal, reflexive manner, but also enact praxis through finding a way to connect what SAHM voices are saying and business organizations – a place of connection where we can adopt the maxim that the *personal* can become and *is political*

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(Hanisch in Donovan, 2008: 158). The way I have chosen to establish such a connection is through the gathering of narratives. This is a manner of working that allows to '*connect the person and the personal to social events, processes and organizations [] using narrative methods enables researchers to place themselves at the interface between persons, stories, and organizations, and to place the person in emotional and organizational context*' (Van Maanen, Manning and Miller, in Czarniawska, 1998: v).

My research employs narrative forms as an approach to develop an epistemological framework that focuses on the creation of knowledge (McAdams, 1999), is cognisant of the interpretative role of the participants in this project, and honours a focus on situated (phenomenological) experiences and the meanings those experiences hold. It is a research practice very much driven by Gilligan's (1993) claim that '*among the most pressing items on the agenda for research on adult development is the need to delineate in women's own terms the experience of their adult lives*' (1993:174).

> *Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and 'get a life' by telling and writing their stories.*
>
> Langellier (in Riessman, 2005: 700)

> *Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that personal narrative is liminal. A limen is a threshold, a border, a margin, a transitional space, a site of negotiation and struggle.*
>
> Langellier (2003: 459)

The narrative method is a mode of research that privileges the particulars of lived experience, and as Turner states '*It is only when we bring into relation with the preoccupying present experience the cumulative results of similar or at least relevant, if not dissimilar, past experiences of similar potency, that the kind of relational structure that we call 'meaning' emerges*'' (Turner, [V] 1986:36). Narrative research is thus positioned not as a quest for truth, but rather as '*a quest for meaning*' (Rhodes and

Brown, 2005:167). It can therefore be surmised that narratives are essentially individual constructs of human experiences, and thus a hermeneutic process that allows both the researcher and the researched to present our own interested, subjective and evaluative meanings.

In general terms, there appear to be various approaches to creating, defining, using or studying various types of narrative forms. Narrative method is applied in a range of interdisciplinary areas, including the fields of psychology, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, organization studies, and history (Rhodes and Brown, 2005:168). The narrative form involves storytelling methodology where either the story itself or themes identified through the story, become the focus of study. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2001), narrative method attempts to balance the competing concerns of how a story is told and what the story contains.

Narratives are personal stories of life experiences that feature both sequence and consequence (Riessman, 2005); they are '*constellations of relationships which are set in a particular time and space and are comprised by causal emplotments* (Somers and Gibson, 1993: 27; Somers, 1994: 616); and they are representations of events or series of events composed of two main parts, the story – that is the series of events as they happened; and the narrative discourse – the mode through which the stories are represented (Abbott, 2002 in Rhodes and Pullen, 2008:583). '*The story is the content [] the "what"[] the discourse is the "how"'* (Sarup 1996:17 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 92).

Somers (1994) draws a distinction between the current usage of narrative as research practice that views 'life itself' as being 'storied,' from the traditional past use of the method as simply a '*representational form/method of presenting social and historical knowledge*' (ibid 613-614). In this manner, our attention is drawn to narrative and narrativity as concepts through which we come to '*know, understand and make sense of our social worlds through narrativity*' (ibid 614), and thus it is through narratives that we create our social identities. It is a stand that poses that '*life is storied'* and that '*narrative is an ontological condition of life*' (ibid). Stories thus guide our actions and

we construct our identities by locating ourselves within emplotted stories, in this manner our experiences are '*constituted through narratives'* (ibid).

Regardless of how we define narrative, when they are used as data for our research, narratives call for interpretation because '*narratives do not speak for themselves or have unanalysed merit'* (Riessman, 2005: 2). In response to such a call, Riessman (ibid) offers a four-part typology, useful in analysing oral narratives of personal experiences.

'Thematic analysis' is useful when the context of a text needs to be emphasised. It is a representational form, where the collected stories are placed in conceptual groupings and the emphasis is on 'what' is said more than 'how' it is said, the 'told' rather than the 'telling' (ibid). This is a useful approach for identifying common themes across a number of participants and events, but not so for identifying individual meanings, interpretations and contexts (ibid p3).

'Structural analysis' emphasises the telling of stories and employs close attention to the use of language in that being told. It requires an examination of syntax and is useful for building theories that relate language and meaning; and for comparing small numbers of narratives or case studies.

'Interactional analysis' emphasises the '*dialogic process between teller and listener'* (ibid) and is useful for analysing the '*process of co-construction where teller and listener create meaning collaboratively*' (ibid p 4). Special emphasis is placed on 'paralinguistic' elements of conversational interaction such as interruptions and pauses.

The fourth category in Riessman's typology is 'performative analysis', an extension of the interactional approach, that relies on performance to move an audience through the use of '*language and gesture, "doing" rather than telling alone*' (ibid p 5) and focuses on practices of communication and identity construction. Performance in this analytical context can mean a range of things, from a drama skit to narrative as praxis. This is an emergent approach that is being applied predominantly in identity construction studies, that is, the performance of identity (see Riessman 2002 and 2003 for performance of identities in illness narratives) as a '*communicative practice that is embodied, situated*

and material, discursive, and open to legitimation and critique' (Riessman, 2005: 5 on the work of Langellier and Peterson, 2003). This approach moves beyond a relationship between researcher and researched to include audiences as part of the narrative performance and making readers or audiences the 'ultimate interpreters' (ibid p 5).

Regardless of the narrative approach, however, *'narratives do not mirror, they refract the past [] this is what makes them useful'* (ibid p 6). As storytellers we interpret the past and by applying our imagination and personal interest we choose how to make narratives meaningful to others – how to create connections – *'narrative analysis can forge connections between personal biography and social structure – the personal and the political* '(ibid p 6).

Thus, I use a narrative method specifically, to allow for the telling of stories of lived experiences as ex-professional women, as long term SAHMs and as managerial commentators on re-integration to organisational life - individual experiences, that, as I have previously discussed, garner credibility and meaning from participants' embodied standpoints. As Lugones and Spelman write, it matters to women *'what is said about us, who says it, and to whom it is said: having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it.[] We can't separate lives from the accounts given of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our experience'* (1983: 573, 574). This concept of agency over the telling of subjective life's experiences as SAHMs is further reinforced by hooks who writes that '[o]*nly as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless - our beings defined and interpreted by others'* (1989: 12). Features that Carver (2003) elaborates on when she states that *'the act of women speaking their stories publicly [] radically challenges traditional notions of agency, spectacle, and spectatorship as female performers move their voices and bodies from the background to the foreground'* (ibid p16).

Specifically, my aim as researcher in using narrativity is to find ways of addressing questions about the experience of being SAHMs, questions of identity, meaning, selfhood and transformation between the worlds of career and SAHM-hood; and then again between SAHM-hood and career. Writing as a feminist about women's life

experiences I am conscious of Braidotti's (1994) claim, that we face further demands as researchers in that we act in accordance with women's own wills in the telling of those women's accounts. A point that reinforces the need to employ reciprocal and reflexible research practices (see Lather, 1991 and Finlay, 2002 discussed previously). Therefore, I use narrative methods for the following salient purposes: as a way of producing reflexive knowledge about a minority group; as a receptacle for praxis so that SAHM voices be carried to places of collective action (see Hare-Mustin, 2001) that is business organisations; as a means of introducing new maternal narratives to feminist and organisational theory; as a means of contributing to the changing nature of narrativity in organisational research (Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Calas and Smircich, 1999) as it moves away from positivism and scientism (Rhodes and Pullen, 2008); and as a means of communicating with a broader academic community. How I enact these, is the substance of the next section 'Research Design'.

4.5   The Research Design

4.5.1   The Research question

The salient question underpinning this research is:

To what extent do SAHMs consider themselves as skilled and how do current organisational practices hinder or support their re-engagement with the professional workforce?

Two separate studies were conducted to explore this main question: Study I and Study II

4.5.2   Study I – the SAHMs

The aims of Study I were to identify the characteristics and expectations of the SAHM cohort and explore their skill potential as plausible future employees. This was achieved by investigating SAHMs' narratives of their experiences, views and feelings of: professional pasts, experiences whilst mothering, future career inclinations and expectations of employer organizations. The sub-questions that were addressed were:

- How do the women position themselves?
- Why did SAHMs drop out of their professional careers (and why did they not follow the dominant trend to re-enter the workforce during their children's early years?)
- How do the women use their time and what do they do with their time?
- How do SAHMs perceive their skill development if any over the last 20 years?
- What are the women's time-use aspirations into the future
- What do these women consider a fit or misfit between their skills and experience and current employment practices?

4.5.2.1   The participants

Twenty women took part in this first study. Initially research participants were sourced through my personal networks in Sydney, such as schools and community groups, and then through those initial contacts, via a snowballing effect – SAHMs that knew other SAHMs.

In selecting an appropriate number of participants for my research I was guided by the literature on studies carried out by scholars in methodologically or topically related fields. For example: Shelten and Johnson (2006) used a sample size of five when they carried out a narrative analysis of the experiences of motherhood by older women; Millward (2006) used a sample size of eight participants in a phenomenological study that focused on women transiting from organisations to maternity leave; Gatrell (2005) carried out a study of parenthood and couples' commitment to work and family with a sample size of twenty; Vejar and her colleagues (2006) carried out interview analyses of women transiting from careers to fulltime motherhood with a sample size of four; and as a final example, Rubin and Wooten (2007) carried out an in depth interview study of highly educated stay at home mothers using a sample of ten participants. In considering the nature of the above studies and their sample sizes, I was persuaded that sample size of twenty was appropriate for the purposes of my own research.

Aside from the participant selection criteria, I did not make any explicit nor implicit allowances for inclusion or exclusion of any social characteristics such as socio-economic, cultural or marital status. Given that my method for sourcing participants relied on personal relationships and community networks, the participant group was predominantly homogenous in the above respect, and reflects to a large extent my own socio-economic and cultural position.

The criteria for participation required that each woman:
- First and foremost, considered herself to be a stay-at-home-mother
- Considered herself to be well educated and qualified – that is that she held either tertiary qualifications or industry specific credentials

- Felt that she had experienced a successful career before becoming a full time mother, in positions that she deemed to be professional or managerial in nature;

- Is currently mothering adolescents/young adults

- Has been a SAHM for 10+ years

- Has thought about re-entering the work force at career/professional levels in the future

4.5.2.2   Finding the data - the interview process

When I was initially pondering the possible ways of carrying out my research - of collecting the narratives, I read a quote in Oakley's work: '*interviewing is a masculine paradigm*' (1981: 31).   In academic research practice there has been a growing reluctance by feminists to engage in traditional forms of interview processes (Oakley, 1981; Reinhartz, 1992; Smith, 1987; Hertz 1997; Richardson, 2002).

We are also told that '*narrative interviewing represents a major shift in perspective in the human sciences about the research interview itself*' (Riessman, 2004: 709).   When working with narratives, the facilitated question/answer interview formats are replaced by more organic conversational co-productions.   In this format, narrative interviewing becomes a quest for collaborative meaning-finding (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2002) and a negotiation for conversational spaces (Riessman, 2004), where more power-equal interactions take place.   This interactive dialogic process is what I wished to replicate in my practice as researcher.   Thus my aim was to facilitate 'conversational spaces' for SAHMs' voices (Riessman, 2004) where I, as interviewer, was an active participant in the interaction (Rapley, 2001); and so collect SAHMs' narratives through a collaborative meaning-finding interview format (see Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2002) rather than more rigid or fixed formats.

As interviewer, my approach aimed at being respectful of the choices participants made in how they framed their ideas and responses (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:80).   Thus the narrative data producing interviews were directed by a loose three-pronged directional agenda: I began with some explanation of the purpose and aim of the interview, followed by a trigger to initiate interaction and concluding with a 'what

would you like to see happen next' style question. The following points were used to trigger discussion or re-direct the conversations:

- Personal/family biographical details

- Professional and career history

- Reasons for being a SAHM

- Involvement in activities, in/outside the home

- The strengths, competencies and skills they believe themselves to have

- Reasons for considering professional/career re-entry

- The kind of work place/environment they would like to see themselves in

- Concerns about re-entering paid workforce

- Expectations of organisations and future work

Interviews took place in relaxed home environments around kitchen tables, on lounges or in gardens. One was conducted in my home and all others at participants' own homes. Participants were given a written explanation of the research and all signed a participation agreement. All interviewees gave their verbal consent for, and appeared comfortable with the recording of our discussion. There were however, a number of instances where participants asked for the tape recorder to be paused due to the sensitive or personal nature of certain points that arose during our conversations. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and a number of participants chatted on after the tape recorder was turned off. Some sent emails or phoned with after thoughts, and these added comments have been considered with the rest of the interview data.

4.5.2.3 Managing the data

Given that each participant personally knew at least one other woman in the researched group it was important to protect and ensure confidentiality as much as possible. Therefore the names of interviewees, the people they spoke about, and the places and organisations they referred to, have all been replaced by pseudonyms or de-identified.

The data became reliant on three forms of documentation: audio recordings, typed transcripts and my personal journal notes. I purposefully made no written notes during the interviews themselves, as I felt this would allow me to be fully involved in the

interview discussions. Thus I relied on the audio-recordings of those sessions for repeated playing during the data analysis stage. All interview recordings were fully transcribed and hard copies of these became my most used working tools during analysis. I made use of a field journal for the duration of the data gathering and analysis stages, to record details of the research activities themselves; emerging ideas and challenges; incidental conversations with participant SAHMs; non-verbal interactions; as well as my personal reactions to each encountered situation.

4.5.2.4 Seeking Focus in the Data

My original starting point was to engage a research method that would facilitate the exploration of individual's narrative accounts in their individual social situated-ness (as in the work of Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998) and therefore be suitable for capturing SAHMs' embodied phenomenological narratives. The method needed to assist in translating relational ontology that is an emphasis on the self and identity as social interactive processes, into both methodology and concrete methods of data analysis (ibid).

After initial readings of the transcripts, it became apparent that even though the SAHMs' narratives differed in their personal contexts, discursive detail and situated nuances, they also shared very strong common threads on subject matter. At this point I experienced a moment of what Wilkinson (1988) calls 'functional' reflexivity. Given that a salient research goal was to identify the key characteristics of the SAHM cohort - it was the commonalities in the narratives that I came to believe needed to be drawn out and examined, more so than focusing on the specific manner in which participants told their stories or the language they used. This realisation together with the number of stories themselves, plus the level of detail within each, led me to review how to best do justice to the data whilst maintaining phenomenological integrity. At this point I decided to focus exclusively on a thematic approach to analysis (Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Rapley, 2001). This is a common method of analysing qualitative data (Riessman, 1993; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

4.5.2.5 Searching for themes

The process of determining the themes began at the data gathering stage where I sketched initial patterns and observations in my field notes. As I subsequently listened to interview recordings and read their transcripts on screen, I identified and highlighted possible categories within each transcript and then after multiple readings, across all the transcripts. Reading across 20 transcripts on a computer screen became difficult to manage visually, so I printed hard copies of the interview data and worked on paper transcripts from then on. I filed the paper transcripts in a concertina file and assigned a compartment per participant. In each participant's section I placed the interview transcript, codes, summaries, observations and all notes for that participant. It was a basic but user-friendly way of compartmentalising and tracking my work.

After reading through each interview transcript several times, I allocated firstly colour codes and, at a later stage, numeric codes to the identified thematic categories. These were written over and through the transcript text, the margins and on 'stick it' notes of different colours stuck to the pages. Once categories were identified and initial interview quotes selected I literally cut up the duplicate hard copies and blue-tacked these cuttings plus various ideas written on 'stick it' notes onto large sheets of butcher's paper. I assigned one of these sheets per thematic category and thus gathered all the quotes, concepts and ideas pertinent to that category on the one sheet, then mounted the sheets on the wall and continued adding and editing. It was a very visual way of working which allowed me to more clearly see patterns, connections, differences and clusters. Many times during the writing process I found myself walking past these charts on my study wall and moving the paper cuttings and 'stick its' to explore different fits, connections or missing links. Working in this way greatly assisted in making sense of, and editing, what was occasionally becoming an overwhelming exercise.

In this manner the categories and their detail crystallised in my wall charts. It was also at this point that a type of reflexive focus-shift occurred in me as researcher. By focusing on the text and the themed contents within the identified categories, I found a certain detachment from each of the individual interviewees forming; and I consciously recognised that I was concentrating more on the patterns embedded within the

individual stories rather than on the tellers of those stories. Thus individual stories are not used in their totality to tell each SAHM's full story. Rather, the women's individual voices are honoured and visible within the contexts of patterns and thematic groupings.

I have made extensive use of quotes to not only validate the research findings but also as thick descriptors (as in Geerz, in Martin and McIntyre, 1994) to illustrate how participants narrated their lives as SAHMs. These quotes are the instrumental data that demonstrate the real thoughts, feelings and ideas of the participants.

4.5.3 Study II – the managers

The second study was carried out to explore and provide a current organisational context against which to consider the data that emerged from Study I.

This study identified managers' perspectives and organisational practices that might apply specifically to the employment conditions for SAHMs considering re-integration. It was conducted to address the following research sub-questions:

- What is the attitude of managers towards ex-career women who have been out of the paid workforce for 20 years?
- How do the women's skill development and time use differ from or concur with organisational or managers' notions of skill development and time use?
- What position do managers present regarding recruitment and attraction practices of re-entering professional women, particularly mothers, to their organisations?
- To what extent if any, are managers addressing the issue of an ageing workforce in practice?

4.5.3.1 The Participants

Six managers in six different industries were interviewed in the second study. Participants were sourced through my professional networks in Sydney where my peers facilitated the initial introductions.

Industry expertise, qualifications and professional level data that emerged from the SAHM narratives in Study I was used to guide the selection criteria for both the type of organisation and the managerial level to approach for participation.

Given that, all interviewees in Study II are senior executives within their organisations (i.e. bearing C-suite, director or vice-president titles), with direct reporting responsibilities to either: national CEO levels, international/regional Director levels or dual reporting lines to both. All interviewed managers are employed in medium or large organisations, operating in the private quaternary and quinary sectors of the labour force. Both these are generally characterized by high levels of services or intellectual activity and staffed by personnel with similar educational backgrounds to the SAHMs in Study I. The managers' educational/professional backgrounds are in law, accountancy, business, management, and IT. Their organisations represent a diversity of industries: Information and communication technologies; business consultancies; pharmaceutical R&D; media/ entertainment; investment brokerage/banking; taxation and legal

4.5.3.2 Finding the data - the interview process

A narrative interview format was also used to explore organisational practices and managerial views. Narrative methods have been shown to be well suited to organisational study (see Calas and Smircich, 1999 and 2006; Czarniawska, 1998; Gill, 2001; Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; McAdams, 1999; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Rhodes and Pullen, 2008), for they facilitate the exploration of subjective experiences of individuals, groups and the interactions within them, resulting in rich data that cannot be obtained from questionnaires or observations. For example, organisational narratives have been identified as one of the best business practices of socially responsible companies (Reder, 1995) and as powerful strategic planning tools (Shaw, Brown and

Bromiley, 1998). The use of narrative inquiry in organisations is a recognised means of examining the interpersonal and intangible side of practice.

My interview approach mirrored that used in the first study in that I began with an explanation of the research and aim of the interview. A variable was that I provided the managers a brief synopsis of the characteristics of the SAHM cohort I had already researched.

As in the first study, the Study II interviews were organic in nature and a negotiation for conversational spaces (Riessman, 2004). The emphasis of this second set of interviews was on eliciting managers' narratives on organizational practices within their spheres of work. The interview foci and directional questions for this second study were steered by the themes that emerged from the initial analysis of SAHM's narratives in Study I, in particular those related to issues of skill and age. Thus the following points were prepared as triggers to assist the interview discussion and direction:

- Work practices that support re-entering staff especially women
- Work practices that address the recruitment, selection and retention of older staff
- Availability of alternative work arrangements
- Strategies that are in place to manage an ageing workforce
- Views on SAHMs as potential employees
- Description of the company's culture
- Gender and age issues and their in-house management

Interviews took place at manager's work premises, three in designated meeting or board rooms and three at managers' work desks. Participants were given a written explanation of the research and all signed a participation agreement which also assured them of complete confidentiality. All interviewees gave their verbal consent for, and appeared comfortable with the recording of our discussion. There was one instance where a manager requested that the tape recorder to be paused due to the confidential nature of a point that had arisen regarding a client. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. I subsequently telephoned all managers to thank them for their time and input. One manager requested I return upon completion of the PhD to discuss the results.

4.5.3.3   Data management and analysis

In keeping with the assurance of confidentiality given to the managers, the names of interviewees, their organisations, and the people they referred to, have all been de-identified.

The three forms of data documentation used in Study I was similarly used in this study: audio recordings, typed transcripts and my personal journal notes.

Having established a workable and productive system for thematic analysis in the first study, the interview data from Study II were coded and managed manually in a similar manner. Managers' narratives are reflected in the thematic groupings and in the extensive use of quotes in the analysis.

4.6   Research Ethics

The ethical framework I have adopted in my research practice borrows from Guillemin and Gillam's (2004) work on ethics in research. This is a framework that distinguishes two distinct dimensions through which ethical practice in qualitative research can be achieved. Guillemin and Gillam's two dimensions are (a) 'procedural ethics' and (b) 'ethics in practice' (p 263). The first refers to the process of applying for formal University approval to carry out research involving humans; and the second refers to the ethical issues faced by ourselves as researchers in the field, whilst carrying out the research.

Procedural ethics: The main aim at a procedural level is to satisfy the relevant ethics committee that my research project is ethically acceptable. This approval process has two benefits. Firstly it allows the approving ethics committee to protect the safety and basic rights of my study's participants. Secondly it provides me as researcher, with a set of guidelines against which to consider issues of risk, benefit, confidentiality of data, and consent; as well as imbuing me with a certain level of credibility as a researcher. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004:268-269) state:

> *[p]rocedural ethics offer researchers an ethics "checklist" by reminding the researcher to consider such issues as the potential risks to participants, the balancing of the benefits of the research against those risks, the steps needed to ensure confidentiality of data, and the inclusion of consent forms and plain language statements in the material provided to participants…in fulfilling the procedural obligations of this ethics checklist, the researcher is granted institutional credibility to carry out the research.*

Therefore my research adheres to the UTS guidelines set by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's Joint NHMRC/AV-CC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice, the Commonwealth Privacy Act (1988), and the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. Ethics approval was sought from and granted by the UTS HREC committee prior to my commencing fieldwork (Ref No. 2011-042A) and I have reported to the committee, as required, for the duration of my research work.

Ethics in practice: The main aim of the second dimension in Guillemin and Gillam's framework is 'ethics in practice' and it considers the ethical issues that may arise out of carrying out our day-to-day research. These are issues which operate in tandem with procedural ethics practice during fieldwork. It refers to the 'ethical obligations a researcher has toward a participant in terms of interacting with him or her in a humane, non-exploitative way while at the same time being mindful of one's role as a researcher' (Guillemin and Gillam 2004:264).

It is an obligation that requires that as researcher, we be alert to 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004:265), such as when are we ethically required to breach confidentiality, or how do we respond to the unplanned supply of sensitive information, or do we stop recording when unexpected information is proffered? These 'moments' entail a reflexive approach to assist us in producing knowledge in the field. In this framework being reflexive about research practice means: firstly, being cognisant of the general ethical dimensions of research practice; secondly, being sensitive to 'ethically important moments'; and thirdly being able to respond to ethical concerns when they arise during the research process (ibid).

Ethics, and reflexivity as discussed earlier in this chapter, come together here then, in the manner through which I research, a process of 'critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced [] and how that knowledge is generated' (ibid p274). My research work has been carried out with a high standard of ethical conduct, a sharp sensitivity to 'ethically important moments' and extreme emphasis on maintaining participants' confidentiality of subject matter and their personal privacy.

Chapter 5: The Findings

Study I - the SAHMs

5.1 Introduction

On reviewing the interview data it became very clear that there were distinct topics all SAHMs spoke on. The women spoke about themselves (5.2), their family (5.3), their skills (5.4), and hopes for their futures (5.5). These were taken then as the four thematic starting points from which to organise the data and from these four main topic groups a number of sub themes emerged.

5.1.1 SAHM profiles

Of the twenty SAHMs interviewed, nineteen have been at home mothers for approximately two decades and one has been at home for the last decade.

All women in the cohort held tertiary qualifications at the onset of SAHM-hood (see 5.4.1.1) in the areas of law, accounting, business, communications, science, performing arts or public relations, and at interview all noted an ongoing commitment to further structured learning (see 5.4.1.2). Prior to SAHM-hood all interviewees had worked in managerial roles within their professions and those roles are summarised thus:

Five media related roles: 1 chief editor for Australia's best-selling magazine; 1 (overseas major city) correspondent for an international media conglomerate; 1 university lecturer and head of media/PR (concurrently) for our largest postal service; 1 policy writer/lobbyist redrafting our health system; and 1 PR manager for a national corporate.

Six business related roles: 1 CFO in international cargo shipping; 1 international banker; 2 corporate accountants; 2 senior consultants in top five consulting firms; 1 (overseas country) trade liaison, corporate; 1 head of HR for a multinational; 1 head of IT support centre.

Three science related roles: 2 research scientists in private practice; 1 medical practitioner running a clinical practice. Two law related roles: 1 barrister in

private practice; 1lawyer in public service.   The <u>remaining role</u> is that of performer/ teacher/manager of a performing arts institution.

SAHMs have between two and four children each, with ages ranging from 11 to 23 years. ALL SAHMs have at least one child aged 15 to 18 years.

All the women are married, although one was separated and another was beginning divorce proceedings at time of interview.   All husbands in the cohort are reported as working in very senior professional and/or executive roles.   Their positions are very well remunerated and also exact enormous time and dedication commitments.   Two major repercussions of the men's extreme jobs on SAHMs are: a) they provide financial resources enabling the women to stay home, b) but they also absent the men from family life and the women operate as sole parents in day to day terms.

Although class status and family incomes were not discussed specifically, a number of indicators did emerge in the interviews which position SAHMs as upper middle class women.   All SAHMs live in upper North Shore suburbs of Sydney, recognised as an affluent upper middle class area.   This together with spouses' well-remunerated senior roles and the women's professional histories are good markers of SAHMs' socio economic positions.   Other signs of middle class demonstrated at interview were the schools children attend and extra activities both children and mothers engage in. Notwithstanding, the most obvious indicator of class is that at interview all SAHMs described themselves, their lifestyles or their SAHM-hoods as states of privilege (5.2.4). However this is not to suggest that all the women positioned themselves equally.

5.2   SAHMs talking about themselves

The first thematic grouping reflects SAHMs talking about themselves as individuals. This is further distinguished by how the women speak about their sense of self and identity, what they feel defines them; by their views of themselves as mothers; by their pursuit of activities outside the home; and by considerations over financial matters.

5.2.1   Sense of self

Each of the women in this study spoke positively about her sense of self.   In describing themselves and what defines them some drew on examples of perceived personal traits such as intellect and creativity, others on activities they derive satisfaction from, and some highlighted their view of self as independent of their role as mother or the kudos associated with a job title or earnings, for example:

> *I write, I talk I am not stupid I've come to realize, I have a certain level of intellect* (Louise).

> *I look at me and think that I'm quite a capable person* (Joan).

> *I have no issues with self-esteem [] my self-image you know, is of a creative, vital, intelligent person* (Belle).

> *I have so many passions and interests* (Ita).

> *A large part of my personal identity was to do with intelligence, with intellect and with umm …academic success…with being thought to be very clever and so it never occurred to me [] that I wouldn't go on to get some kind of tertiary education and then go on to get some kind of career. Mothering actually didn't enter my life plan in a conscious way* (Trixie).

> *My sense of self doesn't come from the fact that I can say to someone I've got this high profile job earning half a million a year* (Kat).

> *My identity is not wrapped up in them* [the children] (Trixie).

> *I enjoy the freedom of being able to do the sorts of volunteering type stuff that I do now* (Margaret).

Trixie spoke about womanhood itself as being a major contributor to her sense of self and what defines her:

I've strongly believed since I was a very young girl and to this day, that being a woman is far superior to being a man, that we have by far the better shopping bag at the end of the day and at the beginning of the day. I think that <u>we</u>...are so, so far and away luckier to be women than men. Women: what magnificent creatures we are. On every level emotionally and relationally, physically and spiritually and intellectually and everything...we are amazing people <u>and</u> we get to have the babies <u>and</u> we get to be the mothers and we get to be the daughters and we get to be the friends of other women and we could be friends with women and men, and real friends with both. I think that we have it...we have got... and in our society, there's not even that pressure really...there is not really the pressure that we have to look after the family financially if we don't want to (Trixie).

Other participants used examples of fulfilling activities they are involved in and from which they derive great personal satisfaction to illustrate how they perceive themselves or some favoured traits. As an example, Joan has been a volunteer Board director as well as a Chairman for a number of years and frames her satisfaction and pride in her accomplishments there by saying:

As Chairman [] professionalism and transparency were important [] to show leadership - a strong leadership [] but also, creating an atmosphere in which people feel that [] all opinions are heard and that everybody is clear about the direction [] that was important, and I thought I did that reasonably well...really well actually (Joan).

And Margaret who is emphatic that mothering work is work, spoke about how comfortable she is with herself and how important it is for her to balance what she sees as her 'work' with an active pursuit for personal stimulation and self-development outside the home in order to maintain her sense of self and have some 'input for yourself':

I don't mind my own company and I <u>do</u> see what I do now as working. [] I actually treat my week like a working week, and basically always have[] but I also need to do something stimulating, you can't keep doing boring, you can't keep doing manual[] that's why I'm really enjoying [] doing the lecture course on comparative religion and, and literature and whatever else, because it's stimulating. That's giving, putting stuff in, umm, not just giving it out and it's such a luxury[] you've got to have some input for yourself (Margaret).

In describing their sense of self, there was an emphasis by the participants on making the distinction between their identities as women with individual needs versus their role of women who happen to be mothers. Trixie illustrates this distinction between her identity of self and her role as mother by saying that her identity is not 'wrapped up' in her children:

I love them [the children] – *in such a way that I couldn't imagine before having them. But that's not to say Adriana that I couldn't have had a happy life without them, cause I was having a happy life without them. And - I think it's connected, you know to that fact that I'm the bolter, that I need - I do need to get away from them pretty regularly, to stay sane. It's not my - my identity is not wrapped up in them, although I love them passionately* (Trixie).

A similar distinction is made by Belle who spoke about separating her role of mother from her overall view of self, highlighting that the children are not tied to her 'self-image':

I was very proud of myself because I had produced three gorgeous children. I've really enjoyed motherhood and I just slotted right into the groove of being a full time mum [] But they are not tied at all to my self-image as a, you know, a creative, vital, intelligent person (Belle).

And in Jean's case the role of mother does not subsume her individuality:

I became a mother and I grew up. Because it wasn't just all about me anymore [] I think my identity did change but not necessarily in a bad way, it just grew, it just broadened. [] Jean is Jean and not just Jean as Sue's, Mark's or Adele's mother (Jean).

This sense of growth is reflected in Emily's narrative, where she describes how in taking on the role of mother her personhood has remained the same as prior to motherhood but her 'sense of self' has changed to a 'fuller' version:

I don't think women can have it all. I'm a true believer in - you have to either have one or the other. So although I'm the same person that I was 20 years ago, taking on a different role [] my sense of self has definitely changed. I'm a fuller person (Emily).

The need to be involved in activities other than caring for the children or the home environment was seen as important in maintaining a sense of self and identity. Liz expresses this by saying she believes she would have gone 'bonkers' unless she had participated in other activities where she gained satisfaction and self-fulfillment:

In some ways I can't be a full time, full time, totally full time mother especially when they're at school [] if they did have a mum, that was around for them the whole time, probably that mum would be stark raving bonkers (laughter) (Liz).

And on a similar vein, without stimulation from meaningful interests outside the home Joan would have 'gone spare':

I bore very easily, ok? I have a short attention span – I'm not sure if it's a medical condition or not (laughter) *I've got to have some kind of mental stimulation all the time, so…you know, motherhood has been great and I actually never thought twice about going back to work, all through this time [] I just never, never felt the need. I've been quite happy being in motherhood I suppose …but…that said, if that's all I'd done I would have gone spare* (Joan).

Even though all participants spoke of being happy or satisfied in their roles as SAHMs, they also spoke of the emotional changes they had experienced over their years as mothers. Some recalled how when they exited the paid workforce to become a SAHM had been a time of re-defining perceptions of self and some spoke of the need to reclaim a sense of self, independent of their role within the family. Kat's words encapsulate what has been a common trajectory for many of these women. They talk about the change process in how they view and define themselves now, compared to when they left their careers, between a decade and two ago:

[When I became a mother] *I still identified myself as a lawyer or barrister for a few years. I don't know whether it was vanity and whether I sought to justify my place in the world by describing myself as an ex-lawyer or whether it's because I still hadn't come to accept that something that was so intrinsically a part of my way of life for so long - whether I just struggled to accept that and maybe harboured some hope of returning. [] I felt adrift. I was actually quite happy doing the mum thing. [] When my mother died [] I confronted expectations which I hadn't realised were upon me in terms of mothering. [] I thought if that happened to me tomorrow how would I see myself? Would I be happy with the decisions that I'd made? []*

It occurred to me that with my professional background, my link, my strong feelings towards my own children, the catharsis that was my mother's death led me to thinking I would like to volunteer for a (type of cause) *support organisation. [] I went from being company secretary to a director and absolutely love it. I found that fulfilled a lot of the lawyer in me [] I thought I was 'crash through the glass ceiling kind of woman' and I really thought that's what I was before I left* [Big 6 Law Firm] *but I discovered I was actually looking for meaning and for meaning in terms of my role in society, not just hidden. [] I think for one's self esteem in a modern Western society your job is often who you are. So I had to really come to terms with that. Would I allow myself to be defined by something I used to do and let my identity slip away? Not because I'd chosen to have kids but because I no longer was a senior associate at* [Big 6 Law Firm] *which was a job I could hold my head up high about having. But having let it go does that mean I let myself go? [] I don't think so. As long as I*

tap into the various parts of my personality I'm pretty happy [] There's a real strong part of me that loves doing stuff for nothing. That's the other thing I discovered. I just don't care about me earning money. So my sense of self doesn't come from the fact that I can say to someone I've got this high profile job earning half a million a year. That's not the bit that I love and I didn't realise that (Kat).

Another common trait amongst the participants is the need to evaluate and redefine a sense of self, not only from their past professional roles but also within their family structure. Many of the SAHMs spoke of the importance of having a strong sense of personal identity and to not be subsumed by their role of mother or wife. This is in part what drives them to be active participants in pursuits outside the home. Trixie's words exemplify this common trait amongst participants, and she goes further. She describes what for her was an 'intellectual' exercise and needing to make conscious decisions at an 'intellectual' level in order to manage her life, relationships, guilt, regret and responsibility:

When [daughter] *was two I remember thinking: people don't - people just know me as* [daughter's] *mother and* [husband's] *wife and, and I was terribly unhappy. I actually - it's the only time in my whole umm, since I gave up work, that I* <u>*really seriously*</u> *considered going back. Going out and finding a job for myself, and umm, really thought I've - I've got to do something cause I'm losing myself in this whole you know, mother of baby, and wife and - the whole - that thing. It was just ugghh - and umm and instead of going and finding a job I actually bolted and I went back to* (overseas) *where, where I'd had this totally - my job, my independent life, my nice job and [] and kudos when, and importantly, where nobody knew* [daughter] *or* [husband] *they only knew me []It got it out of my system. I decided not to, I wasn't going to go and find work. I'd decided I didn't want to do that. That wasn't really for me and, and that I - but that I'd have to manage myself bit more differently [] I think a lot of people who aren't intellectuals, and I'm not talking about intelligence now, I'm talking about intellectualism [] a lot of people just live their lives randomly or as they happen [] and they just muddle through their lives, but I think if you're more intellectual*

you actually manage, you manage your life a bit more [] You're conscious of your life, not just in terms of umm…the day to day workings of it, but in terms of relationships and in terms of umm…pleasure and in terms of responsibility and in terms of social responsibility even,. In terms of - how to manage guilt and regret - and those things, you know? [] If you can take the intellectual exercise of stepping away from your life and looking on it and analyzing it in all of its massive excitement and ugliness. Then you can - intellectually - you can decide how you actually want it to be and then you - and then you make that happen. [] I'm not talking about that whole thing of setting a goal - your day goal, your week goal, your month goal, year goal or your 10 year goal. [] I'm talking about handling your life. Because - I don't think life is so much like a linear set of experiences or - I think it's just this huge sloppy organic thing, that you are part of, that sort of tumbles through time, and, and it's how you sort of massage that thing into being more what you want it to be. So the intellect puts some semblance of order to the organic growth (Laugh) [] or at least just brings an awareness (Trixie).

In speaking about her sense of self within the family structure over 21 years of SAHM-hood, Helen spoke about how the loss of her personal income when she gave up her career, impacted on the relationship with her husband and states:

For me personally, being in a relationship where I was the stay at home mother, I felt quite disempowered early in the relationship (Helen).

The process of 'identification with the different parts of self' as described by Kat, or of how to 'massage' the 'huge sloppy organic thing' that Trixie refers to was common amongst the SAHMs. Even though all the women interviewed were active outside the home and those activities were seen by them as instrumental contributors to their sense of self and general happiness, they also spoke of mixed feelings such as inadequacy and unfulfilled expectations due to having stayed home to mother. These contradictory or parallel views of selves are further illustrated in the words of Bev and Angela. Bev described herself as 'fulfilled' on the one hand but also as a 'lightweight' and Angela

feels she's had the most 'perfect life' and at the same time does not feel she has 'made it' and feels 'inadequate':

> *I feel quite fulfilled in some ways, just by being a wife and mother and not having an outside job, umm, on the other hand I sometimes feel that I haven't fulfilled my potential [] I guess if you've kind of fallen into it umm because of circumstances, being a full time mother and having the choice to do that – not having to work – I mean I did go through a stage of, you know, I could do anything – what will I do? I should do something other than being a wife and mother… and sometimes I feel a bit sort of lightweight – if that's the right expression – that that's… I mean that's all I do. I mean so many women are working and being mothers and wives and holding all of them together… I do feel a certain stigma, that's probably perhaps a bit strong a word, but certainly that I <u>should</u> be doing more (Bev).*

> *I want to work, I feel like I've got a contribution to make and I don't feel I've made it. I feel inadequate, like women that have a career and wait to have children then can't have children and they feel inadequate because they are unable to fall pregnant. I have the complete opposite. I've had the children. I've had what most women would consider the most perfect life.[] I'm grateful most of the time, but I do feel I've missed out on something and missed out on contributing and there's so many things I want to do (Angela).*

5.2.2   Selves as mothers

In talking about the 'part of self' that is a SAHM three sub themes emerged from the participant's narratives: the reasons or circumstances that shaped their decision to be a SAHM; the participant's perceptions of how others view them as SAHMs; and their feelings about being a SAHM.

5.2.2.1 Decision shapers and choice

The decision shapers that emerged from the narratives, that is, the reasons and circumstances that led participants to become SAHMs appear to revolve around two central considerations: views on child rearing and the practical logistics of managing the family unit as a whole.

SAHM	# of Child.	Left Career at	Reason Given
Bev	2	1st born as toddler	Wanting to care herself, husband's job
Marie	3	Prior to birth	Work environment health risks
Louise	3	Prior to birth	Husband's job & o/s posting
Belle	3	1st year post birth	Wanting to care herself; husband's job; own career demands
Liz	2	Prior to birth	Husband's job & o/s posting
Margaret	3	On return from 3rd maternity leave	Family logistics; husband's job; own career demands
Trixie	2	Prior to birth	Wanting to care herself, husband's job
Joan	3	On having 2nd child	Wanting to care herself; husband's job; own career demands
Donna	2	Late Primary school	Swapped with stay at home dad
Darcy	2	Prior to birth	Work environment health risks
Kat	2	2nd child's infancy	Wanting to care herself; husband's job; own career demands
Ita	2	On return from 2nd maternity leave	Family logistics, wanting to mother; husband's job; own career demands
Emma	2	1st year post birth	Wanting to care herself; husband's job; own career demands
Jean	3	Baby/Toddler	Wanting to care herself; husband's job
Sandra	2	On return from 2nd maternity leave	Long hours of own job & need for self-care; husband's job
Angela	4	Toddler	Family logistics; husband's job
Pieta	3	Birth	Wanting to care herself, family logistics; ; husband's job
Helen	3	Eldest aged 1	Wanting to care herself; own career demands
Alex	3	On return from 2nd maternity leave	Wanting to care herself, own career travel demands, family logistics; husband's job
Emily	3	Birth	Wanting to care herself; husband's job

Figure 5.1: Approximate time frames when SAHMs exited careers and broad categories for reasons given.

It can be seen in the summary above (Fig 5.1) that at the onset of SAHM-hood of the 20 participants, 3 gave up their careers in early pregnancy due to health risks associated with their work environments; 5 left their roles at the birth of their child and 11 returned to work from maternity leave but exited the workforce in the children's early years. One SAHM whose husband had been the stay-at-home-dad swapped roles with him and left her career when her older child was in primary school.

Most of the participants spoke of being instrumental in managing the running of the family and familial relationships:

> *You're the glue, the mother is the glue [] I'm like the referee, I'm like the umpire. All the time I'm like the umpire to try and keep things good. Ninety nine per cent of the time they are good* (Emily).

> *I know that if I worked five days a week till 6 o' clock. I know that this entire household would fall apart. It would* (Belle).

The importance of choosing a way of mothering that made them 'available' to their children or 'be around' for them, was raised and stressed by every participant. (This is expanded on further in the discussion of teenagers).

> *I think it should be your choice. [] I do not want to miss out on my children's youth.* (said with great emphasis) *I will never, ever get to see them grow up again. [] I don't want to miss out and I also think that the value that I am adding you know…by being at home and contributing to them being educated you know…young women …with good values… You can't put a price on that…so I am being practical* (Belle).

> *I just don't think women can have it all. I just don't think they can. I think men can, it's a man's world. I don't think women can have it all, I think you have to choose. I think you have to choose, I think you have to have that time off in the middle. I really believe that. I just don't think - there's no way that that's ever*

going to change. It just won't, it just won't. Until men give birth it's never going to change. It's just not going to. You can't have it all []. I think you've got to choose, I don't think you can do it all. Even if I do decide to go back to work, I'm still going to be the mother. I'm still going to need to be around even when they're older. Particularly when they're older. We're talking when our kids have got their own families. You're still going to be needed. No it's really difficult. I really feel sorry for women - I really feel sorry for women that want it all. I think it's very, very, hard. I feel very sorry for them (Emily).

Although Emma made a conscious choice to focus on SAHM-hood, her story also illustrates a common theme in the narratives and that is the cost associated with that choice and the ability of SAHMs to put part of themselves on hold. What is clear from all the narratives is that for these women the state of SAHM-hood is not permanent and they all anticipate pursuing their own interests in the future:

I wanted to focus on my children.[] I think you have to choose your moments in your life where you can do something that you might find more enriching than just keeping the dollar wheels turning [] I think women biologically, because they've had another role if they've been a mother, are able to say: 'I can split my personality if you like and I can become this person for a while and I can just put that other one on hold'. [] But there's an opportunity of cost associated with that and you have to choose not to take it. I think there is a wastage for us - but I think if you're not prepared to go through that phase with your children there may be another cost which you'll have to bear at a later stage and I think that's the quid pro quo. You say: 'I would rather put this time into my children and hope that I get a decent outcome by the time they finish school and I can pursue my interests then or I don't'. [] I've given this considerable thought [] but I think in the end you just have to make a choice. [] I don't necessarily see it as a bad thing though because I think in each phase of your life there are many lessons to be learnt (Emma).

Or as Kat states, for her it is not a clearly defined choice between family and career, but rather a number of "middle grounds":

I used to worry along the way about the choice between the family or the job but I think I've come to realise that maybe the choice is not just between one or the other. There are lots of middle grounds (Kat).

Some of the narratives highlight how ideas and views on mothering itself changed for the women after giving birth and contributed to their SAHM-hood decision. Both Joan and Louise talked about a 'shift' in their views on motherhood that occurred after the birth of their children. Prior to motherhood Joan thought the concept of staying at home to mother was "beneath" her and Louise thought she would have children and "slot" them into care. Now Joan's view is that there is 'a lot of pride to be taken in growing up some decent human beings' and Louise could not imagine "dumping" the kids to go back to work:

My own mother, she stayed at home and that - that conflicted me quite a lot, when I was a young woman and went to University. I thought - a woman should have all the choices that she wants, all the career paths that she wants, and umm, that whole concept of staying at home as a mother was actually something that I thought was umm, a bit beneath me actually [] I must admit - I had a bit of an attitude shift after I had [1ˢᵗ son] (laughter) [] I am the one that can have the biggest effect on my children [] And then I probably acknowledged something that I always knew - and that is that there is quite a lot of value in motherhood. Once you become a mother (laugh) you think – oh you can actually make quite a lot of difference in, you know, human beings' lives and specifically your own children's. And umm, you know, there's actually quite a lot of pride to be taken in - in growing up you know, some decent human beings and so - that was probably the - the biggest shift [] I really felt that I had a lot of value to put into these human beings and that that time would pass and then I could go back and do other things, once they were you know, more independent or on their way kind of thing. So you know, if I had that time again I wouldn't do it differently, I wouldn't (Joan).

Originally I kind of thought - oh well alright this works you know - I've got my career and I've got this planned three year gap [spouse overseas posting]. I can have my children in this three year gap, come back to Australia, slot them into child care and go back to work. It'd work you know, that was my cunning plan. The 3 years turned to 17. [] I do think that even regardless of what career I had - I just couldn't imagine - you know, dumping the kids and going back to work (Louise).

The narratives demonstrate that SAHMs' choice to stay home to mother was seen through a family-unit lens and as a preferred option to having external carers for their children. Additionally, most SAHMs spoke of the pleasure they derive from being home for and with their children:

Men can have a family and a career if the woman gives up her career. But women - if both partners keep working - then umm the question mark is, can either of them really have a family? I mean you have - but can it, is it a healthy family? Is it a family life that they would have hoped for, imagined or - and I know lot of people do, a lot of people do. But they involve others - they don't raise their own children. They've carers and nannies and vacation care. I don't know how bad that is for children [] how good it is for children, how good it is for society. I'm glad I raised my own children (Trixie).

Family is important and I think I never wanted to have the kind of family like
I saw friends of mine have - where parents worked, you were like ships passing in the night. You didn't really see your parents, or they were home late, or they were always working (Darcy).

The 11 SAHMs that returned to work from maternity leave spoke about the difficulties of juggling returns to professional work, the required long hours, the demands of young children and career-busy husbands. Like Margaret and Sandra, many spoke of the exhaustion they experienced and the inability to do it all, and how these career related factors contributed to their decision to quit the workforce and stay home full time:

I had a 3 year old, a two year old and a zero year old, and umm, and a husband who was rarely here. He worked 12 hours a day [] and I thought I just don't think I can do this now. I just didn't have the energy to leave the house for that many hours a day. Would have been you know, would've been easily, oh gawd, you'd leave home at 7:30, be back at six, so you'd be gone for 11 hours, 10 and a half hours whatever. I just thought, I can't do this, and so I chose at that point to resign and haven't been back to paid work since then - so that's 18 years (Margaret).*

As in Margaret's story, the long and increasing number of hours was also an issue for Sandra who left her employer to set up her own business in the hope of alleviating the strain. However, this alternative was also abandoned:

I took two lots of maternity leave [] the company kept in touch with me [] a lot of it had to do with the company keeping in touch and being there at the right time to go 'come on back' [] I went back to work two days and we were able to employ a lady who looked after the girls whilst I was working, and looked after me too. [] So that made it very easy to go back to work and to be able to focus on work when I was at work [] Two days very quickly went to three days – 24, 26 hours.[] I decided that I would much prefer to try working at home [] and I started a business from home []. That enabled me to supposedly - the theory was, I'd see clients during the day, and then I would be able to drop the kids in the morning, pick them up from school and do all their activities - didn't work quite that way. I ended up sitting at eleven, twelve o'clock at night writing reports, and decided after a while that wasn't going to work. [] Nanny kept coming in the afternoons so that I could keep working, [] but I decided I wasn't getting enough sleep, so then I stopped work altogether (Sandra).

Two other participants spoke of employer attitudes and employer's unrealistic expectations as contributing to their decision to cease paid employment and focus on fulltime motherhood.

I signed off on something the night before I had [1st child] *and she* [the manager] *was sitting on my bed the next morning with more work for me to do, as I was throwing up. I said: 'I think you need to give me 24 hours to recover' – after that I'd had enough* (Emma).

I remember when the publisher [] came to me when I had just given birth to [1st child] *and she came to me with the page proofs in the maternity ward to edit [] she came into* [name of hospital] *Hospital, you know, this young career woman with all these page proofs and I literally had just given birth - because we had a deadline* (Belle).

5.2.2.2   Other people's perceptions

Many participants spoke about comments that have been directed at them about their SAHM-hood. How they see themselves as mothers is at times challenged by how they perceive other people view them in their SAHM roles.

As examples, Kat finds motherhood very fulfilling and feels she is wiser for the experiences, but believes the role of mothers is devalued and still struggles with an answer to the question 'what do you do?':

I'm pretty happy. To be honest though generally I still struggle with that question at parties 'so what do you do?' It's almost like this bubble of emotion comes to the fore and I struggle and I say oh I have different projects. I'm beginning to say when people say 'what do you do', I say well - instead of saying I do stuff, I started to say 'well actually I'm a director of a national charity that supports families [cause type]. *I'm also supporting marginalised women and I learn Italian and I study the visual arts'.   I give a longer answer and if their eyes glaze over then I stop.[] If you say you're a mum they're not interested. I've tried that answer because I actually thought that all the other stuff didn't rate because I wasn't earning any money. I wasn't studying with the view to earning money. If you say you're studying with the view to qualify for something, oh people get that [] relatively recently just started using 'I'm a mum with some interesting perks on the side'.   I actually feel that the unfortunate by-product of*

post feminism is that being a mother is being devalued [] it's actually really personally rewarding to be the carer. That it's something that - would I have felt comfortable not being the carer? I don't think so. I actually, for me it's been a good thing to have been the carer because I think there's been a real getting of wisdom in that process (Kat).

Likewise, Trixie has encountered negative perceptions and at times wishes for validation of her role as mother:

We've all sort of suffered a little bit of a setback on how we're viewed by certain members of society (Laugh). *And how - I think the really crucial thing for each one of us to confront is how important is that view to us personally - and depending on who expresses that view. And in most cases the people who express that view and their opinion isn't important to me. And - but sometimes - but it'd be nice to be validated* (Trixie).

And Liz expresses a lack of comfort in admitting to being a mother because of the anticipated response

How many of us truly feel comfortable saying that 'I'm a mum' I bet nobody. I bet nobody does. Not because you don't - you know, it's because of the response you'll get to saying that. The societal perception of them (Liz).

Anne (who has completed a M Lit and a PhD during her SAHM-hood) reports on the other hand, encounters with assumptions of ignorance or of her not having kept up with technology.

There's this judgment that if a woman leaves the workforce to raise her kids, when she comes back in - she will be technologically a troglodyte or something (Marie).

When Margaret and Joan are asked if they work, they understand, as did the other SAHMs that spoke about this point - that the implied meaning is 'paid work'.

Margaret's response to such questions is to say 'yes I work'. This stems from her view of self as a mother who does work – it is unpaid but it is work:

> *My sister-in-law said to me yesterday 'are you working?' I really didn't know what to say to her and I went 'I am working yes, I'm doing all sorts of things' I said to her. But really - what she was asking me was: do you have a paid job yet. Now - she is an accounts payable manager or whatever. I could think of nothing more boring than doing that. Umm but to her and to many others - working - regardless of what you do equals being paid* (Margaret).

Joan's response on the other hand is quite opposite. Even though she devotes more than a part time work load to her volunteer job, her reply typically is 'I don't work' not because she believes this, but rather because she has had to answer that type of question often, and now feels that she has had enough:

> *If I'm asked 'And what do you do' - implying what do I do for a living, with life, I'll say 'I don't, I don't work'. Currently, that's my answer, yeah to say 'I don't work'. Umm, a couple of people who know me they say, they go – 'well that's not true'. Well I don't say 'I do nothing' but I'm not in paid employment and you know - I'm so over that too - as well so you know. I'm over that - having to explain - so yeah* (Joan).

Perceptions of non-work were also identified by some participants in describing the expectations some working mothers/parents have of SAHMs, particularly in reference to supervising or chauffeuring working parents' children:

> *It just comes back to that assumed availability, you know? 'Mum will drive, mum will do it' and I do. It gives me the heebie-jeebies sometimes [] no other parent can do it because they work full-time and they're tired. All right, I'll do it* (Emily).

It's amazing how many parents - how people know that you'll drive your kids <u>and</u> theirs – and they let you! Just because it's convenient for them, because they work and you don't (laughter), (Alex).

Some think we sit around the whole day. Yeah, yeah - I know there's definitely a prejudice there - and an expectation to help them out with their own kids (Belle).

The value or reasons for SAHMs' mothering work is questioned not only in broader societal settings, but also within the SAHMs own family structures. A number of participants reported on family members' views or comments of their SAHM-hood choices. Trixie spoke about her 20 year old daughter's views on her mothering role and not seeing her mother as doing work because there is no income being generated. The daughter's view is that 'mum lives off dad's money':

It's interesting to me the way that [daughter] *views all of that now ...that she really; she definitely makes a distinction in her mind that I live off - that mum lives off dad's money. It's dad's money and mum is, you know, the beneficiary of that...she doesn't...and I...that's kind of shocking really...that* [she doesn't see it as a partnership] *not financially no...In every other way yeah but not that way. It's really interesting* (Trixie).

And in Darcy's story, she explains how it is her sister that does not understand her choice to stay home to mother, even though both were raised in the same manner.

My sister doesn't get me, said she could never have stayed home with the kids, she would have gone insane. I don't know why my sister didn't get it. She was brought up by the same mother, the same - system (Darcy).

5.2.2.3   Feelings on SAHM-hood

Despite being aware of lack of understanding of their SAHM-hood choices or of some unfavourable societal perceptions towards them, every SAHM interviewed felt not only positive about having been able to stay home to mother but also identified flow-on benefits to themselves, their children and partners:

We're fortunate in our family situation that I don't have to work (Joan).

I'm really, really blessed (Trixie).

Emma spoke about the great enjoyment she derives from her role as mother and sees SAHM-hood as a 'gift' she is able to bestow on her children:

If you have the time and if you're financially able to do that, I think that's a wonderful gift to give to your children (Emma).

There was an acknowledgement by most participants of a number of accompanying and conflicting emotions to the overall sense of privilege - such as feelings of loss and different types of costs attributed to SAHM-hood.

Liz spoke of the need to grieve for the loss of her previous career:

If you'd interviewed me years ago you probably would have needed the box of tissues - but they would have been tears of anger, more than anything. Not anger - just I guess - loss because you have to grieve for the career that you might have had (Liz).

Marie spoke about financial costs of this privilege and shared that in her family, certain expenses have to be forgone for the privilege of her being an at home mother:

I'm in a very privileged position in that I don't have to work but there is a cost, we don't have big holidays, we don't eat out often, so it's a choice and we just choose to go without. So when I say a privileged position it's a choice to also go without (Marie).

Emily credits the way her three children have developed to her having stayed home. And although she is very clear that this was a privileged position to be in, she also spoke

of the cost.   For her and her husband financial readjustments were required when her earnings ceased and she remembers it having been a 'struggle':

Definitely a privilege. Definitely. To be able to be in a financial position to have stopped work. It was a struggle, especially when I first stopped. A big struggle going from two salaries to one. So - but I think it's just been very important and definitely worthwhile [] I think - I don't know how it would've been had I done it the other way. But I just look at the way the three children have - are turning out. I've got my eldest who is at university, who - they're not taking drugs, they're hard workers. Both the boys are working, they're both studying. [Daughter's] *just doing beautifully. So whatever I've done I feel that I've done it right* (Emily).

Margaret spoke about feeling lucky and privileged to have been able to stay home, but also acknowledges that for her it has not always been easy and at times she does get taken for granted:

I feel so - I really do feel so privileged. I can't say it's always been very easy, let me tell you. I reckon a hell of a lot of times it would be lot easier to walk out of the door every day and say 'I'm going to work, I'm not here'. But I do feel very lucky to have had this sort of middle time that I've had with them and in a way I won't be sad that school ends because I'm a bit over school now and feel as though I've been there for so long. But I will be sad when umm, when they not necessarily leave but when their lives change. Umm, yes, so I do, I feel very lucky - get taken for granted a lot of times but we're really lucky as well (Margaret).

Helen feels she has made a great contribution to her children's lives and attributes the great relationship she has with them to her having stayed home.   But she also remembers feeling devalued and disempowered when entering SAHM-hood:

*I just have the greatest relationship with all three of them (*the children*) and certainly have gratitude on that level. I think I've contributed a lot to their lives by staying home. I think I felt quite depressed through a lot of the early years. I guess because I wasn't happy or felt valued or empowered* (Helen).

5.2.3 Selves as active women

In this category I highlight the activities that SAHMs spoke about having involvement in, aside from their role of mother within the family unit and in the public domain. Two types of activities emerged from the narratives. Outside the home activities are identified between activities they take part in for themselves, and activities they engage in for the benefit of others. Secondly, income generating activities are also shown.

5.2.3.1   Activities for selves

The narratives highlight the many and varied activities participants are involved in for their ongoing personal development or pleasure. These women are all engaged in educational, interest, artistic or well-being pursuits, independent of their roles as mothers or wives.

SAHM	Activities for selves
Bev	Visual arts; Vocational study, Fitness programme
Marie	Academic study, Visual art, Performing arts, Languages
Louise	Writing – published numerous books; Fitness programme
Belle	Visual & Performing arts, Languages; Fitness programme
Liz	Vocational study; Fitness programme
Margaret	Vocational study; Visual arts, Fitness programme
Trixie	Academic science studies; Writing a book, Fitness programme
Joan	Languages, Vocational study; Fitness programme
Donna	Fitness programme; Vocational study
Darcy	Academic study, Vocational study; Fitness programme
Kat	Performing arts, Languages; Fitness programme
Ita	Performing arts; musicology studies
Emma	Research; Writing non-fiction book
Jean	Academic study, Vocational study; Fitness
Sandra	Languages; Fitness programme
Angela	Vocational study; Fitness programme
Pieta	Academic study; Languages, Fitness programme
Helen	Visual arts, Vocational study
Alex	Vocational study; fitness
Emily	Academic study; Fitness programme, Language

Figure 5.2: Engagement in activities for personal development and/or pleasure

The majority of SAHMs reported being involved in regular or structured fitness programmes with one participant (Darcy) having pursued her interest in her specialist discipline to senior instructor accreditation. Three quarters of the women spoke on the relevance of health and fitness at this stage of their lives:

There's also the maintenance side - the body maintenance - exercise and all that stuff - to keep healthy. If you're not healthy the family falls apart (laugh), (Bev).

I'm doing my golf and the tennis and gym and all those sorts of things (Sandra).

As listed in Figure 5.2 above, six of the participants also spoke of their active involvement in enhancing or maintaining proficiency in foreign languages:

I'm doing two classes of French a week (Sandra).

In the area of Arts, four are actively involved in music or dance performance and five women actively pursue visual art practices. Additionally, two other SAHMs spoke about their long term involvement in arts related developmental courses through the Art Gallery of NSW. The majority of the women pursue more than one interest as can be seen in Fig 5.2 and as exemplified by Kat's statement:

I have been doing the public education programme out of the art gallery of New South Wales for years because I would actually like to know enough about the visual arts that I would be a guide. [] I'm in a conversation group [] We have brunch and we just speak in Italian. We take turns presenting a philosophical or political or personal topic in Italian. I've got that and I've got my dancing and I'm thinking I've got all these things in my life which are really unreal. Now if I was working full-time I couldn't do any of those things. I'd just be doing the work life balance. Just. (Kat).

Another six participants spoke of tertiary studies they are currently undertaking or have completed during their SAHM-hood:

With my PhD and M Litt [] degrees I decided that I was just going to do whatever interested me – there was no job in mind at the end of it, yeah (Marie).

As Marie notes above, it is interesting to note that the majority of the structured learning these women have taken part in has been for interest and personal development and not necessarily with a view to specific future employment opportunities. Emily's story is similar to Marie's in describing her reasons for undertaking further study. For her yes, there were considerations of future employment "*maybe*", but the main reason was to engage her mind:

One reason was for future employment, maybe – a big maybe. But the main reason was because I felt that I was just losing - I felt that I needed to do something cognitively. I needed to do something to keep my brain alive and active and make me a little bit more interesting (Emily).

These women saw studying as an activity that could be engaged in whilst still carrying out their care responsibilities. For example Marie (above) completed both her post graduate degrees whilst home schooling her three children to university level. Pieta (below) began her law degree when her youngest child was in senior primary school and emphasizes that her own studies were secondary to the caring of her children:

Did the law degree part-time, always taking into account school pickup times, what subject could I do that would fit into a summer school subject or something like that.[Laughs] All that kind of thing. So a lot of my study was again taken as a second priority to being a mother and caring for the children (Pieta).

Three of the women reported being involved in authoring books and one SAHM (Louise) was due to release her third novel at the time of interview. One other SAHM (Trixie) considers herself a self-taught and keen scientist. An interest that she reports extends to her volunteering activities with science related national organisations.

5.2.3.2   Activities for others

As well as engaging in activities for self-development and interest, all SAHMs report being involved in volunteering with varying levels of commitment. These volunteering activities are summarized in Figure 5.3 below and are carried out in a range of community groups and charity organisations and/or the various schools SAHMs' children attend.

All the women have been involved in multiple volunteer activities. The majority have also been committed to at least one on-going volunteer activity over a number of years. Examples of these long term commitments are: Margaret spending 11 years in Literacy work; Marie 15 plus years in community journalism; Joan 10 years as a Board director; Jean 8 years in grief counseling, and a further 10 years with another agency/centre; Trixie 15 years in anti-human trafficking efforts; Sandra 7 years on a current Board; Alex 7 years administering a literacy programme; and Emily who has worked for 5 years with at-risk-children in an orphanage.

SAHM	For others
Bev	Disadvantaged women's org;
	Schools – social justice campaigns; fundraising
Marie	Journalist & Editor national community paper
	Various music related orgs - management, teaching & fundraising
Louise	O/s NFP social justice projects – pro bono law, activist & major fundraiser
	Schools – fundraising
Belle	Schools – organising & fundraising;
	Performing Art institution
Liz	Schools – organising & fundraising
Margaret	Literacy/teaching work; fund raising; community support groups
Trixie	Major fundraising events – o/s human trafficking
	Major senior citizens event organizer.
	National Conference organiser (science related)
Joan	Board chair & various directorships
	Project management – multi-million dollar building works
Donna	Schools – event organising & fundraising
Darcy	Schools – organising & fundraising;
	Managing numerous sport teams
Kat	Board directorship science research focus; pro bono lawyer;
	Disadvantaged women's org;
	Schools - choreography; various school committees
Ita	Major organising & fundraising for war torn country
	Trains/leads community choirs; major school fundraising organising
Emma	Schools – organising & fundraising
	Lobbying & PR – government & media
Jean	Various Psychological & grief counseling groups – (founder & active counsellor of one such group)
Sandra	Board directorship; pro bono accounting
	Schools – organising & fundraising
Angela	Schools – fundraising & various committees
	Women's refuge – pro bono accounting
Pieta	Schools – fundraising; event organising
	Teacher assistant
Helen	Relationship counseling; financial counseling;
	Major community conference/event organiser
Alex	Coordination & lead of major fundraising & literacy events
Emily	Working with at risk children & families in an orphanage
	Schools – organising & fundraising

Figure 5.3: SAHMs' volunteer or pro bono role involvement

The narratives highlight a general sense of busyness, engagement as well as ongoing involvement in school based events and all report having volunteered at their children schools at various times during SAHM-hood:

> *Rarely do I sit down [] keeping the home, keeping the family together and running; and some volunteering.[] For my son's school I do - I'm quite involved [] there's usually something coming up that I will volunteer for to help out. So I'm quite hands on at* [school name] *[] All those things are time consuming [] the volunteering activities do take up quite an amount of time [] last week I spent every day from 9:30 to 1:30 organising the boxes for* [school name] *garden day. This week I'll be going [] on Thursday to do the pricing and then I have to do collections on Friday* (Donna).

> *Always organising and arranging things. Manager for the soccer teams, I took over the book club, at the school for a few years* (Darcy).

Demonstrating to their children an active engagement in meaningful and rewarding pursuits in was also seen as important by many SAHMs.

> *It's important for the kids to see me doing stuff for me that's not going to the beautician and what have you. Yeah, you know what I mean? Stuff where I'm contributing to society, using my intellectual capital, my background* (Kat).

The majority of SAHMs spoke about the importance of volunteering at schools or being involved at some level. It is interesting to note that for a number of SAHMs volunteering at schools appears to be motivated by different reasons than volunteering for other community activities. In these cases volunteering at schools offers an entrée or a means of connecting or keeping tabs on their children's institutional environments:

> [Volunteering at schools] *does help understand what is going on at the school which helps you understand the environment that the kids are in* (Pieta).

Additionally for some SAHMs it is an opportunity for children to see the mother's involvement and interest in their educational environment:

> *I wanted my kids to see me there…and, and just put value in their education, value in their school* (Joan).

> *I think I have been involved in their school activities quite a bit. I am very selective about what I do and I do it for the kids* (Belle).

Aside from school based activities, the ongoing nature of volunteer work done for community groups is also stressed in the narratives:

> I *write regularly for the (*community group*) national newspaper - columnist, a feature writer. In terms of honorary stuff we've done a lot in terms of the* (organisation name) *Community and a lot - a huge amount gets done for the* (name of) *Association that the kids and I don't get paid for* (Marie).

A number of the SAHMs commented that the impetus for becoming involved in volunteering was the need for stimulation and the wish to develop an interest outside the home:

> *I needed the mental stimulation. So that's why I got…I got involved on the Board…and umm…as time went on I just got involved more and more and at senior levels at the* [organisation] *I suppose …and because I found it interesting* (Joan).

For others, it was an awareness that being in a privileged socio-economic situation and having a sense of civic responsibility, they wished to contribute to meaningful projects

> *Various charitable things []so it might be as part of a social justice team at school organizing different functions, either to raise money or to just - to raise awareness of social justice for example* (Bev).

Twelve hours a week. One and a half days a week [] working with families at risk, drug addictions, alcohol, domestic violence, autistic children, cerebral - some cerebral palsy [] it's really, really interesting. But that's - it's a home for children. They have an orphanage and there's other stuff (Emily).

Many of the women spoke of the real enjoyment or sense of satisfaction they derive not only from being able to engage in volunteering, but from the volunteer work itself:

I add a bit value up the road at [school name] *doing literacy work with the boys - for eleven years now - but it's more about me having a bit of fun really with a group of kids.(laugh) it's fab, I love it, fabulous stuff. [] the boys love it you know. It's a bit of a treat really [] They get a break from their teacher [] I really enjoy umm … I enjoy the freedom of being able to do that and the other sorts of volunteering type stuff that I do now, of helping people who I consider to be… umm…needy and that doesn't necessarily mean financially needy - but needing help* (Margaret).

A number of SAHMs spoke of applying skills they would have used in previous careers, to their volunteer roles. Many are involved at influential or senior levels in charities and NFP organisations. Some of these women are holding executive, board or committee positions; others are mobilizing and managing volunteer staff (in a couple of cases 100 plus); others are liaising with suppliers, professional organisations, the media or government personnel:

When I gave up work, I was able to still do all the things I used to do at work but do them for free for other organizations. [] some things I started out myself, some things I pioneered are still being successfully run. We contacted the local Council [] we thought we'd go and ask what the community actually needed. I organized through a group of umm, like-minded people - and I ran I, and ran it very successfully - I organized to get transport, go and collect these elderly people, give them lunch and some form of entertainment. [] And every month we would do it, and then we'd take them home. [] And as the years clipped by [] Council started giving us a grant, to help to pay for some of it because it was

very popular. And Council saw how popular it was and how well it worked and they ended up wanting to do it weekly and we gave it to them, and now they do it twice weekly. [] it was such a valuable thing to do that, people that came, they - it was like the – the - for many of them it was the - the highlight their month. [] month in and month out and they formed relationships with my helpers, with me and with the other people that they were eating with (Trixie).

Being able to use already held professional skills in an unpressured environment was reported as valuable by some of the participants:

*I started getting more involved at (*organization*) and I joined the board down there [] I've been on it for seven years [] in a voluntary role even though there were things that needed to be done, the pressure's not as great as it would be in a paid environment. That works really well I thought, for us* (Sandra).

All SAHMs speak of contributing in some way to fund raising activities, particularly in schools. A number of them have additionally been responsible for initiating and organising events that generate substantial funds for charities they are involved with. In organising these events, the women not only raise significant dollar amounts, but also mobilise, rally and manage large numbers of volunteer staff:

There has been a lot of involvement in a lot of different charity stuff. Recently, with the [group name] *my husband's President of, I had a huge dinner dance with 350 people - targeted to raise $25,000, we ended up raising some $37,000 - to support charities in* [o/s country] *because there the war has left a lot of people homeless and limbless. Also I've just had a dinner, for 70 people in my garden and basically we did a bit of a slide show on the history of* [o/s country], *the war, both sides, and people just gave money, $4000 on top of the dinner price… they all had a really good night. I got an email saying, 'can you please organise another one'…they really appreciated that and said 'it was not just a dinner, it was something - we learned something, we had fun and the food was different'. So yeah, it gives you confidence to do something else* (Ita).

Like Ita, a number of SAHMs spoke of actively supporting and fund raising for social justice causes in overseas countries. Trixie is passionate about ending human trafficking and uses her corporate skills and experience to organise functions and volunteer staff to run events for '100s of people':

> *When I was lecturing in* [o/s country] *I met a woman. [] The organization that she runs is, umm, rescues children, who have been umm, taken from their families and put into enforced prostitution in* [o/s capital]. *She would go in, rescue these kids with the - sometimes with the cooperation of the law [] and try to rehabilitate them or help them to recover from illnesses or comfort them till they died from aids or - her life constantly threatened. [] The thing that slows these people down, these amazing people who are willing to risk their lives - is money. To me it's the most ridiculous thing. And so it's always been a passion of mine to fund raise for people like that. People who are willing to give their lives - something so significant, but they don't have the money. And I know that's something I can do. I'm not willing to go into some hell hole in* [o/s capital] *and rescue a child and then watch that child die up North in peace. I'm - I'm not built for that. But I can fund raise. And so, for instance, I've organized huge, like jazz nights with big bands and smaller ensembles; suppers like jazz suppers - I'm talking like 100's of people. Where people pay, to come and watch that, and be a part of that - and then, obviously make further donations to, umm, to support people like her - to make an impact on human trafficking. Slavery today is much more umm, prevalent numerically than it was, in the 1800s or in the 1700s and so I'm [] – so- stuff like that - I can organize. I am good at organizing and I can always organize to get volunteers to come and help* (Trixie).

Louise on the other hand claims that 'fundraising and glamming up' are two things she does well and uses her public speaking and diplomacy skills as well as her 'extraordinary system of networks' to drive her involvement in charitable work and raise thousands of dollars:

I actually ended up getting heavily involved in the community and I became the president of the Australian and New Zealand women's association in [o/s city]. I ran functions to raise money for charity. We had meetings, we'd publish a magazine every month. We had a huge amount of things to do, it meant a lot of speech making and sitting at formal dinners and sitting next to the minister for transport or whatever, so that was a lot of glamming up darling, I do glam well, But whilst it was entertainment and stuff, its whole basis was raising money for charity. [When] *I was President we raised more money than they ever had in their lives because I sweet talked the head of* [Name of Airline] *into giving us an x dollar donation on every* [Name of Airline] *ticket sold in* [o/s country]. *We blew the computer up actually.* (laugh). *He told me later, he rang me up and told me it was all my fault that I'd crashed the entire computer system because the amount of money that came across was so massive that it had been chaos.[] Fund raising and glamming up go hand in hand because you make speeches, make sure that you thank all the right sponsors, do your barrel girl impersonation and give awards for people for contributing to the society and you rely heavily on an extraordinary system of networks* (Louise).

In talking about the activities SAHMs take part in for the benefit of others, it is clear from their narratives that alongside their mothering, these participants perceive themselves to be very engaged women with a keen sense of community and social responsibility who actively practice a broad range of management and business skills.

5.2.4 Money matters - Selves and Financial considerations

5.2.4.1 Finances and choice

All participants acknowledge that loss of personal income when exiting their careers contributed to changes in perceptions of self and identity but also enabled them to become full time mothers. Many of the SAHMs also report that financial considerations were major influences in their ability to choose to mother full time. The majority frame this choice as an overall state of privilege - at being able to financially be in a position where they do not need to generate a personal income:

I certainly feel very privileged to be able to afford to do what I have done - to stay home (Margaret).

I am fortunate that I am not under financial pressure to work (Liz).

If you've got somebody, firstly who is capable of financially supporting you – wow - that in my case meant I did not work at all [] I'm really, really blessed (Trixie).

Some participants report that they and their husbands had actively positioned themselves financially at the onset of parenthood, through joint earnings and savings:

Fortunately for us also - that I had that choice to make [] from a financial perspective, yeah. Partly because we'd both been living and earning money in [overseas region]. *So we came back quite comfortably set up. So I had that option umm to stay at home and not have the financial imperative to have to go back to work* (Joan).

Or additionally, others prepared through payment of major expenses prior to children, and through forward planning and budgeting:

We both worked very hard to pay off our first house and we did it to the point where we knew that [] we could live on one salary. We planned all of our finances for the next 20 years on that fact - that it was going to be one salary and have lived accordingly (Alex).

5.2.4.2   Considerations on Earnings

At the onset of SAHM-hood some of the participants were influenced in their decision to exit their employment through a comparison between their own projected earning capacities against their husbands'. As Trixie's story so clearly illustrates, her husband earned in one month what she was earning in one year:

(Husband) *was made an associate and he earned more in a month than I earned in a year. It was just stupid for me to get out of bed and go to work. For 20 days of work… he…the money I brought into our family in one year was less than he made in a month. I really had the ultimate choice then. I was allowed to say to myself, even though I enjoyed my job, and I really did, 'do I really want to have to get up every morning and do this job? Do I really want to have to do what other people want me to do?' [] Because the money became irrelevant and umm, I decided no, I don't want to have to do* (Trixie).

This great disparity in earnings between the women and their spouses made the decision to stay home to mother "easy" for some of the SAHMs:

From our point of view… I was never in a career that was going to earn mega bucks. I was always going to be earning significantly less than he is…so that made the decision in some ways easy. If I'd been in a career, that's the same … where I had the same earning potential… I think that would have made it a lot, lot more difficult (Liz).

Some SAHMs report that the choice to continue to care for their children into teenage-hood has been influenced by other types of financial considerations such as what they believe they would potentially earn on re-entry now, compared to the cost of replacing themselves with external carers:

For the amount of children we have I'd have to be earning 200 to 250,000 to make it worthwhile. [] You go back and all they are offering is $15 to $20 or $25 an hour - it's not worth your while. You might as well not get out of bed because it's not worth your while. By the time you've got the kids out the door, organised child care, holiday care, holiday camps, really it's just to break even and all you are doing is stimulating your mind. You might as well go do some charity work (Angela).

Some SAHMs spoke of their belief that in addition to the dollar cost of replacing themselves there is an accompanying emotional cost to the children:

To return to work - it wouldn't work for me with the type of job my husband has, because I would really have to replace myself and the children would suffer, so I'm prepared to step back now (Emma).

Some of the SAHMs report that if they were to re-enter paid employment now and not replace themselves, then they would wish to work only during school terms and school hours so that they could continue to be at home when their children are. These SAHMs believe that only basic and poorly paid administrative jobs could accommodate such conditions. This is exemplified by Darcy's experience when she briefly re-engaged with paid employment:

My friend runs a recruitment firm. [] She had a one month contract [] basically data entry. I was only working part time, so 16 hours a week within school hours [] I was being paid about $17 an hour which is crap. We were casuals, so we had no anything, no holiday pay, no sick leave, no nothing. So the advantage was, I could get up and go, I just didn't get paid, so no big deal. [] I wasn't stuck. But every woman in that office was university qualified and earning $17 an hour for basically running that business. It's just shocking, pitiful [] If you consider that using my hobby, I can teach a [activity type] *class at home and I can earn $200 plus an hour, it sort of makes your $17 an hour look like zero, why would you bother?* (Darcy).

This view of school-hour-friendly-jobs is held by all the SAHMs that have at different times contemplated taking on part time employment. Like Margaret states, they cannot reconcile the projected income and working conditions against their perception of their own 'potential':

Why would I want a $35,000 a year job when I know what my potential is? (Margaret).

5.2.4.3   Dependence vs independence

The issues of financial independence, or of dependence on a partner's income were discussed by all participants.   Two SAHMs spoke of being totally, financially independent, that is they have their own personal money:

> *I have my own money I actually am pretty financially secure. I have a lot of money in the bank really, compared to most people so [] so I don't particularly need to work* (Louise).

> *I really feel as though, that I am incredibly lucky. I have enough stuff, [] I don't really need any more. I feel as I though I'm you know, very comfortable* (Margaret).

The majority of SAHMs spoke of having relationships with their husbands where the work of one compliments the work of the other. However. it was noted in a number of narratives that some SAHMs are very aware of their financial dependence on their partners, and as Trixie notes below, even though SAHM-hood is part of a familial partnership, the *"money comes from his work":*

> *I'm at that stage of my life now - I'm actually probably feeling this a bit more - that idea of that… of being financially dependent. And when you get to this age and the idea of maybe getting back into the work force isn't – like you know it's not going to happen - and how dependent you are for finances. Like the true rubber hits the road, knowledge that – right, if I had to be financially independent now - could I be? - without taking everything he has?* (laughter) *financial independence for me it's not just about the security of food and clothing and shelter and being able to do what I want. What I am really noticing now is I wish I had an independent wealth to gift from [] if I wanted to really give significantly to* (organisation) *to have the ability to do that without having to discuss it first [] maybe that's not fair because I know that if* (husband) *wanted to give some significant amount of money to something, he'd ask me first. It is a partnership, but the truth is that the money comes from his work, not from mine and, and I would love to have money that came from mine* (Trixie).

5.2.4.4 Income generators

Every single participant in this study considers herself a stay at home mother and sees herself as having exited her career. Nonetheless, eight of the participants have generated some small earnings during their SAHM-hood, some due to the sense of dependence noted previously. Two of the SAHMs engaged in temporary paid activities marginally related to their professions at the onset of motherhood (Liz and Angela); one through an existing hobby (Darcy), one through interests and a scholarship (Marie); two of them through volunteer work that has at times been paid (Helen and Emily); one who took up a clerical part time role exclusively to pay for a specific expense (Belle):

> *I generated some income working at home. I taught piano at home for 13 years while still home schooling the kids and then I won a scholarship to do a PhD so I decided to just do that so I didn't go back to teaching* (Marie).

These income generators have been casual, part time, ad hoc or short term and SAHMs speak of their earnings more as spending money rather than income. The exception is Pieta, who at the time of interview was about to begin part time employment (preparing for an imminent divorce) in a field she retrained in during SAHM-hood.

5.3   SAHMs talking about their families

In the second thematic grouping SAHMs share their experiences within the family context and speak about children and partners. Specifically they talk about 'how' they practice as mothers, their involvement in children's activities; the exigencies of teenagers; and the impact of spouses' careers and activities on their own as well as family life.

5.3.1   About the Children …

The demographic details garnered from the narratives show that all SAHMs currently have dependent teenage children living at home. Three SAHMs also have a child in senior primary school (Joan, Emma and Angela) and 9 SAHMs also have young adult

children who are now studying at tertiary institutions. Three children from this group of 9 are currently living away at university (Pieta, Helen and Alex).

9 participants have two children each, 10 participants have three children and one participant has four children. Additionally two women have adult stepchildren, whom they have cared for in the past (Helen) and now (Belle).

SAHMs children's ages range from 11 years through to 23 years and the approximate average age of the children still living in the parental home is 16 years old. All SAHMs have at least one child aged between 15 and 18 years old.

SAHM ID	# of children	Ages of Children
Bev	2	14 & 17
Marie	3	19, 22, 24
Louise	3	14, 16, 18
Belle	3 (& 1 stepson)	13, 13, 16 and 24 (stepson live-in)
Liz	2	14, 16
Margaret	3	18, 19, 21
Trixie	2	17 & 21
Joan	3	12, 15 & 17
Donna	2	13, 15
Darcy	2	17, 19
Kat	2	15 & 18
Ita	2	15, 18
Emma	2	12, 15
Jean	3	14, 16, 19
Sandra	2	13 & 15
Angela	4	11, 14, 16 & 18
Pieta	3	15, 18 & 18 (1 away at university)
Helen	3 (& 3 stepchildren now not at home)	16, 20 & 22 (1 away at university) and 31, 32 & 34
Alex	3	15, 17, 19 (1 away at university)
Emily	3	14, 18, 21

Figure 5.4: The number of children SAHMs have and their ages

5.3.1.1   On general child rearing and mothering

The narrative data highlights the mothers' aspirations and attitudes to raising their children and demonstrate a conscious awareness of being key influences in their

children's development. Active engagement in various child related activities was reported as being very important by this group of SAHMs:

I am the one that can have the biggest effect on my children (Joan).

SAHMs speak of their expectations of raising '*well adjusted*' (Kat) '*independent and confident*' (Bev) '*decent human beings*' (Joan) and choosing to be at home was seen as instrumental in facilitating a certain manner of bringing up those children and enabling the pursuit of extension or developmental activities.

One of the reasons we decided that I would stay at home was so there would always be somebody home for them when they got home from school or they could be picked up and taken to activities or whatever – that was really important to us [] The other reason, what I consider to be my primary and most important role is the - is the bringing up of the children - in the right way to make them independent and confident and strong and able to stand on their own 2 feet morally and physically. And I need to be around to achieve that. I think that is what I consider to be my role. I guess to send them out into the world with a strong set of values and strong sense of self (Bev).

A few of the women spoke of an additional sense of social responsibility in raising their children, where success is not solely defined as achievements for the benefit of the individual child:

I understood the role of raising good kids. No one has to convince me about that. I actually thought it was my obligation as a citizen to raise well-adjusted kids, kids who could actually put into this community something meaningful when they left school. That I understood and I have no chip on my shoulder about that and the decision to leave the work force (Kat).

This sense of social responsibility or awareness appears to also be reflected in what the women wish to impart to their children:

We read the papers and we talk about communities and how that you are not just a person that you are a part of various other communities and that you have a role, that you are a citizen of this house, that you're a citizen of the school but you are a citizen of the world and that there are different things that are expected from you in each of those areas and different behaviours - you are not to behave at school in a way that you don't at home or vice versa. So I don't know. I think I go for the well-rounded… people of the world stuff… that's what I hope that I impart to my children (Louise).

All SAHMs report being very aware of their socio-economically privileged position and a number of the women spoke of the need to teach their children concepts such as gratitude and appreciation for the kind of life they lead:

I think the children need to know that actually it's not a bed of roses, they're not owed anything in particular and that there's a very tall order for knights in shining armour in the North Shore. [] I think that they need to understand that they're in a very privileged situation and not take it for granted [] and I want them to enjoy the fact that they can make an effort and achieve something. I find it very loathsome this expectation that mummy and daddy are just going to buy me a bespoke BMW when I turn 18 and buy my house and all this sort of rubbish (Emma).

Many also spoke of their concerns over prevalent cultural values of narcissism and entitlement that they believe children are over exposed to:

I am very afraid of them becoming precocious or feeling entitled to things and being, you know rabid consumers of everything [] I just try to make the kids, you know…appreciate what they have and that it's all relative. There is always going to be somebody who has a bigger house and better this and a better that and I want them to be happy with what they've got (Belle).

5.3.1.2   On School work and Education

Every one of the SAHMs interviewed declared that their children's education is extremely important to them.   They spoke about the importance of the structured education their children receive and their personal involvement and input in not only supporting and facilitating but also extending that process of education.   Aside of the SAHMs volunteering activities in schools previously discussed the data points to two other main areas of mother's involvement in their children's education: supporting and monitoring the actual school work, and facilitating extra-curricular activities.

Mothers' expectations of their children's education appear closely aligned to the type of schools and style of formal education they chose for their children.   According to the narratives, 18 SAHMs chose private schools for their children, one SAHM (Marie) chose to home school her three children and continues to do so at university post graduate and research levels; and one SAHM chose a performing arts school and academically selective State schools for her children (Helen).

SAHM	Children ages	Education type	Main Extra-Curricular learning & formal participation
Bev	14 & 17	Private	Music, Sport (1 semi-professional)
Marie	19, 22, 24	Home schooled	Music very high levels (2 teacher qualified), Sport – 3 black belts & instructors, performance, literary pursuits, community work
Louise	14, 16, 18	Private	Music, sport
Belle	13, 13, 16	Private	Dance high level; performance
Liz	14, 16	Private	Music
Margaret	18, 19, 21	Private	Music, sport, community work
Trixie	17 & 21	Private	Music very high levels (1 teacher qualified) performance, community work
Joan	12, 15 & 17	Private	Music, sport – state representative
Donna	13, 15	Private	Sport, creative
Darcy	17, 19	Private	Music; Sport, (1 now semi-professional)
Kat	15 & 18	Private	Music, dance, sport
Ita	15, 18	Private	Music very high levels (1 teacher qualified), performance, community work, sport
Emma	12, 15	Private	Music, sport
Jean	14, 16, 19	Private	Music, sport
Sandra	13 & 15	Private	Music, sport
Angela	11, 14, 16 & 18	Private	Sport – 1 at state & 1 at national representative levels
Pieta	15, 18 & 18	Private	Music, sport
Helen	16, 20 & 22	Selective & Performing Arts	Music high levels, drama
Alex	15, 17, 19	Private	Representative Sport, Flying – 1 qualified pilot
Emily	14, 18, 21	Private	Sport, creative & design

Figure 5.5: Cohort children - ages, schooling type & extracurricular activities

For most SAHMs, involvement with school education also includes actively demonstrating to their children a general interest in work being done and speaking with the children about that work:

I really enjoy watching my kids go through the process of education. I enjoy talking to them about what they're studying and discussing issues. I think children miss out if they don't have that intellectual input at home (Emma).

Additionally, it involves the close supervision of school assigned home-work and most mothers noted that they have set expectations, or study regimes in place when children arrive home from school:

They come home from school and they sit down and they have their afternoon tea every day and that's where I find out what happened during the day. Homework from that point on [] for example [son has] *a speech exam this week and so everyday we'll - once he's finished his homework he'll recite what he has to know for his speech exam just as a practice - to be there, if I was working he wouldn't have anyone to do that to. It just wouldn't happen, or it would happen too late at night* (Donna).

When they come home, for all those years I've been at home, I just set up a very disciplined homework structure so they just learnt that homework is part of life. They learnt (Angela).

The importance of education is reflected in how the majority of SAHMs spoke of hopes and aspirations they have for their children and expectations of future educational outcomes. A number of participants spoke of the educational background of family members which appear to also influence these mother's expectations. All SAHMs anticipate that their children will attend university:

My biggest aspiration for my three daughters is that they go to University [] You know, my dad is a doctor, my sister is a doctor, she's a [specialist], [husband] *went to Cambridge, he is a lawyer in intellectual property and I think I'd just like them to get a really sound education and speak properly [] For me it's just important that they get a good education[] For me their academic life is really important and I don't want to tire them out I want them to focus on school and study… to have time to be kids and have friends over [] I would like to see them*

just develop their full potential … you know…So I am going to push them a little bit. You know…I supervise homework quite a lot (Belle).

In speaking about educational futures and university some of the narratives highlight the women's awareness of the pressure their children are under. This was evident in how the women spoke about older teenagers, in particular those preparing for the HSC[26] . In particular on the need to not only support their children academically and emotionally through that examination process, but to also manage the stress repercussions on the rest of the family:

The HSC has somehow become now this massive be all and end all of a 17 year olds' life that it does just take over the whole family. Is it because it's the HSC and that they're in these private schools where it is the be all and end all? It's an insane concept [] We're expected to manage the fallout of the HSC on the rest of the family - to still be there, to still cater to their needs, to whatever, but to not allow that stress of theirs to take over everyone else in the house (Darcy).

SAHM's involvement with children's education does not appear to stop once school ends. The mothers with young adult children already studying at tertiary institutions spoke of their continued involvement and active interest in their children's education even when those children are away at university. For example, Darcy's elder son is currently in Europe, Alex's eldest is studying in South Australia and Helen's son is in the ACT. All three mothers maintain interest and input through regular and scheduled Skype appointments with their children and via email:

I'm still involved with the kids at university now [] even this morning for instance, [son] *emailed me an essay that he's been writing on political philosophy.[] I share the interest with him [] What has amazed me is that he kind of now has wings and he's doing this by himself. He doesn't need me to do anything with the essay. But there might be a few grammatical things that I might pick up, but it's kind of just sharing his work and his interest and being there for him still* (Helen).

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[26] Higher School Certificate: undertaken at the conclusion of secondary education and instrumental in University admission

Or as in Marie's case, her university aged children live at home, and she rallies the family to offer practical support and assistance for the eldest child's specific academic project:

> *With* [daughter]*, the PhD she is finishing, everybody's got a job to help her through* (Marie).

5.3.1.3   On Extra-curricular activities

All mothers spoke about actively supporting and encouraging children's involvement in extracurricular activities, outside of regular school environments. These are seen as extensions to children's development and overall education.   All SAHMs' children participate in sporting, cultural and/or creative activities.

An important and time consuming activity reported by this group of mothers is the "taxi" service they provide, that is driving their children to and from schools and other activities.   This taxi-ing is instrumental in their children being able to undertake their extra-curricular, school or social activities:

> *Having three children at three different schools presented quite lot of challenges because you know…you had to…you had to spread yourself quite thinly…even…even just picking them up and dropping them off became you know, became an issue* (Margaret).

For example for the children playing sport as part of private school teams requires that they play 'away matches' for most of the season, with other schools all over northern, central and eastern Sydney as well as The Southern Highlands.   This often requires "*getting up at the crack of dawn*" (Angela).

> *With school sports they have to get to some strange places and that's been interesting having the three of them at three different sports, in three different directions at the same time – that's always fun* (Alex).

Even though the taxi-ing is onerous, many SAHMs spoke of the benefits in being the driver not only for their own children but also their friends. A number of mothers commented on how much valuable information they are privy to, whilst driving their teens and their friends around and how it is an opportunity to get to know their children's friends:

I do all the driving around for my kids and their friends. I got to know their friends' parents because I was available [] Because I knew their parents I was more comfortable letting my kids do things with those friends [] that was important. You get a lot of information driving kids around, I tell you. [] Other people's kids, it's beautiful. Love it. That's where I get all my information, driving [] Hear it all (Emily).

I'd find driving in the car they can't get out, so you find out more about their lives when you are driving in the car in the morning or picking them up in the afternoon. I just found a great connection with the children as I was driving (Angela).

Most of the children are involved in a number of activities and a few participants spoke of the "*craziness*" (Louise) of trying to do too many activities:

We got a bit crazy at one stage where, you know – "you want to do it?" – "we'll do it. I don't care if it's on at the same time as something else – we'll work it out" - we had eight activities on a Friday because I was just determined to be, you know - the Super mum and I don't care that Emma's got ballet practice and Ed's got a piano lesson and Cameron's supposed to be at Chess club all at the same time – we'll manage you know. So worst case scenario was getting them changed in the car, whilst driving from one activity to another. But yeah - that was the day from hell – what was I thinking! and then off at some soccer field at 8.30am for soccer (Louise).

This appears to have been more common in the early teenage years. As children have matured or become more accomplished in a particular activity, the mothers' overall

attitudes appear to lean more towards not *"overscheduling"* (Belle) the children and allowing for kid's *"downtime"* (Bev). Many of the SAHMs spoke of their attempts at finding a balance between encouraging children's involvement in structured activities and allowing for down-time:

> *I believe very, very strongly in not over scheduling children [] I think kids need down time* (Belle).

> *I don't like them to have too many* [activities]. *I like them to have down time because I think kids need to be kids as well and just chill and process any stuff that… they're so stimulated - at school and with everything else outside school, technology and whatever…I believe that they need to have time to just be kids – so I'm not a believer in filling every moment with specific activities… but, we do like them to have opportunity to experience things* (Bev).

However, it appears that in pursuing these structured extra-curricular activities, the majority of SAHMs support or encourage a certain level of competence or excellence in their children. For example, Alex's narrative demonstrates how when her eldest son wanted to learn to fly at age 15, she not only supported but made it possible for him to undertake weekly training at an airport an hours' drive from home. That son is now a qualified pilot and has begun study towards an aeronautical engineering degree at university.

> [Son] *wanted to learn to fly so he had to get out to Bankstown [] So for the first year and a bit I had to drive him out and sit and wait for him - and fingers crossed that he did come back down again - until he got his driver's license* (Alex).

It appears that the number of activities decreases as teens have grown, but the time or commitment spent on retained activities intensifies. This usually involves multiple classes or training sessions a week. For example Belle has three daughters attending four ballet classes a week each:

Lots of ballet - four times a week. They all did ballet from the age of two and they still do, dancing ballet and they are not sporty. They love dance like their mother and they are very arty (Belle).

In Marie's story, she tells of supporting her three children over many years of learning martial arts to advanced levels involving three training sessions a week plus classes where the children themselves are instructing:

My kids always learnt martial arts - to a very advanced level. They are at martial arts three times a week where they [subsequently] - *the 2 eldest did teach for years - so they paid their own fees – they covered their own fees* (Marie).

As mentioned previously, the majority of SAHMs children participate in organised team sport, additionally some are also involved in representative sport. Angela speaks of the immense amount of work involved in supporting two of her four children train with the National [sport type] Team. An activity which involves ten training sessions a week per child, and her daily driving between school and Olympic venue – 25 kilometers apart through peak hour traffic:

[1st son] *got into the Institute of Sport. We went from being a normal family just with school sport a couple of afternoons and on a Saturday morning to, all of a sudden, by the end of the year everything went crazy.* [1st son] *was doing four mornings, five afternoons and most of Saturday with his* [sport type], *then* [2nd son] *was selected as well* (Angela).

Music related activities were reported as being both very important as well as long term pursuits. Fifteen of the SAHMs spoke about their children's extra-curricular musical education and involvement in performance groups, some at exceptionally high levels. These types of activities also require huge amounts of time commitment and dedication from the mothers. Ita's story encapsulates the time commitment required of her when she speaks about her two daughters who are each studying both violin and piano, at very senior levels. For Ita this is a daily nine hour personal commitment to music alone:

[1st daughter] is doing AMusA²⁷ piano and she was doing Grade 8 violin last year. [2nd daughter] is doing Grade 7 violin and Grade 8 piano. They're both high, high level, so it's a matter of pushing and supporting them through all that [] So it takes a lot of energy. So yeah, the Suzuki²⁸ thing is a lot more intensive than other methods [] with musical kids and all the practice required and all their activities. Between 6 and 9 am, you know, I've done three hours of really intensive work. Then between the hours of 3 to 9 on the other side, that's six hours there, I'm really intensive again. So that six and three hours, I've done a nine hour day. In between, yes it's been at a slow pace, but I've still done a job. So I don't know where the 8 hour day comes from (Ita).

It is interesting to note that from the 15 SAHMs who spoke about music education of their children, over half have selected the Suzuki Method of music learning, which as Ita describes above, requires very "intense" input from the mother.

5.3.1.4 On mothering teenagers

All mothers interviewed overwhelmingly concur that "being home", "being there" or "being available" for their children when they get home from school is of great importance and value:

I think the value of being at home – being always there to have time and to listen to them. They always knew I was there and that they could come to me (Angela).

I think there's been a huge benefit in staying home and being there for all my kids but my son in particular who has struggled with Asperger's and getting him through school, full stop. So it was just a massive achievement to actually get him through high school and the HSC. So I had a big commitment to that [] If I wasn't there, he may not have made it through high school (Helen).

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²⁷ The AMusA (Australian Diploma in Music) is considered highly prestigious. It is awarded by the Australian Examinations Board (AMEB) to outstanding candidates in musical performance and music theory.

²⁸ Suzuki Music Method involves a pedagogical triumvirate involving student, teacher and parent. The parent attends all lessons with the music student and additionally sits with the student to monitor and coach through daily practice sessions at home.

The majority of SAHMs report that when viewed retrospectively over their children's development, it has been far more important to be at home for their teenagers than it was when the children were younger:

It's more important to be at home when they're teenagers than when they're little (Emily).

Older kids, they stay up later and their lives are more complicated with friends and school work. So to have a consistent adult here, when they're here - I think is a real benefit, huge benefit to them. My perception is that they do need me here in the way that - it's a real benefit to them that I am (Jean).

Being here when they're older - I think, I really do believe that they are significantly advantaged in terms of [] knowing that there is somebody here for them always [] The number of conversations you have at 3:35 in the afternoon about things that have happened, gone wrong, gone right or whatever (Margaret).

Some SAHMs noted that this is because immediacy was a key need of teens. As Joan's story reflects, when teenagers want to talk or need assistance, they want it straight away:

With the older ones when they want help they want it <u>then</u> and it's got to be something to be taken care of <u>then</u>.[] I've never bought into the concept of quality time, that you can say to a kid: Here's the couple of hours that I'm available umm synchronize yourself with me [] the whole idea that you know, you can set between six and seven at night or something and say – this is our quality time – I just don't buy it. Then that's probably one of the reasons that I've stayed at home as well because I think you've got to be able to react to your child at the time that they need you [] because you help a kid deal with an issue straight away, and they see how to do it, it doesn't build up, you can teach them how to deal with it independently [That's an] *opportunity to learn a new skill there, maybe how to manage a person or situation* (Joan).

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Donna is the only participant that returned to a fulltime senior career after maternity leave whilst her husband took on the reins of the stay at home parent for almost 10 years. She also concurs that it is more important to be home for older rather than younger children, adding that her 'being there' is beneficial to the whole family. In fact Donna felt so strongly on this point that she cites it as being a major reason for her swapping roles with her husband, (him going back to into the workforce and her staying home):

> *I think it's more important to be home now they're older[] As teenagers there's conflict between how much responsibility you should give them and how much they're actually mentally capable of handling. [] If they've got issues during the day and they do want to speak about it, you're there to talk about it. When you're working I think you're so busy just getting the dinner out of the way and the showers, the routines and the necessities, you don't have time to actually be there if they do need to talk and also to guide them. [] for my children I don't want them coming home to an empty home [] I'm sure other people may argue otherwise - but personally I think being here is of benefit to the entire family* (Donna).

The benefits of 'being there' on the family and in particular on the father was noted by some SAHMs:

> *They like me and I think that they like their father because I manage their relationship with him very well as well - and that actually takes some effort and time. [] yeah and I think that umm family harmony, that family dynamic that we've got going - which is a very good one - I think it's because I frankly committed the skills that I have committed to other - my other activities to my family. To the handling of people* (Trixie).

All SAHMs' narratives highlight two salient benefits to being home for teenagers: being able to monitor children's activities and providing opportunities for communication.

The ability to monitor or control to some extent teenagers activities was reported as extremely important by the majority of participants:

> *I keep an eye on the children. I know what's going on* (Emily).

> *If my kids aren't home I need to know exactly where they are, who they're with and I will check up on them and they know I'll check up on them* (Alex).

Most SAHMs spoke positively about their teenagers' behaviour and credit this to the children knowing that their mothers know what is "going on" and are monitoring their social lives:

> *I think it also means I am really lucky - I have really good children, really. [] They are good because I think they know that I am here and I know exactly what's going on, all the time* (Margaret).

This monitoring extends beyond children's individual activities to the friends and networks the children are doing things with. Alex for example refers back to her 'taxi-ing' service as being important not only in enabling her to get to know her children's friends but as a means of controlling outings by having set drop off and pick up times and places:

> *When they want to meet up with friends, I find that I'm usually the one that drives them to and from movies and that, which is good, as I said, I know where they are and who they're with* (Alex).

For others like Pieta, the monitoring is more subtle but it is still important that their children know they are being expected at home and that mothers know what they are doing and who they are with.

> *There's some kind of sounding board for them when they come home from school or wherever they've been, to discuss things if there's something bothering them or whatever. Just knowing that there's someone at home waiting for them I*

think is a good thing. It gives them a sense of security. And I think when you're at home too there's more time to be taken in looking at those things and seeing what friendships they might be making or activities they might be getting involved in as well (Pieta).

Most of the SAHMs spoke of encouraging their children's friendships and many report that one way they monitor these relationships is by actively welcoming those friends to their homes. Pieta describes her home like an 'open house' that her children's friends like to regularly gather at and 'dance in the kitchen' and states:

I like to know what they're doing. I like to know who their friends are and I like them to think that they can all come here. And that would not happen if I was not here for them. [] They have 100 people come over in the afternoon, "Oh so and so can't go home before we have a music concert, so can she come over here and could she have dinner here and whatever" [] Their friends, they know that they can come here [] I think there is a huge advantage in being available for them. [] If you are here you pick up on things "Just let me check again - what was happening here?" So they know that you know. They know you are here, and it's not about fear. It's just about: 'this is what she expects from me. This is how I am expected to behave'. I really think that's a great thing. [] They like the idea that I am here, and that we talk while I make them some toast or whatever. [Daughters'] friends they come over and they will eat and they will cook and they will dance in the kitchen, umm and I feel, I mean, I just think it's so amazing - it's fabulous. There is much more of a closeness. You can develop a much nicer relationship (Pieta).

And Emily expands on this issue of monitoring friendships by adding that she actively develops relationships with her children's friends, to the point where they confide in her or can just 'be themselves' when in her home:

I want my children to know that their friends can come to me, their friends can just be themselves and I think that's really important.[] I want them to feel that I appreciate their friends and that I like their friends (Emily).

All SAHMs concur that teenagers speak little. Many report that their teens grunt a lot or shut themselves away, and that communication occurs at unpredictable moments and requires conscious management. Being 'home', 'there' or 'available' was reported as being crucial to capturing appropriate times to communicate with teens:

I give my children time, and ideas (Louise).

A few SAHMs describe how they set up daily routines that give their teens more focused opportunities to talk. Whether it's over afternoon tea or homework as described previously (under education) or by setting up specific one on one time:

When they're teenagers they go to their rooms and shut the door, I go knock on the room, I go in and I sit down, once a day. "How's it going? You okay?" I check in with each kid on a daily basis just to let them know that they're supported and that I'm here if they need to talk about anything - anything (Jean).

SAHMs concur that their most meaningful conversations with their teenagers occur at unscheduled moments. Emily's words capture the essence of what all the SAHMs addressed: that there is great value in being at home thus enabling those opportunities for mothers to have important conversations with their teenage children and build 'close' relationships:

When they're teenagers they grunt a lot. Every now and then without you even knowing about it, you might just be cooking dinner or whatever, as long as you're in the home, every now and then a child will instantly come out and start talking about something important. [] So you get:

     "Grunt, grunt, and grunt, hey mom, I've got a friend on drugs".
     "Oh? Well we need to talk about that".

So you need to stop everything you're doing and you need to find those moments. If you're not there; you're not going to have those moments. [] There's no predictability in when those moments are going to happen. You know, every now and then they have something important to say and if you're not there,

you're not going to hear it. So I think that's really important. I think it's more important to be at home when they're teenagers than when they're little, to be honest. [] When they're young they get a lot of attention, they get a lot of hugs, they got a lot of kisses, they get a lot of, "aren't you gorgeous?" When they're teenagers, they're not gorgeous, no one wants to hug and kiss a teenager. They're horrible, they're just gross. But it's when - this is when they need their mums the most [] I think building that relationship is very important. It's very, very, important building that close relationship with your teenage children. You're not going to get that if you're at work, you're just not going to. Then you can do all your mundane crappy things during the day but then when they get home from school or uni, that's when you've got to be available (Emily).

As above, Trixie's story mirrors two recurring experiences amongst SAHMs, how simply by being around, teenagers do talk and do not realize they are doing so, and the positive relationships these mothers report having with their children:

Older kids are people who can frankly feed themselves and look after themselves. [] Me being here, I think it means just being interested and aware in them more than, than umm you are in other activities. Putting them first in everything, never saying 'I'm sorry darling, I can't umm, look I'm a bit busy, we can't, I can't talk right now' [] just to be around, just being available really [] you know yourself that they don't want to talk to you but umm (pause) *but because I'm around they're talking and don't realise the extent to which they're doing it. [] I have an exceptionally good relationship with my children. I think that we communicate openly and honestly on basically everything* (Trixie).

As a result of being available, all participants spoke of having 'close' 'open' or 'good' relationships with their children and many like Joan (below) spoke of enjoying their teenage children or their company:

I quite enjoy them now. I quite enjoy their sense of humour and their wit umm…you know, it's really nice - they're independent, individual little adults (Joan).

5.3.2 About the Spouses…

Every SAHM interviewed spoke of her husband's career and the impact it has had on her own career and on family life. The focus of this next section is on highlighting what the SAHMs identified as:

- key characteristics of husband's careers (seniority, hours, travel/postings)
- impact of spouses' career on becoming SAHMs and continuance in the SAHM role
- how SAHMs actively support husband's careers

The first characteristic applicable across the cohort pertains to Seniority. At the time of interview all husbands in the group were reported to be employed in very senior roles, with either national or international scope. Their de-identified roles and industries can be summarised as follows:

Number	Type of Role	Industry Type
2	CEO	Banking; IT
2	Specialist Consultant	Medical
2	Senior Scientist	Medical; Engineering
1	Owner (international scope)	R&D; Philanthropy
2	Owner (national scope)	Property Development; Financial Services
7	Senior Executives/Partners (international/Global scope)	Business; IT; Law; Aviation
4	Senior Executives/Partners (national scope)	Business; Law; Banking; Finance

Figure 5.6: Summary of types of roles and industries of SAHMs' spouses

The seniority and level of responsibility of these roles is further categorized by the amount of hours husbands spend at work. All SAHMs spoke of the very long hours husbands commit to their careers, many of them reporting spouses are working 12 hour days regularly:

He would be gone in the morning before they [the children] *got up and he would come home anywhere between usually seven to midnight* (Jean).

(Husband) was working just ridiculous hours and was barely ever home really [] sometimes he would go to work at a normal time in the morning, 8:30 or 8:00 or whatever and then come home and be on calls literally until 1:00 in the morning. His average working day would have been 12 hours if not longer (Pieta).

It is not only international calls that are taking place late at night; meetings are also being carried out outside regular business hours:

The meetings are held from eight until 11 or 12 at night (Ita).

Additionally, many of the men are working on weekends:

(Husband) was working as a lawyer – very long hours, 12 or more hours a day coming home at 10 o' clock at night. He worked 12 hour days and every weekend (Belle).

And others at unpredictable times throughout the week:

Because my husband is a [industry] *specialist and consultant, he can work any period of time in 24 hours and any time in a seven day week* (Emma).

A third characteristic of these senior positions is the amount of travel undertaken and all spouses travel regularly:

He does have quite a bit of travelling he needs to do, to [country 1 and country 2] *so it's good for him to know I keep things going at home and the girls to know I'm around* (Sandra).

For 19 years [husband's] *job's always been so strange, like he left yesterday, he's going to be gone 8, 9 days and does that every two to three weeks* (Alex).

Three husbands are currently based overseas and commute back to Sydney to see their families (Jean, Pieta, Liz):

[Husband] *accepted a role in* [o/s country] *so he's been commuting from* [o/s country] *for the last, almost, two years, which has been wild. We're not moving there. It's too hard for the kids and he travels a lot out of* [o/s country] *his roles, expertise, his experience has always been in global positions and there's just very few of those positions here in* [industry type] *at his level and he doesn't want to retire yet* (Jean).

Another six husbands have been posted overseas during the years of SAHM-hood (Liz, Joan, Ita, Pieta, Louise, Jean):

You know, we've lived in four different countries (Liz).

5.3.2.1   Influence of spouse career on women becoming SAHMs

There was overwhelming agreement in all the narratives that the initial decision to take on the role of SAHM and in later years the continuance in that role has been heavily influenced by the exigencies, growing responsibilities and seniority of husbands' careers.

Liz's comments mirror those of SAHMs whose husbands have been employed in roles with international or global scopes. She states that when the husband's career requires residency in different countries, it can "decimate" the wife's career:

My husband's career has been central to the choices I've made in my work and as a mother, totally, totally, utterly and absolutely (laughter). I remember grappling with it and I certainly remember feeling a lot of resentment towards my husband about what was happening because I hadn't - and I remember, I distinctly remember saying to him. 'I don't remember choosing this, I don't

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remember agreeing to do this' and he said fairly… I think he said – 'I don't think you ever actually did, but look at the reality of the situation' and you have to acknowledge then that well, it just makes common sense if you sit down and just from a completely - judge it completely objectively, of course it makes sense. There wasn't any other way to do it. [] Now because of his job and because of his career - that I hate so much because it's decimated my career (Laugh) what have we done? We've travelled around the world. [] Is that a trade-off for not having a career? I'm not quite there yet. I can say 'yes look it's been brilliant and I have loved doing it', in an ideal world I would have had both - but then you have to look at it realistically and think – 'could I have done my job changing countries every three years?' No. I couldn't (Liz).

Louise expands on this by explaining that for her, the entrée into SAHM-hood was when she agreed to accompany her husband on an overseas posting of initially three years. The posting turned to 11 years away, a period where all her personal "ideas and plans" had to go "by the wayside" as she played a supporting role for the benefit of her partner's career growth:

I loved him and the only thing he had ever wanted to be was a partner in (Law Firm) *when he was offered a job in* (o/s country) *I made this decision that I could do this for him. It was a three year contract [] I might have been the educated, umm thinking woman in Australia but in (o/s country) where women were second class citizens - all of a sudden I didn't work, I had no importance in the community, I didn't even have an ID card [] you're not who you wanted to be. Any plans or ideas that you've had have all gone by the wayside. You're just the partner of whoever [] he was lauded as an important influential person and I was not. So yeah, that was hard [] So, 11 years later, 3 kids in tow, I come back, without the driver, without the maid without the nanny – and <u>worse</u> buy a gigantic house that fits my husband's status and the lifestyle we were used to - with the lawn tennis court and the pool and the sauna and the 6 bedrooms and 8 toilets - and I hadn't even cleaned my own toilet in 11 years - and I got dumped back into this world* (Louise).

Jean also spent a number of years accompanying her husband on postings to different countries, and now that their three children are in high school she is staying in Australia and (as quoted in the previous page) he has been commuting out of an overseas country for the last two years:

> *So it did impact on my decision to not work. [] If he had been a nine to fiver maybe I would have felt differently but I don't know, because he's never been a nine to fiver* (Jean).

For all the interviewees across the cohort, the initial decision to become a SAHM was made in balancing the needs of family and children with consideration of the characteristics above: the seniority of a husband's role, the hours such roles demand and the geographical locations those roles revolve around:

> *He can manage the stress of his job because I'm here. So if I did what he was doing would he manage? I doubt it [] No.* [Husband] *could not do his job and hours without me being here. I can say that with some pride and honesty* (Kat).

> *The crazy hours, it certainly wasn't very good for family life or marriage or anything. So if you've got three children there has to be some caregiver there and I was it [] I just thought this was a better way of raising a child than having numerous caregivers come in* (Pieta).

5.3.2.2 Supporting the men

All interviewees see themselves as actively supporting their husband's careers. This support is expressed in a number of ways.

From fully managing the home-sphere thus allowing the husbands to focus on career:

> *His focus was on his work and his life was much simpler. He could give that his full attention because I was handling the rest* (Helen).

To managing the father-child relationships:

The children are everything to him and he loves me but the family is the thing for him and the children ... and he... because he has this really high pressure job... it's taken my skill and conscious management, not just sort of subconscious doing things, but actual conscious management of his relationships with the children that's enabled us to stay a close family (Trixie).

To providing practical career support specific to husband's work such as writing his speeches:

I've got very good writing skills and I often write the speeches for my husband. The fact that I do that and that I am here are the only reasons he's able to do that other role of President as well as CEO. [] Now he could not have done that if I was also working. So it's allowed him to grow as a person I feel, and given him a broader set of skills (Ita)

To networking with clients and colleagues:

I have been a huge, economically and in every other way - addendum to (husband)*'s career. Because I do have the skill to - we've had, you know - client building relationship if you like - by me just entertaining in this house - three times a week. And I certainly have the skill and the ability to do that - there was a stage when we were doing a lot with particular clients* (Trixie).

(Husband) *doesn't want me to cut his boss' food but there's some value that I can carry on an intelligent or informed conversation and not embarrass him when he's with his work colleagues or clients* (Jean).

We have to build relationships with his clients. [] I'd be turning up to violin lessons with the girls with a full made up face and heels, so that I could race back and at six o'clock be in a car to go and entertain clients (Ita).

To discussing work issues:

If he is having issues at work he comes home and talks to me about it and I'll be a sounding board so there's a lot of psychological and practical support (Jean).

To general PR and entertaining for the benefit of the husband's role and his firm:

The PR side of his job was my job. I'd go to constant dinner parties and balls and drink way too much alcohol because that was what my life revolved around – entertaining for [international firm] (Louise).

Emma encapsulates the general view of interviewees, that the women in this cohort are not only running 'everything else' to prevent family life from 'falling to pieces' but actively engage in supporting their partners careers.   Additionally all SAHMs are candidly aware of the impact this long term familial and spousal support has had on their own careers and in Emma's words the women "work around it":

For women in this generation where there is so much more pressure on men in those senior roles than there was perhaps in our parents' generation, we have to be fairly strong people prepared to just run everything else, otherwise it just falls to pieces. [Husband] *knows when he comes home that all the other processes, that endless dearth that you continually process, is still happening, that everything else in his life is taken care of. [] Because of the strange hours that are worked in* [industry type] *you either marry someone who does the same thing as you, in which case you're ships in the night and never see each other but you can both project along a career path quite well, though probably divorce at the end, which is what I see, or you have a partner who has some insight into the environment you work in, and I do. A very direct insight, so that allows him to do whatever he has to do and work the hours he needs to work - it's a 20 year time frame before you achieve the* [career type] *role and my husband's been in that position for a long time. Me being at home allows him to develop his business as he sees fit and develop those relationships and work within the politics of all the other institutions he works with. If I wasn't prepared to do that, for a start most of the marriages break up, if the person can't understand the nature of the work and secondly, we are in a financial position that other*

people aren't in because I'm just prepared to let him go. He can earn the
money; I don't complain; I work around it. I am the person who manages the
home and so we're comfortably off because I'm prepared to let him do that
(Emma).

5.4 SAHMs talking about their Skills

The third thematic grouping presents interview data focused on concepts of qualifications, skills and perceptions of competencies.

In Chapter 1 I outlined the characteristics required for participation in this study. There it is noted that a key aim of my study is to investigate professional women and professional work, thus a key requirement of participating SAHMs was that they be tertiary qualified.

The interview data confirms that all women in the cohort did indeed hold tertiary qualifications at the onset of SAHM-hood. This narrative data is presented next in two broad categories: Firstly, qualifications obtained through formal or structured learning and secondly, perceived competencies or skills.

5.4.1 Formal qualifications

5.4.1.1 Pre SAHM-hood

All women in the cohort held formal qualifications at the onset of SAHM-hood. One of the interviewees held tertiary qualifications in performing arts (dance), another, an industry specific Graduate Diploma, and 18 of the women held Bachelor Degrees. Four of these 18 held two degrees each and one of the 18 also held an Associate Diploma. Two others out of the 18 also held Masters Degrees. Two of the degree qualified women additionally held advanced formal qualifications and accreditations in Music.

5.4.1.2   Acquisitions during SAHM-hood

During the SAHM-hood phase seven of the women reported having undertaken formal university studies. One participant has earned a Masters as well as a PhD on full scholarships (Marie), others a Law Degree (Pieta) and a Bachelor of Business (Angela). Two have completed counselling related degrees (Helen and Jean). Two others are part way through a Masters Degree (Darcy) and a degree re-training in special needs Education (Emily).

Most of the participants spoke about other non-university, yet structured developmental learning courses they have attended over their SAHM-hood. 14 of the women undertook courses at TAFEs, community colleges and private colleges in fields as diverse as Visual Arts, alternative health practice, Software/computing, music, various languages, Board management and counselling. A number of the women have become certified practitioners or instructors in their chosen field of activity/interest.

SAHM	Qualification Fields Pre SAHM-hood	Structured Learning since SAHM-hood
Bev	Fine arts/art history	Visual art Software
Marie	-Journalism -Photography	MLit, & PhD Music; Visual art
Louise	-Science (specialised) -Law	Software Fiction Writing
Belle	-Journalism/Communications -Foreign language	Language; Performing art Software
Liz	Science (specialised)	Software Language
Margaret	-Liberal arts & business -Grad Dip Ed	Software Visual Art; Literature
Trixie	Communication & media	Science courses
Joan	-Applied medical science -Computer Science	Board m'ment Language, software
Donna	Finance	Software Design related
Darcy	Science (specialised)	MA – information systems; Software; Wellbeing related instructor training
Kat	-Liberal arts -Law	Language; Performing art; Board M'ment; fine art
Ita	-Commerce & finance -Masters (business)	Choral Music Conducting
Emma	-Applied health science -Communication	Writing
Jean	-Liberal arts -Business	Counselling degree; Philosophy course
Sandra	Business/ Accounting	Not discussed
Angela	-Accounting -Graduate Diploma	B Bus Design related
Pieta	-Liberal arts & Language	Law degree
Helen	Finance	Counselling Degree Visual Art
Alex	-Performing Arts/teaching -Management	Software
Emily	Public Relations	BA –Special Needs Education; Language

Figure 5.7: SAHMs' main areas of structured learning pre and during SAHM-hood.

5.4.2 Perceived skills and competencies

In discussing their perceived skills and expertise, most of the participants emphasized a view of having retained many skills from their exited professions:

> *I'll speak for myself or other friends like me who had a career of some sort. I think that you don't – you don't lose your career skills [] I don't know how you would convince an employer that you know…that we know, we still have those abilities - we just haven't practiced them in the last few years. I don't think that our time out from the workforce takes away anything from our skills* (Belle).

Additionally all SAHMs overwhelmingly believe they have gained or enhanced many business or professional skills over the course of their SAHM-hood. Most SAHMs drew a distinction between their formally acquired credentials and general personal skills and competencies. These have been acquired predominantly from engagement in two areas: the private sphere of home in their role as carers and partners, and in the public sphere in a variety of volunteer roles.

5.4.2.1 As mothers

Participants overwhelmingly concur that in their role of running the family they have enhanced a number of skills. Margaret refers to better general managing and organising skills, two skills addressed by all SAHMs:

> *You know doing the mothering stuff, it seems pretty insignificant really but it's taken up 18 of my years* (Laugh). *If I say this is what I have done over 18 years it actually doesn't seem that much really but in fact I have really been incredible busy for 18 years and it's not busyness for the sake of busyness. It's actually, I feel as though I've been quite productive for 18 years. I've done lots of things umm in 18 years. [] It doesn't look like you've done a lot but, but perhaps you've done more than somebody who has umm sat at an accounts payable desk for 18 years, really. Because perhaps you've had to do more problem solving, more*

organising, more managing and, and I really get quite annoyed (that this is not easily recognised) (Margaret).

Pieta adds that for her to be able to manage the home, the husband's career and her own studies she developed greater time management, multitasking and planning skills:

I think probably time management skills and the ability to multitask on a lot of different things. [] I've completed two degrees on a part-time basis both while I was a parent of three children. So my time management skills are fairly good. So that kind of thing, multitasking and a lot of forward planning too and project management kind of skills [laughs]. *Tenacity in terms of just sticking at something until you're finished. I mean especially doing a law degree part-time because it ends up being so long, five and a half years or something* (Pieta).

And Belle also cites multi-tasking and adds maturity and strong work ethics as important abilities of middle age women

With maturity you gain, diplomatic skills and I think that I am a good communicator. You know I can get an idea across. I like to think that I'm literate I'm good at getting a message across. I think that middle aged women - almost across the board - and I would hire middle aged women - they have a very strong work ethic. [] I think that stay at home mums are the masters of multi-tasking and being efficient, we are managing our own little microcosm in a way. Stay at home mums would be bringing maturity and life experience and not just their past work experience (Belle).

5.4.2.2   As volunteer workers

It was shown in Fig: 5.3 that participants are active and committed volunteers in numerous settings. The narrative data highlights that SAHMs are active in a diverse group of professional networks and business settings. All the women concur that they have learnt much from these activities and the competencies honed from volunteering work fall broadly into people skills or business skills.

The people or interpersonal skills developed are characterized by the diversity of individuals and organisations SAHMs work with. The women are dealing with a range of people, from socio-economically challenged individuals through to politicians and industry leaders:

> *One thing I learnt from being the president of* [volunteer organisation] - *I have no real problem with sitting with prestigious people or whatever, you know - I think my best was being invited to parliament house [] for lunch with John Howard and Kim Beazley and the President of [*o/s country]*. I can certainly do that. I've sat between the ambassador for Eritrea and the ambassador for Lebanon, which was particularly tricky to come up with some luncheon/dinner/ table conversation. But I managed it, we ended up having a meaningful discussion about Russian icons. So there you go, so yes I can talk to anybody. That chameleon like benefit gets me through stuff like that. I can give speeches. I'd rather give a speech and have it done in 15 minutes than work for a year balancing the books* (Louise).

> *Learning to deal with people from different backgrounds, that was really difficult for me because I wasn't highbrow, and sometimes they were all quite wealthy people* (Ita).

The business related skills are characterised by firstly, an ability to organise and secondly, the ability to manage. All interviewees reported a well-developed ability to organise, either groups of people or events, as a key skill. Many acknowledged this is a skill they would have had in previous careers but have further developed during SAHM-hood:

> *A skill that I had at work but I really, really learnt since I left work, paid work, was organizing, helping to organize people. Because in any job, anybody will tell you that everything is great and easy until people get involved* (laugh) *and it's actually, I think - one of the greatest life skills you can have is to manage people [] I can organize large numbers of volunteers to do special things. And the other things is that I can - I can not only just get the people interested, but I can actually organize the big events* (Trixie).

For the women involved on Boards or working committees the acquisition of other business and management skills were noted. These include project management, recruitment and work allocation:

> *I've learnt a lot of things. I feel like I've done a lot of good things particularly in this new building project. I'm chair of the working group so I liaise with the project manager and the architect and the builder and it has just been a fabulous learning experience. Doing things like interviewing and selecting the project managers and architects and things like that. And then working with them to make sure their design actually comes to reality Probably the biggest thing I've learnt is how to manage people better. I've gotten a lot better at instead of asking people just directing people [] and people have said this to me, I'm able to do it in a way that doesn't put people off side so that it makes them feel like it's the right thing to do [] So the managing of people and certainly when you chair the Board of management trying to get them to do their roles. It was a big thing* (Joan).

Others noted their expertise has developed in more functional areas such as marketing, promotions or researching skills:

> *I think volunteering and organizing events does teach you a lot of skills, it was a huge learning curve for me. From people managing to getting sponsorships, ordering things from manufacturers, I'd never done that before, I learnt to use the internet really well, learnt a lot from wholesale how to get things done cheap and yes managing people's time. [] You learn how to deal with all sorts of issues as well, which you would have in a normal corporate environment too* (Ita).

Participants believe they have applied previous business or professional skills to their volunteer activities and all overwhelmingly concur that their skills set has grown throughout SAHM-hood.

5.5 SAHMS talking about their futures

The narrative data shows that there were three points of connection where members of the cohort re-engage with the paid workforce on some level.

It has already been shown that the majority of participants had temporarily returned to their professional roles post maternity leave or during their children's infancies. Some participants experienced a second point of connection when engaging in ad hoc income generating activities predominately in earlier years of SAHM-hood.

In the latter years of SAHM-hood and as children have gained greater independence, all SAHMs are giving consideration to a future third point of connection with the workforce. This is characterized by 1) a diminishing bind from children and their educational schedules and 2) by greater reflection by the women on their personal aspirations post SAHM-hood.

The fourth and final thematic grouping focuses then on the SAHM's views of their possible futures. What emerges from the interview data here are the women's aspirations beyond SAHM-hood; their strategies in preparing for life post SAHM-hood; their perceptions of paid workforce re-integration; and their expectations of an ideal work environment.

5.5.1   Aspirations - shorter term

A uniform belief held by all interviewees was that they currently find themselves at the cusp of change or a point of transition. The women spoke of imminent changes to their roles as full time carers and of the need to find new directions. The salient decision to be made appears to centre around two broad options: to remain involved in activities on the community and private sphere, or to re-engage with the paid workforce at some level.

All participants expressed strong opinions on firstly, possible courses of action to take and secondly the conditions of employment they would wish for and perceptions of employer attitudes they expect to encounter. Trixie's statement illustrates both these

concerns which are reflected across the cohort – what do I want and how will a potential employer value my experiences during motherhood:

> *What do we really want? What <u>do</u> we really want? What are we missing that we really want? The opportunity to go into paid employment again and to be considered seriously for that, even though we're women who have spent a large part of, years, in motherhood? Because in the circles I move in - maybe that's why I choose those circles - I feel people really do value good mothering. It's just people who look to employ you later, don't* (Trixie).

At the time of interview, it was clear that none of the SAHMs considered themselves to be available to fully step into the next phase of their lives. In discussing broad aspirations for the future, the women spoke of two separate time frames. A more immediate, shorter term goal and a longer term option, the first characterized by ongoing studies of the children and the second, by those children completing secondary schooling:

> *I don't want to be a lawyer just now, because it's such a full time job that I just wouldn't be there for the kids* (Louise).

> *At this stage in our life [] to return to work - it wouldn't work for me with the type of job my husband has, because I would really have to replace myself and the children would suffer, so I'm prepared to step back now. I mean, there aren't that many years left and then I'm sure that I will go off and start something else again* (Emma).

What is clear is the women's awareness of imminent change:
- to their current roles and activities

> *It's not easy for me to start getting back into something full on now but I could probably do a couple of days a week at some stage soon. I'll probably leave it another six months, I think, before I start looking around* (Sandra).

- and the possible direction options

> *I could imagine when I'm not feeling this intense responsibility around children, that then I would welcome a paid role in the workplace but I cannot imagine what that would be right now. And I see a future at (*volunteer organization*), for sure. I think I'm going to be one of those long timers there. I can't imagine at this point, stopping it* (Jean).

5.5.2 Aspirations – longer term

All participants were very clear on the types of work conditions they did not want in the future, and the general cohort views are reflected in Angela's statement:

> *I don't want to really take on a senior corporate role, I don't want to work long hours, I don't want to go into the City leaving at six thirty in the morning [] I don't want to spend time doing unproductive things in a difficult environment. It's not worth it* (Angela).

Additionally, none of the women aspire to return to the same career they held at the onset of SAHM-hood:

> *It's not about returning to something, it's about re-entering. And it's just matching, matching what you have, to where you go really. What can I do with it that uses all my skills?* (Liz).

As shown previously, this issue of skill was discussed by all participants and the overall perception across the cohort is that pre-existing skills have been strengthened and new ones learned. SAHMs are incorporating this awareness in their considerations of goals for the future:

> *I am super aware that I have picked up a lot more skills and in different directions, so I'm not going to go back to where I was* (Marie).

Only a small minority of SAHMs are considering future roles in fields somewhat aligned with their previous professions, however, they noted that they would be seeking very different working conditions. Donna's (previously in international shipping/finance) comment illustrates the most aspired for conditions not only in this grouping, but across the whole cohort: shorter hours, reduced working days and contract or consultancy work:

I feel that I need to get back into the workforce and I need a little bit more challenge perhaps So yes, I guess it depends on the role because I wouldn't be probably going back for a senior executive role [] I don't want to be working to all hours. [In] *my previous job, I'd work through to midnight* so *I don't want that anymore, but that goes with the territory in some of these high paying jobs. I don't know if I really want to go back into a senior management role. Do I really want the pressures and the long hours of going back in? Personally I'd love a part-time job in my field [] just three days a week just to keep my mind active and keep my finger in there, but not just any old job. But it - we've done all the study and we're qualified and we've got all this work experience, but it doesn't seem to tie in with part-time roles* (Donna).

A small number of SAHMs' aspirations are motivated by personal interests developed over their SAHM-hood phase.

For example Darcy (previously in science research) wishes to combine her interests in alternative health therapies, teaching and books

If I could get a job now that would be my dream job, it would be to work with books definitely not science, I think I've just passed that. So I guess if I had my dream jobs, it would be to combine my interest in [type of health therapy] *with teaching* [type of health therapy] *and to be a librarian of some description, or in the information arena. I don't think I could work a full time job now, sitting at a desk, staring at a computer screen. I don't know, I don't think I could do that, in an office block, five days a week, eight hours a day plus, whatever* (Darcy).

Ita (previously in top six finance/consulting) would like to combine her own musical training, with what she has learnt over the years of supporting her daughters to high levels of musicianship and performance:

> *The other passion that I do have and this is something that I'm toying with a lot, is to do with music. I often put duets together, or with the choir I enjoy putting things together. But I don't have the qualifications to run a chamber group or anything official. So I'm wondering whether I should go and do something. I need to go and find out what I need to do, because I've already got an ATC, a Trinity College diploma. What would I need to do to make myself marketable to a school, a small school somewhere that I could run a small music programme. Because that's something I'd really love doing* (Ita).

For the majority of participants, their goals are inspired by volunteer work they have undertaken. They wish to incorporate the skills and experiences acquired through volunteer work into future roles.

Some SAHMs have found a new field or direction:

> *Those 10 years in* (o/s country), *where I had volunteer roles that propelled me to the direction I'm taking now, even though I wasn't employed – those roles to me were lovely* (Jean, previously in international banking/finance).

Some, a specific ideal role type:

> *I think my ideal job would be what I've been doing for the last few years, to be given a big mess, have to clean it up, hand it over and go and do something else. Go and find another big mess to clean up, assess what the problem is, do all the research Consult with all of the different stake holders, come up with a solution or position. Then to put the plan into place, teach people how to use the system say goodbye and then it can be somebody else's problem (*Joan, previously a medico/health related practitioner and managing a practice).

Furthermore, in pursuing these new directions many of SAHMs stated that their priority would be to engage in meaningful or satisfying activity and it would be irrelevant whether those future roles were paid or unpaid:

If I'm going back to work, it's got to be meaningful or for fun and my enjoyment. Because from a money point of view and a career point of view, I don't need a career. I just want to do something meaningful (Ita).

Additionally, none of the SAHMs have a preference for full time employment:

*I would actually prefer not to have a paid job and do something I enjoy than getting money because otherwise as far as I can see it's just boring. I've worked too hard doing other stuff for too long to go back to a job that really is just about the money and couldn't be bothered doing it! Because I've you know, I've perhaps I've managed my own time for too long. It would be really hard I think for me to go somewhere and stay there all week for 8 hours a day (laughter) Really I couldn't think of anything worse than doing that. [] I am looking at maybe two years down the track something that I would consider to be a job, would be a real job. Whether it's paid or unpaid umm it would be something that I probably would have to go to every week umm and yeah, and it would, it would be something that was helping somebody who had a need, and probably a child and it probably would involve reading [] Maybe volunteer - maybe paid work. I don't know really. But it doesn't have to be paid work. So there are, I believe there are opportunities. I believe the Exodus Foundation runs a literacy programme for kids, Aboriginal kids I think, umm which is quite an intensive programme. I figure that I could use my skill and my experience in schools generally to help in that sort of thing and I think that I would find that possibly more satisfying than umm having a paid job (*Margaret).

For a number of participants, aspired for future roles would utilise an amalgam of past professional expertise and interests developed whilst mothering:

I know in the next phase of my life that it's going to be more creative rather than [industry type] *because that is inevitably all politics and I'm sick to death of that. I'm much more interested in - in a world which is increasingly all about politics, I'm more interested in the arts, my interest in the arts and my interest in people rather than budgets and dollars. Women probably have an opportunity to work more as a cartel, where they have a mix of skills and they can come in and out, if their family life dictates. I'm interested in people and ideas and putting things together; things like working with groups of women and I see that a lot in my reading of the arts, where people can't afford to do something by themselves, a group of them together, as in artists sometimes forming little co-operatives where they fund a building where they can sell their wares. It's not just their wares, it's their writing and people like designers and interior architects, people coming together working in a different way from working before, because we don't need to work in large scale corporations to make our money anymore. I don't think I'll ever work in that unilateral sense again in that I would work towards one thing. I think the way I would work if I ever do anything when I have the capacity to do that, is that I will be doing a number of things and I will move and shift* (Emma).

Like Emma, a number of SAHMs spoke of the wish to work in collaboration with other women, and in Angela's case, for the benefit of women also:

I would love my own business with like-minded women where one person isn't the boss but you are all - you work together [] *I want to start something. I have so many ideas and so many things that I want to do. I want to start the culture and get it right from the beginning.* [] *I want to help other women get educated, I want to help children be educated. I think education and knowledge is the foundation of anything and that's what I've always wanted to be involved in* (Angela).

Regardless of specific individual aspirations, all SAHMs concur on one point: they are all accepting of their mothering days as coming to an end and all are planning and

visualising their entry into a third phase in life, what Trixie labelled 'career number three':

> *I've gone through two careers: I had my professional career and my child bearing career and now I want career number three. As a little bit of an addition to my ideal job - if it involved collaboration with other women, I would love it* (Trixie).

5.5.3 Preparation strategies

All SAHMs are anticipating entry into a third phase and at time of interview were found to be at varying stages of preparation towards that stage. Most of them have moved beyond broad direction searches and are more focused on how they could activate a shortlisted number of possible options:

> *I think for me before I decided to take the plunge into something called paid work, I would need to bring myself up to speed before I even decided to go through any sort of interview process. There is no way that I would put myself through something that I felt as though I could possibly fail. I wouldn't do it to myself because I think that would be soul destroying. I would feel a need, when I made the decision that I was going to get a paid job, I would do a hell of a lot of research, I'd make a few choices, I'd do some research about what that'd involve. I would find out what I would need to bring myself up to speed on before I went for any interview, apply for any job. If that took a year, I would do that first* (Margaret).

A number of them have been preparing for life post SAHM-hood for some time, through further study that may or may not lead to future engagement with the workforce:

> *Studying has been a really good thing for me because it just got the cogs working in the brain and the synapses connecting, because those synapses were*

purring, big time. Now they're all on fire again and that's really good. So I really feel that that's important for me. Then whether I do something with it or not I don't know, but I don't want to plan too much. I just want to be more of a floater. I want to be – just go with the flow and see what happens (Emily).

For the minority who are considering re-engagement with areas loosely allied to previous professions the salient need noted is the upgrading of specific technical skills:

If I was going back into accounting I would have to update myself on tax law, I'd have to update any changes in corporate law, corporations law. Depending on what I wanted to do, I'd have to go through retraining, for me, I'd have to refresh on all the standards as well, the accounting standards and the international standards (Sandra).

The majority of those already undertaking further education have done so because of interests developed through volunteer or civic pursuits and a wish to solidify or formalize credentials in those areas:

I already had a degree so I don't think getting a qualification was my motivation to do law. It was just the interest in social justice and wanting to do that kind of work eventually as well. And here again it's fitting in the children. I knew that by the time I was qualified [youngest child] *would be more independent. Having a family and the children and their needs to take into account actually directed to a certain extent what area of law I went into. Because even though I had always wanted to do social justice kind of law, community welfare kind of thing, that was always my goal, I also knew that there would probably be opportunities for employment which were a bit more flexible. In community legal centres you're not running six minute time sheets kind of thing like most lawyers do.[] having a family has influenced a lot of things in terms of future work* (Pieta).

Some of the women studying spoke of their active considerations of both their SAHM-hood activities as well as their professional pasts as the springboard from which to prepare for future roles:

I guess the thought was when I started doing the Masters in Information Management that with my science background I could very easily work in like a medical library, or something like that, or a research library, anything like that. So that yes, would still be interesting because I still have an interest obviously in those fields (Darcy).

Most of the participants expressed clarity in what they perceive their options to be, that is directions they would wish to pursue. Most are however, still searching for ways in how they can operationalise those goals:

I actually need to go and speak to a careers consultant or something like that, and try and nut out exactly what it is I can do because I'm not interested in going back to what I used to do. To go and actually speak to someone, I've often thought that's probably going to have to be my first step, somebody to help me work through options and that. Because I know I can do good things you know and I know I'm very capable but, capable of what? I've had a hand in many things and I'm very happy with what the outcome of those has been, but for me it's very hard to articulate what it is, what sort of role I can do now (Joan).

5.5.4 Expected Barriers

All narratives overwhelmingly demonstrate SAHMs views that they expect to encounter a number of barriers when or if seeking re-engagement with the paid professional workforce.

Factors participants referred to as barriers include employer perceptions of competence, age, length of absence from paid employment, and technical expertise as well as the availability of meaningful roles.

A key concern appears to revolve around a perceptual divide between the women's views of their own competence and how they believe their abilities will be gauged by potential employers. All the women expressed a belief of self-competence and well developed skills. However, the barrier appears to exist in the process of transferring that self-belief across to recruiters/employers.

As Margaret states, the barrier is an employer's 'perception' of what she may or may not be capable of:

> *Ok, am I employable? it's a really, really hard question because I know individually, and that - this is one of the reasons why I have not pursued a paid job, because* (long pause) *because, I really know that if I decided to do it, I could pretty well - I could do whatever I wanted to do. I know that I could do that however, the system says – 'well you've been out of it for too long really and then so many things have changed' - whether they really have changed – umm - certainly computing's changed, but I can use the computer. I can actually use the computer quite well. I haven't lost any of that skill. I've made sure that's inside. You know I'm on my fourth computer since I left the paid workforce. Umm that isn't - that's not a problem. Umm so they would look at that and say well - that's a barrier. I think the barriers - I don't think the barriers are real. I think it's somebody's perception of what I can or can't do that is the real barrier. They have actually no idea what I can or can't do* (Margaret).

For example, for Alex, who has been running a volunteer project for the last 7 years and manages a volunteer workforce of "*between 40 and 50 people*", the main obstacle she anticipates is not being taken 'seriously' by prospective employers

> *I don't think I'm unskilled, I just don't know how to prove it to a prospective employer. [] I could run an office with my eyes closed. I love file cabinets, I love file systems. I love everything to be exactly the right thing but it would have to be in an area like* (volunteer organisation), *see that could be me, without even blinking I could do that and enjoy it [] I think I could do almost anything along those lines if I could get someone to take me seriously* (Alex).

This perception of ability view is expanded further as being part of the expected attitudes to be encountered by SAHMs, making negative employer attitudes the most prominent perceived barrier addressed by every member of the cohort:

> *One of the things that would have to change almost essentially it would have to be an attitude change. That when you think about people like us, we are so valuable, we have, no we are actually, because we've done our childrearing, we're still intelligent, we still, we know how to work. We know how to multi task, we know how to handle people, and you know, we know how to achieve things. So if that could be properly valued, if the people would say, they have their job applicants and they say: 'well I know I can get a really good 15 years out of Ms 50 years old here and sure I might be able to get 35 years out of Ms 20 years old here or 45 years'. But the skill set, this skill set, the value of this person at 50 is just so much greater, can contribute so much [] I think if we had more senior politicians who were women - that would make a big difference. I mean women who had children and got out of the professional workforce and became politicians as their third career. That would make a big difference* (Trixie).

Participants overwhelmingly concur with the crux of Trixie's statement that the combined skill set of each SAHM is very valuable and that in the context of a professional work environment, attitudes need to change to reflect an acknowledgement of this. The majority of participants believe that employer's attitudes are shaped by a number of assumptions:

- an assumed lack of general workplace expertise

> *There's an assumption that because you've been out of the workplace you've not been able to contribute to it, and that's not right. The problem then is finding the workplaces where those people are valued, but do they exist?* (Sandra).

- the length of time away from paid employment and questions of whether or not SAHMs have 'still got it':

In a couple of years I won't have the constraints of thinking, 'oh, I've got to go and pick (youngest son) up yet again from school, umm so yes, so I won't have that. But you know, is anybody at that point, at that point going to think, I've still got it? I doubt it - I doubt it (Margaret).

- a combination of the above absence from paid employment and the current age of SAHMs:

Employers would see two things as our downside for those of us who've stayed home so long- the age, and being a woman. I think that employers just wouldn't recognize that what we've done in the last 17 years is experience. They would just see that you have been out of the workforce (Darcy).

- SAHMs' ages as a disadvantage in organisations where progression and advancement is closely linked to age:

> *I can't go back into a* [Top 6 Accounting firm] *sort of company because I'd be considered too old, they have a very hierarchical structure and people of my age in that environment would be all partners by now* (Ita).

- and a lack of recognition of skills and experiences acquired through non-paid work:

I had in the back of my mind that I might work three days a week or something but a friend who's a supervisor in a [industry type] *firm said my experience wouldn't count. Not having the right piece of paper from a university is an impediment to getting a paid job in a field that welcomes me as a volunteer, where I've essentially worked for 10 plus years and where I've done a lot of training* (Jean).

Additionally, a number of SAHMs stated that some working women are perceived as barriers to their re-employment prospects, women in the workforce acting as gatekeepers against other women:

> *I have found that actually women are the greatest impediment to women getting ahead, not the men* (Emma).

As noted in Jean's statement above, she is now a well trained and experienced counsellor and it was a female peer who discouraged her on the grounds of lack of credentials, similarly Marie, now a successful researcher and writer, was discouraged from an application due to a perceived lack of specific, yet easily acquired knowledge:

> *It's sometimes women themselves who are against us. A friend of mine who was into um recruiting, she made it very clear to me that if she was hiring she wouldn't hire me because I wasn't up to date with the latest, 'you've got to be familiar with all these government regulations today' (laugh). And I thought well ok it would take me half a day to become familiar with that, but at the moment I'm not. And she just said 'well if I asked you now, what was your opinion and you just said I don't even about this', she just said 'really I wouldn't hire you' and I thought right, you're a gatekeeper and you would stop me right there without bothering to find out the rest about me* (Marie).

Belle was offered a role in her previous professional field and wanted to negotiate options other than full time which she knew to be readily available in this industry, but found that it was not possible due to the attitude of the female interviewing manager:

> *This is a huge organization,* [name] *magazines and I know how magazines operate. There are lots of freelance jobs, and she just said to me- 'I'm sorry we can't offer you anything, we have no part time jobs here' there was just no discussion, no support there. Those are the types of women who are not helping other women and are obstructive. I know there are always lots of mothers whose kids are grown up like mine, at least who are more independent-who*

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would like a part time job but a meaningful job, a career, but it's women like that HR manager at [company name] *who are contributing to it not happening.* [] *These are women who deliberately don't support other women, when it would be easy for them to do so* (Belle).

A final barrier addressed pertains to a perceived incompatibility between the structure of corporate work and SAHMs preferences at this stage of their lives. As noted previously, if SAHMs were to re-enter the workforce, none of them would wish for full time employment, but they do aspire to meaningful roles. This however, is viewed by every participant as incompatible with their perceptions of how work and organisations are structured. A structuring which all participants believe to be inflexible in the realm of professional work and which Kat further describes as an environment of 'robotic obligation', and a 'mechanisation' of time or the self:

I actually resent the impact of full-time work. It's like having to suck up to the man. The man is whatever overlord is in charge of work. It's that obligation. It's having to go to work like a robot every day. I never questioned that when I was younger but it's that robotic obligation where you're doing it for the man. You're not doing it for yourself. There's something quite big brotherish about all of that. It's just so inflexible. That's what I hate about full-time work, to have to turn up in an office environment like I used to where you sit at your desk. It's the mechanisation of your time and your - of yourself. For me there's no going back to that. Anything that's time charged, would never do that again. That to me is the ultimate of robotic work (Kat).

5.5.5   Expectations of an ideal

Kat's statement that 'there's no going back to that' (in previous section) reflects views held across the SAHM cohort. All the women stated that if they were to re-engage with the paid workforce, they do not wish to return to careers held previously and the accompanying conditions of employment. As I noted in the earlier 'Aspirations' section,

they all speak emphatically in terms of re-engaging with the workforce in something new rather than returning to something prior.

During the course of the interviews all SAHMs spoke at length of ideal organisational cultures or ideal work conditions that they would wish to re-engage with. Some even spoke of 'magic wand' scenarios. Three elements stand out as being at the core of their expectations from organisations and from paid work, for optimum or ideal future engagement:

- attitudinal changes,
- changes to the structure of professional work, and
- plausible re-entry pathways.

5.5.5.1 Changes to attitudes

The first element, attitudinal change, this the participants discussed as being instrumental to changing what they believe to be current perceptions of stay at home mothers. The interview data overwhelmingly demonstrate that SAHMs believe attitudes towards women who stay home to mother need to change.

Trixie illustrates the overall attitude change required at political and societal level (towards SAHMs) by comparing it to historical social changes towards other minority groups. She also optimistically describes it as an impending 'wave' that will have repercussions on the employment arena:

> *The progress, in sort of the larger societal terms of, of discrimination against minorities, even-though the minority might in fact be a large number of people, but let's say minority in terms of power. The things that, the broad sweeps that change attitudes, for instance: the new respect perhaps for Seniors that wasn't there 30 years ago; the respect for women that wasn't there 50 years ago. Maybe it's now time for the combination of the senior woman, the older woman, who's a mother and an ex professional. Maybe we're the next wave. It's just one of those things that's going to happen through sheer numbers and a little bit of aggravation from the people. And maybe that time has come because there are so many of us now, because of who we are and our education levels and*

what we've done [] Just the fact that you are doing this research and other women are thinking about it and there are women everywhere whose husbands have gone off with their secretaries. [] Maybe it's a voice that is just gaining a volume. Yeah and some smart politician is going to pick up on it and realize, 'hey wait a minute, my instant key to popularity is going to be to tap into this'. And maybe women in our circumstances need to hire a really good public relations person to come and just represent us and that will force the attitude change required in employer circles (Trixie).

Sandra further encapsulates a common view across all participants that change needs to occur in organisations. That is, in the 'employer circles' (Trixie above) managerial attitudes need to change by first actively acknowledging and recognising the strengths and skills sets of ex-professional women who off ramped for SAHM-hood and second by creating specific opportunities for re-entering SAHMs:

Getting somebody back into a work environment who you don't have to train into it, you know they've performed before, you know they can perform again, you know they've got the skills. Yeah sure, they might need to update their systems skills, their online skills a little bit, but they're self-sufficient, they're intelligent. It's a very easy ask for a company to employ somebody like that [] The benefit of women in our position or people of our age group going back into workplaces, you've already got all of the good work skills and values and attitudes. It's the technical stuff you're learning which anybody can do. [] companies should go 'oh good, let's get her because she has already been trained, she already knows how to operate in a business environment, she already knows how to manage people, she already knows all of those skills. [] the workplace needs to create opportunities for women [] So perhaps part of the whole encouraging women back into a professional environment does have to be, 'we have changed and this is how we've changed', and there has to be a big PR campaign (Sandra).

When SAHMs spoke of attitude in organisational contexts it was a term used synonymously with organisational cultures. All participants spoke at length of the need for change in organisational or corporate cultures in Australia. For the 'opportunities for women' (Sandra above) to become a reality for SAHMs, two key changes were identified as being required at organisational levels:

First - managers' attitudes towards middle age and the value to organisations of accrued wisdom and life experience:

> *Age is not valued in organisations, everything is about the young and I think that is a great shame, I think people are you know, put out to pasture because they've gotten to 50, or anybody over 50 has a problem finding a job, a decent job. Age and learning from our life experience, you can't put a price on it. What needs to change? we need to change the general workplace perceptions of age, age is good, it's wisdom, it's life experience and it's valuable* (Bev).

Second - managers' perceptions of SAHM competence and potential

> *I think employers need to change their perception of non-working mothers, that they're not on the ball, that they've somehow lost their edge [] they need to be willing to you know I suppose to consider these women as very valuable potential employees and look at what they have to offer* (Belle).

These two perceptual changes were discussed across the cohort as being influential in changing attitudes and creating more inclusive cultures. And as Kat summarised it is a hoped for cultural change that would 'de-intimidate' the workplace for re-entering SAHMs and should be driven from the most senior managerial levels:

> *I can think of practical solutions and I can think of cultural change required in the workforce.[] In terms of cultural change, women like us can be helped by de-intimidating the workplace environment. I would love to see a culture that is so much more amenable. It's got to come from the CEO. It can't come from a marketing section or the HR section. It's got to come from - it's got to come top down* (Kat).

5.5.5.2 Changes to professional work structures

The second element at the core of SAHMs expectations for ideal employment futures also relates to organisations, but more to the manner in which professional or career work is structured. I noted earlier SAHMs' views that if they were to re-engage with the paid workforce, two considerations are significant: none of the interviewees aspire

to full time employment, and all participants believe in a current paucity of part time professional roles as illustrated by Donna's statement:

I don't know that there's any around for ex CFO's (Donna).

Overall, SAHMs would like to see changes to the way professional roles are structured. According to the interview data, in an ideal re-entry environment those roles would be characterised by: not being full time; meaningful, stimulating, challenging and above all flexible. Overwhelmingly, the most salient role trait discussed by every participant, was the wish to self-manage their work time. These then are the key characteristics and considerations SAHMs are looking for:

a) Now vs then

Reflecting on the characteristics of professional roles, Donna highlights a distinction made by the majority of the participants, and that is that their expectations from engaging with the workplace now, are quite different to when they set out to form their careers.

What we wanted when we were 30 is quite different from what we want at 50 (Donna).

There was overall agreement across the cohort that a major reason none of the SAHMs wish a return to work full time is their belief that professional full time roles are characterised by pressure and stress, and Donna continues

Do you really want the pressure anymore because let's face it, in those top-tier jobs there's a lot of pressure (Donna).

b) Money not important

All participants also stated that at this stage of their lives income is no longer as important a component in their ideal work-role as other factors

Not all women, but a lot of women are motivated by different things to men, and at our age making money isn't necessarily the thing that is most in their mind (Sandra).

Factors raised by every interviewee, as significantly more important than income revolve around issues of flexibility, enjoyment meaningfulness and mental challenge.

I don't feel as though I need the paid stuff to give me satisfaction, that doesn't, it's not about, the money part is nice but it's not absolutely necessary [] The flexibility is much more important, and being able to do a job I enjoy. I would prefer to do a one day a week job that I felt was challenging, mentally challenging, than work a routine five days on something that I considered to be mediocre (Margaret).

c) Meaning and grunt

Joan describes for example, that for her the enjoyment would derive from engaging in a role with 'grunt' 'stimulation' and 'meaning' and not having to re-enter 'at the bottom'. For Joan, Margaret (above) and every other participant, flexibility is also very important:

I think from an employees' point of view, I'd really like to go back to meaningful jobs, jobs that have a bit of grunt to them, that you're not having to start again at the bottom [] I need a great amount of stimulation, mental stimulation, great amounts of stimulation and flexibility. In terms of flexibility, I mean I'd like to be able to do it in the hours that I want to be able to do it. And I would accept that there would have to be some, there would have to be some limitations, but if I had to provide you know, for instance 30 hours in worked hours, but nobody told me when I had to do those 30 hours, that would be ideal (Joan).

d) Fitting in with other activities

As has been shown earlier, SAHMs are involved in numerous activities. This appears as an important consideration when SAHMs speak of future work. The majority, like Ita, speak of wanting to have time to fit future employment in with interests and activities they have developed during SAHM-hood:

Flexibility of hours and the ability to work from home when needed would be very important because I have now developed other passions, the choir and all that. So I could see myself working part time (Ita).

e) Different flexibilities

Every single SAHM spoke of future engagement with the workforce as conditional on whether or not it was to be a flexible arrangement:

In an ideal world, yeah, I think an absolute must is just some sort of flexibility, so that if I needed to go, I could just get up and go (Darcy).

Flexibility though appears to mean a number of things to the women. For some it is simply not working full time and the option to choose not only when, but also where they work:

If I was to take a job, my expectations would be, well permanent part time, pick my hours, can work from home, which I could do in my own hours (Louise).

For others it is the absence of an on-going, continuous commitment, allowing for blocks of free time in which to undertake other activities such as travel.

Flexibility, that would work for me personally, or freelancing. Yep. That type of work would be fantastic (Donna).

The manner in which SAHMs spoke about flexibility appears to be overwhelmingly tied to the freedom to manage their own time. As was shown in Joan comment previously, what SAHMs are saying they want, is to have the ability and freedom to work an agreed number of hours when they choose. This is further illustrated by Trixie's commenting on what is important to her, in essence, the freedom to arrange and manage her own work time use:

Having the freedom to - to arrange my time the way I want. So if I got, if you gave me a fantastic job, that was interesting to me, that I could feel passionate about, that I can see was more meaningful than something that wasn't meaningful umm, but I could do it in my time, like not starting at 9 and finishing at 5. But rather maybe starting at 11 and finishing it at 9 in the evening with a big break in the middle – that - that's what I mean. Not so, not calling the shots so much about what the work is necessarily, but more about how the time is managed (Trixie).

f) Interaction

Kat's comment mirrors the majority of SAHMs' and like Ita (previously) being able to 'slot' different tasks or activities is important. Additionally, her comment based on her current volunteer work highlights an expectation expressed by approximately half the participants, and that is the wish for interaction or collaboration at a professional level.

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I've been with (volunteer organisation) *and I've been used to the fact that I know I've got to do something but that I can do it whenever it suits me. So I can slot it in between my other projects. That's what I love, it's the flexibility to actually decide what time of the day it best suits you to have that conference call or read the 100 page document is fantastic. I prefer tasks rather than just showing up for work although I love meeting with other people. I love board meeting days. I love going in there for five hours with my board. They're a great bunch of people with really clever and interesting skills set and I love the dynamic of the conversation. I love collaboration, I love to manage my own time use, so they're the most important things I would want in any job* (Kat).

Emma also would wish for a part time professional role and spoke of the need to control not only her time use but also the type of work she engages in. Like Kat, she would like to interact with other professionals in an institutional setting, but does not believe roles with her expectations exist and like Donna (previously) feels that working as a consultant might be her ideal:

I would love to work one day a week or two days a week. I would love to find a role where I could do what I do, but I actually don't really want to work at home anymore. I would like to go work in an institution, have another opportunity to meet other working professionals. I'm looking for the interaction now, I miss that contact. But I'd still want to have control over my work and my time, working a consultancy would be ideal where you're generally doing all the material yourself (Emma).

g) The ideal role

The ideal future role expectations discussed at interviews appear heavily influenced by SAHMs experiences of the volunteer work they engage in. An overall ideal role and organisation is summarised by Jean's description of her current volunteer position which she calls a 'little utopia'. It incorporates elements all SAHMs spoke of as being important – the ability to manage own hours, meaningful work, professional status, focus on employee care, progression and development, and a supportive environment. There is only one down side, there is no pay:

My [volunteer role] *it's everything I actually want in a job, other than there's no pay cheque. It gives me flexibility, so if I don't want to go in on Monday, they don't mind, it's fine, there's no review. There are role models there. There's ongoing professional training constantly through the year, there's weekends away. So it's got all of that but I know that I have flexibility and I know that if I get stressed, their ethos around self-care is very defined it's like a little utopia because they're like, if you have a really stressful client and you need a break, you go for a walk, you have a cup of tea. You don't get back until you're ready. Well isn't that nice?* [Laughs] *So yeah, to me there's no downside. I love the flexibility. It's meaningful work. It offers me a depth and a flexibility that - it's lovely. It's the perfect job and the perfect place to work* (Jean).

5.5.5.3   Creation of re-entry pathways

The third element at the core of SAHMs expectations for re-engagement with the paid work force rests both at organisational and institutional levels. Across all interviews SAHMs spoke in terms of not wanting *'to start again at the bottom'* (Joan).

All participants expressed views on the need for some form of interface or entry programme, specific to not only their age group but also their accrued experience. These re-engagement pathways were discussed as plausible at either educational institutions or at employing organisations:

I think one of the problems older women are supposed to have is IT. Women need to be up to date with IT and frankly a solution to that would be just to give them on the job training where you don't pay them. See I'd happily do work for nothing to compensate for the fact that I don't know something and I think any woman would be happy to work for nothing for two weeks just to get to know the ropes. I think that could also apply to all the financial stuff, something that companies, corporates could offer, really good grounding or updating in financial statements, balance sheets, tax and all that (Kat).

Margaret's statement encapsulates the views of a minority of participants who spoke of the role educational facilities and institutions could play in offering refreshers for

professionals who off-ramped. She cites the refresher courses available in the field of nursing as an example of what could be offered across professions:

> *I think Universities have a role in this you know. [] I think if they [] were to have a menu of four week refresher courses called, umm, you know, human resources for dummies type of thing or primary school teaching for dummies, that would be something that I could - would just give me a basic refresher on what I did in my* [degree] *it wouldn't take much to turn all the switches on, because I actually remember, I do remember a lot of it, [] Universities have a role to play because I think they could put together for say, a group of 50 year old women who might want to go back into the work force, the sorts of jobs they might want to go back into [] – they've done it for nursing. Nursing now, you can do a six week refresher course, very sensible [] they could do it for law, accounting, or any of the professions* (Margaret).

Chapter 6 - Discussion - Study I, the SAHMs

Theory needs to be developed that has its origin in women's distinctive existential and material shape of being [] we need to flood the market with our own stories [] we need to show that community, nurturance, responsibility, and the ethic of care are values at least as worthy of protection as autonomy, self-reliance and individualism.

<div align="right">Robin West (in Donovan, 2008:206)</div>

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data garnered from Study I (the women) through a consideration of the following six research sub-questions:

1. How do SAHMs position themselves?
2. Why did the women drop out of their professional careers and become SAHMs (and why did they not follow the dominant trend to re-enter the workforce during their children's early years?)
3. How do SAHMs use their time (what do they do with their time)?
4. How do SAHMs perceive their skill development if any over the last 20 years?
5. What are SAHMs' time-use aspirations into the future?
6. What do SAHMs consider a fit or misfit between their skills and experience and (their understanding of) current employment practices?

In joining perceptual phenomenology with feminist standpoint methodology (Chapter 4) I have stepped outside the strictures of measurable results. Thus to answer these questions, my research intention was firstly to obtain rich personal narratives that are reflective and respectful of SAHMs' voices and what they tell about these women's situated experiences (Smith [D], 1992 and 2004), and secondly to explore thematic commonalities across those narratives (Riessman, 2000). The purpose of Chapter 5 was to present a first level analysis of the interview data and to highlight those thematic areas. These were illustrated and validated by quoting SAHMs' voices from their narratives extensively. My discussion in this Chapter 6 is therefore guided by those

emergent themes and further framed by the above sub questions. The significance and key messages from SAHMs' voices in Chapter 5 are considered now against the background of literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. I conclude this chapter with a composite profile of the SAHM cohort characteristics.

6.2   Positioning the self

Related sub-question:

> 1. *How do SAHMs position themselves?*

Riessman (2000) writes that the manner in which narrators position themselves in their personal narratives signifies a way of performing identity, and that this performance can be as either a 'victim of circumstance' or as an 'agentic being'. Additionally Wearing's (1998) treatment of 'space' as a way to resist what is, and for 'reconstituting the self' and one's identity, provides a useful lens through which to consider SAHMs' phenomenology of SAHM-hood.

The 20 narratives in this first study demonstrate that in talking about themselves SAHMs affirm their identity as agentic, independent and distinct beings. In the telling of their stories, they clearly identify as independent women who resist pre-ascribed norms and engage in spaces where they can exercise control (following Wearing, 1998; in my Chapter 2) - mothering work amongst other self-selected activities.   In their narratives SAHMs position themselves as women with a strong sense of self and of identity and not as victims of circumstance or as women subsumed by mothering. That is not to suggest that their agency has been devoid of boundaries or has not been affected by circumstance and context.

6.2.1   Identity as a multi-layered amalgam

The data from the interviews (Chapter 5) revealed that all SAHMs spoke about their sense of self and identity.   Their usage of the term identity mirrors Millward's (2006:321) definition of the concept as one which is used for self-definition.   In doing so, SAHMs overwhelmingly describe themselves as an amalgam of numerous parts and roles. This further confirms findings in the literature that state there is no consensus on

what the self really is and that identity is multifaceted and fuzzy (Côté, 2006; Leary, 2004; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brown [R], 2000).   Additionally, how SAHMs refer to notions of self or of identity reflects Brubaker and Coopers' (2000) notion of identity as a way to categorise the practice of everyday settings, activities and interactions with others. Throughout the narratives, SAHMs refer to both perceptions of self as well as activities that they engage in or have done as being key factors in constructing their identity. This dyad concurs with the literature reviewed (Chapter 2) on both identity theory and social identity theory that view what 'one does' and what 'one is' as the two core components to a person's identity (Stets and Burke, 2000; Côté, 2006; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brown, [R.] 2000; Leary, 2004).

It is evident from the interview data (Chapter 5) that SAHMs experience their perceptions of self as a composite of multiple layers, or of '*different parts of self'* (Kat) which are shaped by their different experiences and operational contexts. A finding that is supported by Millward's (2006:321) theory that identity as self-definition is 'highly contextual and domain specific'. In this multi-layered-ness, SAHMs speak of being women who also happen to be mothers - their performance as mothers being but one part of their identity. In their role as mothers, the overall message from SAHMs' narratives is that their identities can be summarized as not '*wrapped up'* (Trixie) in their children; children are not tied to their '*self-image'* (Belle) and motherhood does not '*subsume*' (Jean) the women's individuality.

This separation of the role played as mothers from the rest of their identities as whole women is reflected not only in the literature on identity referenced above, but also by the literature on the ideology of motherhood (Hughes, 2002; Nakano et al, 1994; Schwartz, [A] 1994; McMahon, 1995; Ruddick, 1994; Wearing, 1984). Support is also to be found in scholarship on the concept of 'maternal thinking' which promotes a shift of focus from who mothers are to what they do (Ruddick, 1980 and 1983); in literature which treats motherhood as only a part of the 'female process' (Rich, 1976); and in more recent Australian research which has found that it is women with egalitarian (as opposed to traditional) attitudes who regard motherhood as but one part of their identity (Holton, Fisher and Rowe, 2009).

6.2.2   Separating the self from the role of mother

Thus the narrative data (Chapter 5) establishes that SAHMs consider themselves as more than mothers and it is also clear that the experiences and activities they undertake in tandem with mothering, are viewed by the women as being key contributors to formulating perceptions of self (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; McMahon, 1995 following Chodorow, 1999 and Gilligan, 1993). An overall message from the findings is that in their practice as mothers over approximately two decades, SAHMs have experienced a shift or an evolution in those perceptions of self and how they actively construct identity. According to the findings (Chapter 5), prior to, and in the early years of motherhood the salient contributors to shaping perceptions of self, were shown to be predominately:

- the skills accumulated through both tertiary education and professional careers,
- the financial, emotional and kudos losses experienced by exiting the paid workforce,
- the exigencies and circumstances of early family formation and hands on needs of young children,
- the need to redefine perceptions of self as stay at home mothers rather than ex-professionals.

Conversely, during the middle and later years of motherhood a shift appears across the cohort, from a somewhat passive (reacting to circumstance) to a more pro-active (creating opportunities for self) construction of identity. These latter years are characterized by:

- SAHMs purposefully working towards building and maintaining a space for self and of identity that is separate to, or independent of, their mothering role to prevent going '*bonkers*' (Liz), or '*going spare*' (Joan). They have actively sought engagement in fulfilling activities or self-development pursuits outside the realm of home, as Margaret states to '*have some input for yourself*'.
- A greater awareness of their middle-age-hood and a resultant commitment across the cohort to fitness regimes and health
- Capitalizing on their education and skills to support in a very purposeful way their teenagers as they complete senior studies and prepare for university life; their spouses who are by now operating at very senior echelons in their careers; and professional engagement in community/civic pursuits

- A keen awareness that the role of stay-at-home-mother is about to become redundant and the need to prepare for life post SAHM-hood

A characteristic unique to SAHMs is the amount of time these off-ramped professional women have been practicing SAHM-hood. The above points serve to highlight that over approximately two decades, SAHMs have experienced an evolution in those perceptions of self and how they actively construct identity. It is clear that in this evolution, SAHMs demonstrate Hughes' (2002) process of transition from one sense of self to another or a relocation to a new identity.

What this signifies is that in SAHMs' perceptions of a) multi layered-ness, and b) the separation of what they do from who they perceive themselves to be in totality – this is what identifies SAHMs as different from what is popularly regarded as traditional, stay at home mothers. Overall my research finds that in addressing the question of *how* they position themselves, this cohort of mothers present as independent egalitarian women who do not subscribe to the norms or practices of traditional, intensive models of motherhood.

SAHMs present as independent, agentic women who claim to construct their sense of identity from both perceptions of self as well as the various activities they undertake in different settings whilst engaging in what they consider to be work. I discuss those settings and undertakings a little further on (at 6.4).

Next however, I discuss the analysis findings that speak to the reasons as to *why* SAHMs came to practice as they do.

6.3   The self as mother – the family as context

Related sub-question:

> 2. *Why did the women drop out of their professional careers and become SAHMs (and why did they not follow the dominant trend to re-enter the workforce during their children's early years?)*

The previous section examined how the women construct perceptions of self and identity in their practice of SAHM-hood. As discussed, the overarching finding is that members of this cohort identify mothering as one of a number of contributors to their construction of self. This section discusses further on that part-of-self-that-is-mother in order to locate answers to the next research question asked in this thesis which in essence aims to find *why* SAHMs have come to practice as they do.

In addressing this *why* question all respondents referred back to the beginning of their motherhood journey (some two decades ago). These retrospective aspects of the narratives are central to understanding where and how SAHMs positioned themselves at the time of interview and serve to explain the impact that choices made around SAHM-hood have had on their lives.

One of the emergent findings garnered from the interview data (Chapter 5) is that participants made decisions to practice as SAHMs as a result of both practical as well as ideological considerations. Both of which were in turn shaped by the specificities of their individual family circumstances. As cited in Chapter 5, reconciling individual career demands with the practicalities of family life, dependent children and career busy husbands, a range of employment, financial and logistical concerns were key contributors to SAHMs' decisions to practice SAHM-hood. Almost two decades on, the legacy of those factors continue to influence these women.

Extant research (see 2.2) shows that decisions relating to motherhood are generally encased in the rhetoric of choice.   Thus it is important to reiterate that in my findings, SAHMs do not frame their exits from the workforce as clear cut choices as such, but

rather as nuanced decisions or responses to their situated personal and familial circumstances, that is, to the context of their lives.

6.3.1   At time of career exits

The interview data (Chapter 5) reveals some key characteristics of the context within which SAHMs found themselves. At the onset of motherhood these women were all highly educated, employed in professional and managerial roles. As has been summarised in Chapter 5, the majority of the cohort were working in predominately male dominated roles and interestingly, the six women who held what could be deemed more traditional female qualifications (liberal arts related), were also operating in male domains of mid to senior managerial positions. At the time of career exits all the women were married and all the husbands in the cohort were also professional careerists with growing responsibilities and seniority. The implications of which are discussed a little further on (6.3.3). All SAHMs were in a financial position to afford taking maternity leave (at a time when paid maternity leave was not yet legislated in Australia). Approximately two thirds had firm plans to return to their careers post maternity leave, one third had less defined plans but envisaged a return to some form of employment at some undecided time later. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that none of the women in this researched cohort had anticipated being full time stay at home mothers, prior to having children.

6.3.2   Attempts at re-entry

Thus at the onset of SAHM-hood, all the women had an expectation of returning to employment at some point. The data (Chapter 5) demonstrates that there are two broad groupings of SAHMs attempting returns to paid work. The first and largest was the group of new mothers who re-entered their professions directly post maternity leave. The second grouping consists of a minority of SAHMs, who attempted re-engagement with the workforce later during their mothering years,

The actions of the first group (i.e. new mothers returning to their career) are reflected in the extant literature (Chapter 2) in that these new mothers returning to their careers were

behaving according to the hallmarks of highly educated women. As cited in the literature higher levels of mothers' educational attainment is closely linked to speedier returns to work (Baxter, 2008; Dex, Joshi, Macran and McCulloch, 1998; Joesch, 1997). Likewise the findings corroborate the trend presented in various studies showing that women who work prior to giving birth also return to work faster (Baxter, 2008; Glezer, 1988).

However, what my research reveals (Chapter 5) is that organisational conditions, practices and job structures encountered upon post maternity re-entry had significant impact in re-evaluating the decision made by the majority of the cohort to return to work. Findings show that as a result of those reevaluations, all SAHM returners had completely exited the workforce during their children's infancies with one exception. Donna continued in her re-entered career until her older child completed primary school (at which time she off-ramped, swapped with her stay-at-home-husband and he re-entered his profession).

6.3.2.1 Organisational conditions on re-entry

Inflexibility. The snapshots of interviews in Chapter 5 reveal that of the SAHMs who returned to their careers post maternity leave the most cited '*deal breakers*' (Jackie) at an organisational level were the rigid work conditions which they needed to negotiate in tandem with the new demands of (then) very young children and husbands' increasing work pressures. It is important to note that the work life balance rhetoric of the day was in its infancy and had not yet converted to family friendly organisational practice. As such there were limited flexible or part time options for re-entering professional women (in the mid to late 1990s).

Long hours. By far the most problematic lack of flexibility reported by SAHMs was the long hours they were expected to work upon re-entry. A common scenario for these returners was juggling 11 hour plus days at work with young infants and a largely absent husband at home (who was equally working long hours). Although a minority of the returning women was able to return from maternity leave on a part time basis, what they encountered was an expectation of doing more work in less time. This finding is

reflected in the literature where women repeatedly report expectations of full time performance of jobs on part time schedules (Stone and Lovejoy, 2004).

Managerial practices.   The interviews also provide evidence of unreasonable management practices where the predominant expectation was that the new mothers would continue to work at a similar unencumbered pace as prior to giving birth. A point well illustrated in the narratives (Chapter 5) telling of managers arriving in maternity wards directly post birth, with fresh work to be completed in hand.

Structure of professional roles. Additionally, the structural nature of professional roles were noted as not conducive to being carried out alongside caring for young children, in particular, those roles requiring regular or international travel.

The impact of these organisational and work conditions on SAHMs' returns to the workforce are reflected in the literature that addresses the issues and concerns that cause women to leave professional careers due to work stressors (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005 and 2006a; Stone, 2007).

6.3.2.2   Home conditions at re-entry

Gendered homes. A strong message stated by all returners is that they were the ones responsible for caring for their children, having had no practical support from spouses or extended family, and as Pieta states, '*I was it*'. This is a reflection of all interviewees experiences and confirms the common view in the literature (Chapter 2) that gender stratification in the home has changed little and women still carry out the majority of the care work and that household labour remains highly unequal (Hochschild, 1997, 1989; Ribbens, 1994; Baxter et al, 2003; Craig, 2003; Fitgerald and Harmon, 2001; Probert, 2001; Pocock, 2003; Chesterman and Ross Smith, in Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Crittenden, 2010)

Exhaustion. As a result, in describing how they tried to do it all, or working what Hochschild (1997) labelled the 'double shift' these returners speak of experiencing extreme exhaustion, frustration and a general feeling of not being able to meet both career and family demands. These repercussions on personal well-being are echoed in

the literature (Chapter 2), particularly the work of Healy (2000) and Pocock (2003) which describe the detrimental effects of work/non-work conflict such as fatigue, stress, burnout, and decreased well-being, in an Australian context.

6.3.2.3   Re-entry attempts later in SAHM-hood

The second broad grouping of returners is made up of the smaller number of SAHMs that attempted re-engagement with the workforce at later times during SAHM-hood, (i.e. not directly post maternity leave). These mothers engaged in the process of reengagement with paid work when children were older and already in schools.

The overriding message from this subgroup of women is that they have found a lack of meaningful part time or flexible work available that would not only
a) accommodate their ongoing need to be available for their families but also
b) was commensurate with SAHMs' perceived capabilities.

This reported lack of commensurate fit between what SAHMs believe they are capable of accomplishing and earning versus what roles are actually available and paying, plus the employment cultures and work conditions SAHMs encountered post maternity leave returns, continue to have some influence on these women's decisions to not engage with paid work and their future plans (further at 6.5). As will be discussed in the next section (6.4) SAHMs have instead redirected their energies and professional expertise elsewhere – volunteering.

6.3.3   Impact of Husbands' career

A major finding because it is such an overwhelmingly predominant and loud message across the SAHM cohort is that the impact of their husbands' careers on family life was the major contributor to not only their decision to initially quit the workforce but also the continuance in a SAHM role. It is valuable to re-state Liz's comment on this for it encapsulates the views of every single member of the cohort:

> *'My husband's career has been central to the choices I've made in my work and as a mother, totally, totally, utterly and absolutely'.*

This finding concurs with the literature reviewed (Chapter 3) which shows that husbands' employment status influences not only mothers' returns to work but also that when both parents are working long hours it has detrimental effects on family life (Crittenden, 2010; Stone, 2007; Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005 and 2006a; Pocock 2003; Gatens 1998; Joesch, 1994; Hochschild, 1989) and inevitably reduces women's commitment to paid employment (Charlesworth et al, 2002).

6.3.3.1   Her vs his earning potential

This then raises an important question in my research, why is it that it was the women who left their careers and not the men? Quite simply a large part of the answer is that it was a matter of strategy over earnings and earning potential. According to the findings (Chapter 5) when these professional couples found themselves struggling to balance two demanding careers with family life, the women were earning less than their husbands. As the extant literature shows, when decisions need to be made around two demanding careers and family, if the woman earns less than the man, it is she who leaves the workforce (Cha, 2010; Charlesworth et al., 2002).

The effect of this financial consideration is a point that is well demonstrated within my researched cohort. Donna was the only mother in the studied group who at the onset of motherhood held a more senior position than the husband and was earning more than him. Those household conditions framed her family's decision that she be the one to return to work and he be the at-home-dad (for the initial years of parenthood). The rest of the SAHM cohort was at the opposite end of the income spectrum and earning significantly less than their spouses. Trixie's narrative demonstrates this difference in earnings well, for she earned in one year what her husband earned in one month thus giving her the opportunity to make "*the ultimate choice*" and stay home. These two samples clearly highlight how all participants considered their family's income sources as major factors in their decision process.

6.3.3.2 Husbands' Extreme jobs.

The interview data (Chapter 5) also reveals that in the later years of SAHM-hood, the impact of husbands' ascending careers manifests in other distinct ways, namely hours worked, seniority and accompanying high salaries, frequency of travel, and overseas postings or off-shore offices. The manner in which SAHMs describe their spouses' careers points to the characteristics ascribed to the type of roles identified in the literature reviewed (Chapter 3) as extreme jobs. These types of roles are recognized in the literature as significantly impactful on couple's parenting and family arrangements (Hewlett, 2007; Brett and Stroh, 2003) and on professional mothers quitting their careers (Cha, 2010).

SAHMs' narratives revealed that all husbands in the cohort are employed in very senior positions. An overwhelming key characteristic of those roles is the amount of time devoted to work. All the men are reported to work extremely long hours with average working days of '*12 hours if not longer*' (Pieta). This is substantially different from what the literature (Chapter 2) describes as the standard working week of between 35 and 45 hours a week or even of what is addressed there as long hours, at 45 or more hours of work per week (Healy, 2000; Wooden and Loundes, 2002). It is clear that the hours worked by this cohort of husbands is more in line with those ascribed to the extreme jobs described in Chapter 3, where 60 plus hours per week are the norm (Hewlett, 2007; Brett and Stroh, 2003).

Not only are these high echelon husbands working long hours, they are also working extended weeks of '*12 hour days and every weekend*' (Belle); and are regularly working into the night holding meetings '*until 11 or 12 at night*' (Ita) or on telephone calls '*literally until 1:00 in the morning*' (Pieta).

Additionally, regular to constant travel is a characteristic of these senior roles further absenting the men from home. As was shown in Chapter 5, three of the husbands are actually working out of overseas locations and commuting back to families in Sydney, which as Jean describes makes family life '*wild*'. Furthermore most of the men travel nationally or internationally and have been doing so for a number of years.

My study finds that the result of these extreme work conditions has been that the men are predominately absent from the quotidian activities of their children, homes and wives. What this has meant for SAHMs in practical day-to-day terms is that they operate as sole parents and fathers are tangential to the childcare process.

These men's career patterns demonstrate the traditional structure of the unencumbered male, where obligations beyond work are taken care of by somebody else (Moen et al, 2013; Acker, 2006; Crittenden, 2001). These men could not have their careers and families if the women weren't there to run the home-front. As the data reveals (Chapter 5) every member of this cohort believes that their husbands can focus on their careers because the women manage everything else, and that husbands could not do their jobs without SAHMs being there.

6.3.4   SAHMs ideological positions

Study I interviews demonstrate that aside of the practical considerations discussed above, ideological positions are also at play in why SAHMs practice as they do. Ideologies were presented in the literature review as maps or subjective constructs that enable us to create meaning from our experiences, beliefs, values and actions and that they shape and are shaped by social conditions (Freeden, 2003; Maio et al, 2003). This is a helpful reminder in understanding SAHMs' practice of mothering because as will be shown, SAHMs' ideological positions do not fully concur with current dominant motherhood ideologies which inevitably fall back to Hays' (1996) work on intensive mothering.

6.3.4.1   Ideology of motherhood

It is widely acknowledged that women's decisions about employment and mothering are complex. There are three overarching paradigms or models of mothering that can be summarised from the literature reviewed (Chapter 2) that are useful reminders of theoretical and discursive positions: 'selfless mother/traditional housewife' model (in O'Reilly, 2003; also see Arendell, 2000); 'Superwoman' model (in Hays, 1996); and the 'difference or own terms' model (in Gilligan, 1993 and 1988). This is important to understanding the context of my research because it serves to encapsulate a key

contribution – that the experiences, discourses and ideological constructions from the standpoint of these long term SAHMs are different from what the published literature tells us about stay at home mums.

6.3.4.2   Leaving 'Superwoman' behind- The element of time

Two distinct ideological positions emerged from SAHMs narratives, the first and minor, as a memory, the second as their current lived reality. The first was conceptualised by SAHMs in the early years of motherhood a time also characterized by firstly, the women's (then) recent departures from careers and secondly, behaviours falling broadly within the 'Superwoman' model, trying to do it all. The findings (Chapter 5) show that this was a period when SAHMs still grieved for lost careers and still held strong emotional attachment to their professional identities, whilst also holding on to expectations of returning to their careers at some level.

The second ideological position is what was current for the participants at time of interview and it presented as a cumulative construct of SAHMs' experiences over two decades of at-home-mothering and more as a place in time where SAHMs had come to operate in their 'own terms' (as in Gilligan 1993 and 1988).

What this means is that the passing of time has played a significant part in SAHMs' ideological constructs. When interviewed, SAHMs claimed to have been in the role for so long, that they have had time to resolve or move on from many of the issues and emotions they had faced or experienced in the early years of motherhood, much as Liz expresses when she spoke of the tears, anger and grief she had experienced (p 154).

SAHMs predominately reported no longer having the emotional pull from the paid work sphere to contend with and that they had evolved past their initial feelings on career 'suicide' (Kat) or 'decimation' (Liz) or feeling 'disempowered' (Helen). As can be seen in Chapter 5, these women spoke of having reached a position where SAHM-hood was the best way to run their families. They have taken control of their lives by creating a space where they operate in their own terms.

Importantly also, it is clear from the findings that one way many SAHMs have dealt with the part of self that is the career woman has been to '*become this person for a while* [mother] *and 'put that other one on hold* [career]' (Emma); or to redirect their professional skills and corporate expertise into long term meaningful civic pursuits rather than paid employment (more on this at 6.4.4).

Additionally, I find that time is also relevant for these women's constructs when they speak of their awareness that their current mothering practice is a finite state. They see themselves now at the cusp of change and are giving serious consideration to what they will do when this mothering phase ends and whether or not they will re-engage with paid employment. And this is important to note because it provides some background to the discussion of SAHMs futures a little further on (6.5).

6.3.4.3   Ideology of family

A key finding is that at the very core of why SAHMs claim to practice as they do is because they have had children and wish to raise them a certain way (it is reasonable to assume that they would have continued on as part of a dual career couple if they had had no children). They believe in and work towards, a purposeful family life for all family members and according to their family circumstances. Every SAHM interviewed described her at-home work as that of facilitator, manager or '*the glue*' (Emily) in the context of the busyness of their families and the practical considerations discussed previously, husbands' career impact in particular.

This is an important component in framing a significant finding from my research which is that SAHMs describe themselves as mothers and not as housewives. What this means is that the women researched are recasting homemaking as care and positioning the children not the father as the reason for having exited their careers in the first place and for the continuance of their practice. This shift in categorization is supported by some of the literature on motherhood (Johnston and Swanson, 2003; Warner, 2005). Additionally this finding goes some way to showing that the women of the cohort cannot be described according to the tenets of traditional stay at home mums which inevitably are ascribed to the 'selfless mother/traditional housewife' model (Chapter 2).

Although the above shift in categorization is not new, the bulk of research on the broader work/motherhood arena continues however, to be dichotomized between home versus work, continues to make work the centre of analysis and continues to treat children related matters as peripheral, a spillover effect or a problem to be dealt with (in De Vault, 2003; also see England, 2010; Folbre, 2001).

6.3.4.4   Ideology of care

In positioning children as the centre of their mothering practice, what they do, not who they are (as in Ruddick, 1980 and 1983), these women demonstrate what is referred to in the reviewed literature (Chapter 2) as the moral characteristics of giving and caring and an ethic of care (following Chodorow, 1999; Gilligan, 1993 and 1988; McMahon, 1995).   In essence the analysis finds that SAHMs want to do the caring as a preferred way to having external carers. This is a view that is repeated again and again in all the interviews and exemplified by the often repeated participants' comments of '*being there*' for their children and '*supporting*' their husbands.

They frame their care work as embedded in personal relationships of love and obligation, and of give and take. These are elements that according to extant research enable resilience and commitment and are integral to a family's interdependencies leading to the '*healthy families*' (Trixie) SAHMs have aspired to. Support for these elements are expressed in the literature reviewed (Fudge, 2013; Williams, [F] 2001; Gilligan, 1993).

A question arises then: if part of the reason these women became SAHMs is because they want to do the caring, what does that mean for the concept of 'self' as separate? (as discussed previously).   According to Gilligan (1993) women's ability to care for others is closely linked to how that care is reciprocated and proposes that women need to engage in a conscious process of reflection so as to not relinquish care of themselves. Thus reciprocity and reflexivity are important in maintaining the independence of 'self'. Both of which appear to be at play as these mothers balance their own needs together with the needs of individual family members.

6.3.4.5 Mothering discourse

Furthermore, from the narrative material in Chapter 5 it can be seen that in putting children at the centre of their practice has not meant that SAHMs have foregone care of themselves as prescribed by the intensive mothering discourse, nor the care of their partners. This is important to note because as the literature in Chapter 2 describes, modern women who stay at home to mother are predominately ascribed to intensive mothering ideologies, a prevailing model that has influenced both attitudes towards mothering practice and public policy. This is an ideology associated with overtones of sacrifice and subjugation within which it is claimed good mothers are engulfed by their role (McMahon, 1995) or submerge their own needs and identity (Reid Boyd and Letherby, in O'Reilly, 2014; Stephens, 2011; Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Wearing, 1984; Lupton, 2000; Richards [L], 1985). Hays (1996) in particular, has argued that all mothers practice in ways that resemble intensive mothering, regardless of socioeconomic or work statuses.

My research finds however that SAHMs do not fully fit this formulaic construct. SAHMs narrate an alternative version of mothering practice ideology where primacy is given to the woman herself (the mother) and the role they play as mother appears secondary. It can be seen from the interview analysis (Chapter 5) that SAHMs may appear to practice partly in accordance to some of the tenets of intensive mothering simply because their mothering is so child focused; but - there is one important and crucial variance. My findings demonstrate that this group of mothers does not adhere to the submergence of personal needs and identity components within that intensive mothering discourse.

What my research does find rather is that SAHMs demonstrate the attitudes of 'egalitarian women' (in Holton et al, 2009) a position which recognises equality of the sexes, women's autonomy and achievements in addition to their carer role, and regards motherhood as only a part of a woman's construction of self/identity (also found in Ruddick's work). SAHMs' narratives clearly exemplify these through two main claims: firstly, that they work in concert-with or compliment-to husbands towards common goals, and secondly through the details of the many activities they cite involvement in outside of their family role (more at 6.4). Additionally, it is possible to argue that SAHMs' position is ideologically aligned with precepts of 'individualism mothering' as

addressed by the reviewed literature in Chapter 2 (Hughes, 2002; Marshall [H.], 1991; Myers, [D] 2000). Although this is a concept that is often applied to mothers who move into paid work, it does incorporate the premise that women act partly in their own self-interest and towards their self-actualization. Individualism discourse promotes self-care, independence and doing things 'my way' or 'my own' thing (Myers, [D] 2000) and once again, this is demonstrated in the interviews, clearly identifying SAHMs' engagement in numerous activities for self-development, interest, or targeted '*input for self*' (Margaret).

What may have begun as a model of intensive mothering for these women, is no longer so. Over the last two decades (approximately) as children have grown, the women doing the mothering have also evolved in their mothering style and practice. What now characterises SAHMs' ideological and discursive position is:

- Creating a space for self - placing high value on independence, care and development of self
- A purposeful ethic of care for kin and community
- Making the children's adolescent development the centre of their mothering practice

6.4 Practicing as mother and other. Time use – what SAHMs do.

Related sub-question:

> 3. *How do SAHMs use their time (what do they do with their time)?*

It is the three *mothering practice* characteristics listed in the previous section that underpin and provide the contextual background for the responses to the next research sub-question. In essence, this part deals with the analysed data that relates to *what SAHMs do.* This question of time-use elicited a myriad responses and examples from each of the SAHMs interviewed and on analysis it became clear that they cumulatively identified time use as activities either for *the self* or activities *for others* (Chapter 5).

6.4.1   How time is used for a *space for self*

I have previously established the importance SAHMs place on creating a *space for self* (following Wearing, 1998) and an identity as a multi-faceted woman. The first set of interviews (Chapter 5) demonstrates further that in caring for the self and in creating a space for achieving a level of independence from their mothering role, SAHMs engage in a combination of three types of activities. These are entered into for personal development or pleasure, and involve physical, artistic or educational undertakings.

Physical well-being: A keen awareness of their middle-age-hood and the need to maintain good fitness stand out as co-joint factors in propelling SAHMs to devote a focused amount of their personal time to physical activity. The findings (Chapter 5) reveal a pattern of long term and regular commitment to exercise ranging from daily sessions to a number of times per week.

What is interesting to note on this point is that age and ongoing well-being were factors that SAHMs also identified as important in their considerations of future engagement possibilities. They consider themselves to be fit, active and potentially productive for many more years and these factors were identified as strengths to be considered in future endeavours.

Artistic. A second set of activities that is found to be an important contributor to the creation of a *space for self* is engagement in the arts. The majority of the cohort was found to be actively learning or practising an art form – either in music, visual arts or dance. Some are additionally involved with art related institutions or groups in other ways – administratively or philanthropically. Unlike their fitness activities, SAHMs engage in art related pursuits for pleasure. Engagement in these activities has also been long term.

Educational. The third group of activities presents as being motivated by a desire for personal or intellectual development. The findings (Chapter 5) highlight a high commitment to on-going learning across the cohort.   SAHMs have undertaken structured courses at universities, TAFEs and private colleges, not with a view to specific future employment opportunities, but rather, to keep the "*brain alive and active*" (Emily). Additionally, the data reveals that most SAHMs are keen readers and

most speak or learn a foreign language, with many being active members of book clubs and/or language groups and some being active authors.

These findings appear at odds with perceptions of at home mothers identified in the reviewed literature (Chapter 2). In particular, the myths Johnston and Swanson (2003) refer to which portray at-home-mothers as not being 'associated with knowledge' and that they are perceived to be 'interested only in superficial topics' (pp. 30 and 21 respectively). These are the type of negative perceptions of which SAHMs are all too aware as is shown in the previous chapter (at 5.2.2) and reflected in the umbrella statement of "*some think we sit around the whole day*" (Belle).

What these findings signify is that the three groups of activities identified, present as a conscious SAHM strategy for resisting being engulfed by mothering, and for taking control by carving out time and space for self (following Wearing's [1998] notion of space as resistance). It is a time devoted to engagement with activities and interests that are pleasurable and rewarding on a personal level, and have nothing to do with obligations or responsibilities to others. SAHMs can thus be considered to be actively engaged in a process of 'identity capital' creation where they '(re)create themselves' (in Jorgensen, 2007). Clearly these findings establish a position other than unknowledgeable women and also go some way to challenging the noted societal perceptions of 'sitting around the whole day'. They demonstrate instead that SAHMs are independently engaged in a self-selected space where they develop interests in matters beyond the superficial and for their personal well-being.

6.4.2   Time use for others – the children

Time use *for others* in turn, is found to be spent on either in-house (children, partners) or out-of-house (community) activities. I discuss each of the three next, beginning with a recap of the children's age grouping followed by what SAHMs do with and for their teenagers, husbands and communities.

Children's ages. It is well accepted and documented that mothering activities differ according to children's developmental stages and corresponding age-needs (Chapter 2).

To better frame the activities of SAHMs it is valuable to reconfirm from the analysis that 49 of the 52 children in the cohort are teenagers or young adults. The majority of the children are aged between 15 and 18 years, and all SAHMs have at least one child in this age group (at 5.2.3). An understanding of the age grouping in this cohort is important to understanding the context of SAHMs' activities or what is referred to in the literature (Chapter 2) as the process of conceptualising women's 'lives with their children' (Ribbens, 1994). Importantly, the ages of the children cohort firmly establish that my research is specific to mothers of teenagers, setting it apart from previous studies on motherhood and their focus on mothering of neonates or young children (in Chapter 2, such as Vejar et al., 2006; Lupton, 2000; Wearing, 1984).

Three prominent types of activities stand out from the findings (Chapter 5) of descriptions and insights offered by SAHMs about what it is that they do in mothering their teenagers. *Being there* was identified as affecting all those activities, but I compartmentalise the findings as three functional areas of SAHM mothering practice thus: mother as *being there;* mother as *monitor* and mother as *pedagogue*.

Mother as Being there – Being there pertains to SAHMs being actively present and being actively available. One of the strongest messages from Study I is the belief across the cohort, that SAHMs presence in the home is vitally important to their teenage children, with positive flow on effects on the whole family. There is a strongly connected addendum to this finding which is a view also expressed across the cohort: SAHMs have found it far more important to be at home during the teenage years than it was for them to be at home when the children were younger. This is a view captured by the statement *"I think it's more important to be home now they're older*" (Donna) and mirrored by many similar ones across the interviews.

According to the narratives (Chapter 5) the value of *being there* is multi-fold but the most salient is that it enables immediacy of communication - that is, unscheduled and on the spot opportunities for communication and '*important conversations*' (Trixie). This immediacy was reported as a characteristic need of teenagers' communication style, for when teens want to talk, '*they want it <u>then</u> and it's got to be something to be taken care of <u>then</u>*[29]' (Joan). *Being there* is found to provide mothers and teens with the opportunity to capitalise on ad hoc moments and have meaningful conversations. The

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[29] Joan's emphasis

analysis finds that as a result, SAHMs across the cohort report having 'close', 'open' or 'good' relationships with their teens, and importantly, the women credit this to them 'being there' or 'being around'. The other identified value of *being there* is that it facilitates the monitoring of behaviour and the close involvement in education processes – both of which are addressed shortly.

It is interesting that so many of the interviewed SAHMs use the term *being there* for it is also a term found in the literature, for example Reid Boyd and Letherby (2014) and Ribbens (1994) use the exact term and Polatnick (2002) uses 'to be there'. The meaning in both the SAHM narratives and the literature appear to concur that it is a term that refers both to emotional presence and to physical location. For SAHMs it denotes a space and/or place where, as mothers of older children they can encourage confidences, conversations and offer emotional support, care and safety. This too is echoed in the literature (Bailey and Shooter, 2009; Collins and Russell, 1991). An important finding that I identify in Study I but have not found referenced in the literature, is the addendum referred to earlier. That is, that for SAHMs it has been more important *being there* during the teenage years than it was being home during the younger years.

Mother as monitor - The link between *being there* and SAHM's practice of monitoring teenagers' behaviour is an explicit message garnered from the interviews (Chapter 5). This monitoring refers to teens' activities in and beyond the home and is operationalised by SAHMs either overtly or subtly. In terms of overt monitoring, the analysis identifies two strategies in play across the SAHM cohort.

- A universal message is that when children *"get home from school or uni, that's when you've got to be available"* (Emily). *Being there* at those times is considered beneficial for de-briefing on what has happened during the day; for being a *"sounding board"* (Pieta) and offering emotional support; as well as for monitoring academic work progress.
- Ensuring children understand that mothers know what is *'going on'* (Margaret) in their lives beyond home, and reinforce what types of behaviours are expected of them

Two strategies were also found in the analysis as important mechanisms of subtle monitoring. In essence SAHMs want to know what their teens are doing and who they are with, thus they:

- Offer to 'taxi' their children and their friends as a means of controlling social outings, and of *"know*[ing] *where they are and who they're with"* (Alex)
- Open up their homes for teenagers and friends to gather and/or socialise

Both the taxi-ing and the welcoming of gatherings at their homes are reported as very important ways of monitoring the social networks, interactions and friendships SAHMs' children are involved in.

SAHMs' practice of monitoring their teens' behaviour can be more clearly understood when considered alongside what the literature tells us about adolescence. This is a life stage marked by rapid and deep developments. Some of the key changes that occur in adolescence are emotional (Bailey and Shooter, 2009), behavioural and social (Collins and Russell, 1991). The nature of the child-parent relationship likewise changes (Maccoby, 1984). It is a period when teenagers begin to distance themselves from parents on the one hand, but also have a greater need of a 'base' to go back to for safety, care and protection (Bailey and Shooter, 2009). What this means is that SAHMs' monitoring activities can be understood or viewed as a protective measure for children who are pulling away from home and exploring new social contexts. Additionally, SAHMs credit the general good behaviour of their children to these monitoring activities.

Mother as pedagogue – A third dominant message from the interview data regarding the children (Chapter 5) is that SAHMs purposefully and actively engage in their children's education processes.   This is demonstrated in how SAHMs speak on supporting academic endeavours, on facilitating extra-curricular development and on encouraging a certain set of values.

In terms of academic endeavours – it is very clear that all SAHMs have high expectations of and from their children's education. The findings indicate that these are influenced by the women's own educational achievements as well as those of their family members. Consequently the expectation is that all children in the cohort will undertake tertiary studies. A further salient finding is that SAHMs purposefully support

academic progress in three practical ways. Firstly, they have set home-work routines or study regimes in place which they supervise. Secondly, they consciously engage in discussion on topics being studied. The interviews analysed show that discussions on academic work are also evident with children who are already at university. Thirdly, SAHMs are very aware of the pressure their children are under (particularly those preparing for the HSC or IB[30]) and actively implement strategies to support and manage the emotional fall out on their teens and the rest of the family.

In terms of facilitating extra development - the interviews (Chapter 5) reveal that every child in the cohort is involved in extra-curricular activities. All participate in sporting, cultural and/or creative activities, outside of regular school commitments. Most are at competitive, representative, performer or instructor levels. Here too (as in 6.3) it is apparent that time has played a significant part over the course of SAHM's mothering practice. Whereas in earlier years SAHMs children were involved in numerous activities, at time of interview they were involved in fewer. Importantly, the analysis finds that though the number of activities has progressively decreased, the intensity of, and commitment to, retained activities have increased. The analysis finds that this represents an enormous commitment of both time and presence from SAHMs. In particular, SAHMs note their taxi-ing service which is instrumental in children being able to undertake these as well as school activities; and the number of hours they spend being present at, or actively supporting the various activities.

In terms of values – the interviews show that all SAHMs perceive their ability to practice as at-home-mothers as a privilege (5.2.2) and this links in to their awareness of their socio-economic position as being privileged (5.2.3). These views inform the ideals SAHMs aim to pass on to their children so that they become '*decent human beings*' (Joan) with a '*strong set of values and strong sense of self* '(Bev). That they overcome prevalent cultural values of '*narcissism*' (Emma) and '*entitlement*' (Belle) which SAHMs report children are over exposed to. The analysis specifically identifies social responsibility, gratitude and appreciation as being values SAHMs find important to teach their children. Additionally through their purposeful and focussed attention to the children's education and extra-curricular pursuits, these mothers present as also modelling and reinforcing values of commitment, excellence and achievement.

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[30] Higher School Certificate and International Baccalaureate

SAHMs deep involvement with the minutiae of their teenagers' education, friends and emotions are echoed in the literature that speaks to modern mother's preoccupation with the micro-details of their children's lives (Griffith and Smith, 2005:90). The women's self-identified position of being socio-economically privileged is reflected in these preoccupations and in their mothering behaviours. This is a position that the literature shows is prevalent amongst middle class mothers (Reid Boyd and Letherby, in O'Reilly, 2014; Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Griffith and Smith, 2005; Lareau, 2002 and 2003). SAHMs' active engagement in, and facilitation of, education related pursuits exhibit the hallmarks of 'concerted cultivation' also typical of middle class parents (Lareau, 2002). The outcome of these activities for the children is the development of what Skeggs (2004) couches as cultural capital. For the mothers however, it is a process which is recognised as requiring hard work (Griffith and Smith, 1987) and one that creates enormous labour (Lareau, 2002).

My research finds that the notion of *being there* permeates and impacts all the functions SAHMs undertake as mothering activity, with and for their children. *Being there* enables the spontaneous conversations and emotional support moments. It allows for watchful monitoring of teenager's friends and social outings. The practical elements of enacting 'concerted cultivation', that is, the supervised routines, discussions, driving to and from and being present at various activities – these too are found to be intricately linked to what SAHMs frame as *being there*.

6.4.3   Time use for others – the partners

Just as *being there* was identified as the overarching theme of what SAHMs do with their time with their children, then '*running everything else'* (Emma) is the main message of what SAHMs do in supporting their partners. This support is identified in the findings (Chapter 5) as revolving around two types of activities: managing the family and household; and practical support of the men's careers.

As I have discussed previously (6.3.3), the seniority and time-demands of husbands' careers has been found to make the men in the cohort generally tangential to day-to-day

family life. In addition to this, the interviews clearly demonstrate that SAHMs couch their time-use on household and child related activities as a means of supporting husbands in their careers. *Everything else* refers to all the child related activities discussed (at 6.4.2), taking care of the home and coordinating all family activities and appointments. SAHMs repeatedly cite that taking care of *everything else* allows the men to fully focus on their careers with the accompanying and demanding work conditions (see 6.3.3.2).

The analysis also provides a synopsis of more hands-on support for partners' careers. For a number of SAHMs this has included overseas postings and the associated management of outbound and inbound relocations. Most SAHMs support their partners by writing on their behalf, arranging travel, or managing work-related financial matters. All SAHMs actively network and entertain their partners' clients and colleagues and see this as important contributions to the men's careers. As Trixie summarises, "*I have been a huge - economically and in every other way - addendum to* [husband's] *career".* Furthermore, SAHMs generally present as being a '*sounding board'* (Jean) for partners to discuss work related matters.

The significance of this type of hands-on support is that SAHMs present as having a good understanding of their husbands' work and work environments, or "a *very direct insight"* (Elisabeth). It is reasonable to assume then that SAHMs are aware of general business or corporate issues and/or practices. The implication being that through supporting their partners, SAHMs have a vicarious connection to business and professional networks and may not be as disconnected as might be assumed.

What SAHMs do in support of their husbands cannot be considered in contextual isolation. To do so has the potential to reduce SAHMs' activities to merely acting from a traditional gendered position; where men are simply relieved from childcare and domestic responsibilities (Wearing, 1984). What SAHMs engage in under the banner of *everything else* is more nuanced and needs to be considered in the context of, and alongside, the previously discussed impact of extreme jobs on family life (6.3.3.2) and SAHMs' ideological positions on family (6.3.4.3) and on care (6.3.4.4).

6.4.4 Time use for others – the commuity

The interview data (see Chapter 5) highlights that all SAHMs commit a substantial or dedicated amount of their time to working as volunteers[31]. The volunteering work across the cohort is operationalized in two areas: the children's schools, and what I label as community groups (i.e. charities, not for profit organisations [NFP]). The findings reveal that there are two main messages here: firstly, the work carried out differs between the two areas, and secondly, different reasons motivate SAHMs' involvement in each.

Schools: In schools, volunteering is characterized by a number of activities identified in the analysis, the majority of which fall under: assisting teachers in-class, committee membership for various causes, or organising and running fundraising events. SAHMs have volunteered in multiple school based volunteering activities over a number of years.

The key motivator across the interviews is that SAHMs engage in these school based activities predominately '*for the kids*' (Belle). The analysis reveals that, firstly, this is a way in which mothers connect to and monitor the institutions children attend; and secondly, SAHMs treat it as an opportunity to further demonstrate to the children an active interest in their schooling. This is a finding that closely references SAHMs' involvement in their children's education discussed previously (at 6.4.2).

Community: The broader community, however, is where the bulk of the cohort's volunteer work is carried out, and it is markedly different from the school roles by the breath of role scope and depth of engagement.

A salient finding garnered from the analysis is that engagement in community volunteer work has been a long-term enterprise for the majority of SAHMs. This is clearly demonstrated in SAHMs' sustained commitment to one or a number of specific projects or particular NFP organisations for prolonged periods ranging from blocks of 5 years (Emily) through to 15 plus years (Marie). Much of the work is carried out by SAHMs at pre-agreed times or days (but not necessarily set), at the volunteer organisation's

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[31] Volunteering in this thesis refers to the activities undertaken by SAHMs for the benefit of the community, as per the definition in *Volunteering Australia's National Review of the Definition of Volunteering in Australia*, Issues Paper, December 2014. National Steering Committee: Claire Ellis; Kirsten Holmes; Lisel O'Dwyer; Melanie Oppenheimer; Megan Paull; Courtney Webber.

premises. Most of the roles entail work elements that SAHMs can undertake at home or in their own time.

In terms of geographical scope and reach of volunteer work, approximately two thirds of the volunteer roles performed by SAHMs cater for Sydney based communities. The remainder is volunteer roles for the benefit of national or international projects and NFPs. The types of volunteer roles found in the narratives (Chapter 5) point to three broad areas of SAHM engagement:

- Social justice related work that involves SAHMs in issues of war relief; preventing human trafficking; minority and disadvantaged group representation and activism
- Political type work which involves lobbying at local government level; seeking grants; lobbying for research; and media liaison
- Administration/executive type work involving active membership of boards and working committees; organising and running major fund raising events[32]; and leading or mobilizing resources and large groups of volunteer staff (up to 100 staff were noted).

 The interviews (Chapter 5) reveal that SAHMs are motivated to engage in volunteer work by a two predominant reasons. The initial engagement for some was driven by a desire to develop interests outside the home. For others it was a sense of civic duty derived from an awareness of their own socio-economic position of privilege. This awareness mirrors the previously discussed values that SAHMs aim to teach their children (at 6.4.2).

The motivators that have kept SAHMs involved in volunteering over the years however, are highlighted as being different. A key influence has been found to be that volunteer work has provided SAHMs with a platform where they can exercise, apply, or further develop their previously acquired professional skills. Trixie's statement illustrates a common belief in the cohort when she said: '*when I gave up work, I was able to still do all the things I used to do at work but do them for free for other organizations*'.

 Other important motivating factors were found to be:

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[32] Many of the fund raising events SAHMs are involved in generate very large sums of money and this is well illustrated in Chapter 5, see comments by Louise, Ita and Trixie in particular at 5.2.3.2.

- SAHMs believe their work is personally very meaningful;
- They genuinely enjoy the work
- They find the actual work to be interesting
- The work environment is unpressured

SAHMs generally speak of, and refer to, all their activities for others as work (children, partners, community). Their conceptualisation of work with these three groups mirrors that found in the literature that refers to work as comprising 'all the activities we do to be creative, productive and reproductive, not just employment' (Standing, 2008: 365). SAHMs' reference to work in terms of their volunteering is also faintly echoed in the employment related literature where volunteer work has now been included within the current definition of what constitutes work in Australia (CSfW Framework, in Chapter 3). In sharp contrast, the value of this type of work is well emphasised in national statistics where volunteer work is estimated to be worth $25.4 billion to the Australian economy (Volunteering Australia, 2015).

SAHMs' conceptualisation however, does not concur with the dominant ideology of work shown in the literature. The preponderant dogma is that real work is done in exchange for pay, it is full time, indefinite, and carried out at an employer's premises (Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Taylor, 2003; Kalleberg, 2000; Itzin and Newman, 1995). Work structures continue to be based on ideal worker norms. In turn ideal worker norms - particularly professionals - continue to be unencumbered males supported by stay at home partners (Moen et al., 2013; Crittenden, 2010; Williams, [J.] 2000; Acker, 1990; Crompton, 1986).

What SAHMs' work in the community means is two-fold. Firstly, it highlights that SAHMs are very engaged women with a keen sense of community, social responsibility and justice and that the work they do is meaningful to themselves and the recipient parties.

There is also a second and stronger message here. When speaking of their community work SAHMs position themselves as actively engaging in professional type work and as deploying a broad range of professional skills (skills are discussed further at 6.5.1). SAHMs' volunteer work clearly exhibit many hallmarks of for-profit careers, for

example, commitment to a role; working to objectives; managing people, resources, projects and finances; building and using networks. Career success in these settings is defined by SAHMs' own notion of success, a position which is reflected in the boundaryless careers literature (Arthur et al., 2005). That is the ability to carry out professional work, whilst balancing other facets of their lives, and managing their time-use on their own terms. In this manner they resist corporate notions of career success and position their interpretation of success as being independent from rather than dependent on conventional 'organizational career arrangements' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996:6).

Similarly, when viewed through the Kaleidoscope career lens (Chapter 3) it is apparent that SAHMs are treating volunteering and family as part of the 'same gestalt' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). This is a position where a person's notion of career is not divorced from the rest of their life. Women who opt out of corporate life to find new challenges that combine with mothering duties are reflected within this model.

This leads me to conclude that in carrying out their volunteer roles SAHMs are operating as protean careerists (see Chapter 3). In accordance with the key tenets of a protean career model I argue that SAHMs have created a career path that is personally meaningful and incorporates the context of their lives, their personal values and self-drive (following Hall, 2004) – in short they have found the career space (at 2.3.5.1) that fits in with their overall mothering practice (at 6.3.4.5). They have crossed traditional work site boundaries, arguably from paid employment to home, and from home to volunteer work (following Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). Finally, SAHMs have 'taken ownership of further development' to some extent as was discussed at 6.4.1 (following Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006) and as will be noted in the next section on skill development.

Overall, SAHMs are found to treat what they do for others as work. They engage in a self-selected volunteer space to appease their professional selves in personally meaningful endeavours, and they retain control of time use and time allocation by treating all the activities within the scope of their SAHM-hood as the one 'gestalt' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006).

6.5 Future spaces – looking ahead

The previous section examined how the women have used their time during SAHM-hood and the activities they engage in for themselves and for others. This next section discusses the findings that pertain to SAHMs' considerations of their futures. Overall it deals with perceptions of skills, of possibilities and of barriers.

The related sub-questions addressed are:

4. *How do SAHMs perceive their skill development if any, over the last 20 years?*
5. *What are SAHMs time-use aspirations into the future?*
6. *What do SAHMs consider a fit or a misfit between their skills and experience and (their understanding of) current employment practices?*

6.5.1 Future spaces, with what skills? Skill development over the last 20 years

A close link exists between the previous section's question of time use and the issue of skill development. In addressing skills related matters, the overarching finding is that SAHMs believe that their pre-motherhood skills have been strengthened and an array of new ones has been learnt. What emerges from the narratives (Chapter 5) is that SAHMs address their current skill set as an amalgam of two parts: past professional expertise and skills developed through interests and activities during SAHM-hood.

Professional Skills: With regards to past professional skills, the data confirms that SAHMs held tertiary qualifications (at 5.2.4.1) and all had practiced in their respective fields prior to motherhood.

The overall finding here is that SAHMs believe their professional skills have been retained, enhanced or new ones learned. In terms of skill retention, there is a unanimous message from the cohort and that is that former professional skills have not been lost. This is exemplified by Belle's statement that '*you don't lose your career skills',* one of many similar ones.

In tandem with this, there is also an acknowledgement that specific technical skills or knowledge pertinent to a particular profession would have become outdated. Some SAHMs noted the kind of refresher they would require, if they were to ever re-engage with former careers. The women referred predominately to legal and financial updating that would be required in their respective fields. A point exemplified by Sandra who notes '*If I was going back into accounting I would have to update myself on tax law'*. All SAHMs concur with the sentiment of Margaret's statement that this technical updating would be a short process and it '*wouldn't take much to turn all the switches on'*.

Notwithstanding, SAHMs' volunteer work has involved them in a diverse group of professional networks and settings over the last two decades. There is undivided agreement across the cohort that professional skills have also been learnt or enhanced through volunteer work. As Joan states regarding her volunteer role as a Board director, '*I've learnt a lot of things* [] *it has just been a fabulous learning experience'*. The findings (Chapter 5) show that the most noted and repeated professional skills that SAHMs believe to be enhanced due to this work are *organising* (people and events) and *managing* (people and resources). The cohort consensus is that '*volunteering does teach you a lot of skills'* (Ita).

The view that prior skills have been enhanced is also repeatedly demonstrated. Other professional skills identified in the narratives (Chapter 5) by SAHMs involved with Boards and working-committees include: project management, recruitment, task and resource allocation, marketing, public speaking and research skills.

Additionally, many SAHMs note that they have developed business relevant skills through further structured learning (see 6.4.1) and most SAHMs through active support of partner's careers (see 6.4.3). In the general running of their homes and caring for their families, *managing* and *organising* are once again identified across the cohort as two of the most important skills that SAHMs have developed. This was well illustrated in the previously discussed host of activities SAHMs manage on behalf of their children (6.4. 2). Other skills SAHMs specifically identify as having been honed in the home-sphere include: problem solving, multi-tasking, time management, forward planning, and tenacity. Moreover, SAHMs identify *maturity* and a *strong work ethic* as important developments which stem from their cumulative life experiences at middle age.

Interpersonal skills: The findings show that all SAHMs believe their people skills have been greatly enhanced during the last two decades. They credit their interpersonal skills development to the diversity of individuals and groups they interact with. As is evident from the interview data (Chapter 5), in their community/volunteer work, the women are interacting with a range of people from socio-economically challenged individuals through to State and industry leaders.

On the home-front SAHMs are found to believe that they have enhanced these skills through involvement on three fronts: business networks and relationships with senior executives associated with their partner's careers; with educators and those providing towards the 'concerted cultivation' of their children's education; and with their teenagers and their similarly teenaged networks. The most noted interpersonal skills developed or enhanced in these three settings are identified as *diplomacy* and *good communication*.

SAHMs did not vacillate on declaring or positioning themselves as skilled. The interviews provide clear evidence that every participant was resolute and positive about being skilled. This finding is the opposite of what Cox and Leonard's study had found in 1991[33] (in Chapter 3). Such certainty from SAHMs also presents as being somewhat at odds with the literature (Chapter 3) that points to the complexities and difficulties inherent in defining what skill is (Green, [Francis] 2011; Adler, 2004; Grugulis, Warhurst and Keep, 2004; Stasz, 2001; Attewell, 1990; Vallas, 1990; Spenner, 1983).

SAHMs use of the term skill does not reflect the interchangeability in terminology identified in the literature (Green, [Francis] 2011; George and Jones, 2005; Field and Mawer, 1996). The women use the word skill fairly consistently through the interviews, to denote what is referred to in the literature under other labels such as general competencies, abilities or traits. In their use of the term in the narratives, SAHMs appear to treat skill as a personal quality and in connection to an activity they engage in. This position is reflected in the literature that presents skill as a personal quality that

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[33] the women in this study had to be coaxed and convinced that they were indeed skilled

produces value, can be expanded on and that is socially determined (following the PES model advocated by Green, [Francis] 2011:5).

The skills identified in the SAHM narratives as having been developed in the home concur with the literature that describes caring for families as skilled work (DeVault, 1994). Specific skills noted by SAHMs (multitasking, prioritising, planning, management, interpersonal and organisational) as developed through family or community work are expressly noted in the literature also (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Crittenden, 2004; Cox and Leonard, 1991).

The particular types of skills SAHMs identify as having developed over the last 20 years are also to be found within the more recent literature on either soft skills or in employability skills taxonomies (at 3.5.4.2). The consensus through this body of literature is that in an employment context soft skills have now become not only necessary for success across all industries, but also more important for employability than hard or technical skills (Gibb, 2014; Hurrell et al, 2012; Marks and Scholarios, 2008; Grugulis et al, 2004; Dickerson and Green, 2004). Additionally, soft skills are major elements of Australia's current *Core Skills for Work Framework*.

What this points to is that the new emphasis on soft skills in the employment arena would appear to augur well for SAHMs contemplating re-engagement with for-profit work. Particularly as the trends shown in the more recent skills literature are also being reflected in contemporary recruitment and employment online mediums such as SEEK, About.com careers and LinkedIn (at 3.5.4.2). This would suggest that theoretical or policy positions inherent in the literature have begun to trickle down to, and operationalise at business practice level or in certain recruitment areas at least.

6.5.2   Future spaces – realities, wish-lists and magic wands

Related sub-question:

> *5. What are SAHMs time-use aspirations into the future?*

This following section discusses the findings that relate to what it is that SAHMs would like to do next. A salient message is that SAHMs, cohort-wide, speak in terms of being

at the cusp of change in their lives, or what is referred to in the literature as transition (Pocock, 2003; Hughes, 2002). They term this as having lived through two separate or explicit stages of life – professional career and motherhood. All the women are now thinking about or planning towards stage three and this is very clearly illustrated by Trixie's comment: *'I've gone through two careers: I had my professional career and my child bearing career and now I want career number three'*.

A second message is that most SAHMs have moved beyond broad direction searches and are more focused on how they could activate a shortlisted number of possible options. The overall decision SAHMs appeared to be grappling with at time of interview was whether or not to re-engage with the paid workforce on some level, or whether to reinvigorate or renew their focus in the NFP/volunteering sector.

A significant finding from the narratives (Chapter 5) is that all SAHMs are crystal clear on what they do not want to do:

- None of the SAHMs wish to work full time.
- None of the women want to return to their previous paid careers.

A small minority of the cohort was found to be open to the idea of future roles somewhat aligned with previous professions, but only if the associated work conditions suited them.

Of equal significance is the finding of what SAHMs do want and this they addressed as either hoped for work conditions or work type. In terms of work conditions the overwhelming wish across the cohort is consistent with Louise when she said *'if I was to take a job, my expectations would be, well permanent part time, pick my hours, can work from home, which I could do in my own hours'*. Thus the major work condition for all SAHMs pertains to time:

- All SAHMs want short hours, reduced working days, and time-use flexibility.
- All want work to fit in with other activities and interests

What SAHMs mean by time flexibility is having the freedom to self-manage their work's time allocation and use. There was a universal acknowledgement from the

women that these desired time conditions are at odds with paid professional work. As a result, some SAHMs are also found to be contemplating contract, freelancing or consultancy work mode options, or working in co-operative or cartel type arrangements. Interestingly, none of the women couched their options in terms of an entrepreneurial frame.

 In terms of what type of work to pursue, the top criterion for SAHMs is meaningfulness of role. This, regardless of whether the role is remunerated or not (with the exception of two SAHMs, see Fig 6.1). The type of work being sought is found to be influenced or inspired by either volunteer/community work undertaken or by personal interests developed during SAHM-hood. Additionally, all SAHMs emphasise that they would like to engage in professional work that capitalizes on their accrued expertise and skills, not in support or in routine, clerical, '*boring*' (Helen) type roles. This is a cohort view reflected by Margaret when she states '*why would I want a $35,000 a year job when I know what my potential is?*' Rather than engaging in uninteresting or poorly paid work the cohort's general position is '*why would you bother?*' (Darcy) and that '*you might as well go do some charity work*' (Angela).

The overall finding on this point is that as a result of SAHMs' desired for *work conditions* and *work type*, the cohort consensus is that re-engagement with the paid professional workforce will be problematic if not impossible. (The challenges SAHMs identified will be discussed separately at 6.5.3). What the findings mean for the cohort is summarized in the following three groupings:

Grouping 1	Grouping 2	Grouping 3
SAHMs	10 SAHMs	8 SAHMs
Caving in to paid work	Contemplating paid work	Cannot be bothered pursuing paid work
Motivated by financial need	Motivated by meaning of role & personal interests	Motivated by meaning of role & apprehension
Will re-engage with paid work regardless of meaningfulness and conditions of employment	Would re-engage depending on meaningfulness and conditions of employment	Would re-engage but don't believe it's feasible & hesitant to engage in job seeking process
The must do scenario	The wish-list scenario	The magic wand scenario

Figure 6.1: A snapshot of SAHMs' tendencies towards re-engagement with paid employment

Potentially all the women in the cohort would be willing to re-engage with the paid workforce. For Group 2 (in Fig 6.1), however, it would be very much dependent on what types of roles and what types of accompanying employment conditions were on offer. The SAHMs in Group 3 would need some serious convincing or a 'magic wand'. The term 'magic wand' was used during interviews to refer to an idealized state of corporate practices that would actively attract SAHMs back to employment. SAHMs overall would like to see changes to the way professional work is structured and these are addressed a little further on (at 6.5.3).

Importantly, Fig 6.1 serves to illustrate that the availability of finances is once again found to be a very significant factor in shaping the decisions SAHMs make about their time use in the future. Just as being able to stay home to mother was enabled by husbands generating the household income, (in 5.2.2 and 6.3) so too will the women's decisions about their next phase be affected by this. This is clearly demonstrated by the circumstances of the two SAHMs (Group 1) for whom it has become imperative that they re-engage with any paid employment. For both these women their financial position was undergoing change at the time of interviews. One had entered into divorce proceedings; the other would soon be reaching the end of a financial support arrangement with her partner. Unlike the women in Groups 2 and 3 women in Group 1 no longer have the option to wait for the perfect role, or engage in unremunerated work. Their choice is no longer what they would like to do in the future, but rather what they must do.

The situation for the women in Groups 2 and 3 is different. Firstly, they do not have the imperative to have to generate an income, and as was identified in the previous chapter (5.2.2) two of the women (in Group 3) are financially independent of their partners, that is, they have their own personal money. Secondly, most are already involved in meaningful professional work in a sector that welcomes them.

Re-engagement with paid professional work may be a plausible wish for some SAHMs. However, given what this study finds their preferences to be, a revised focus on the

NFP/volunteer sector emerges as the more probable avenue for these women's future time-use.

6.5.3 Future spaces –fit versus misfit

Related sub-question:

6. What do SAHMs consider a fit or a misfit between their skills and experience, and (their understanding of) current employment practices?

A position of self-belief: Overall SAHMs do believe there is potential for a fit between what they perceive as their professional capacity and what they believe they could contribute and accomplish in a for-profit employment setting. The women's belief in their skill and experience acumen was discussed previously (6.5.1). SAHMs' acknowledgement of technical or profession specific updating that would be required in some instances, through short term on-ramping processes is also identified. There is an additional factor that was found in the interviews as contributors to a fit. That is a demonstrated competence in working within a professional setting. This was couched by SAHMs as a bonus, both because of their age and their accumulated experience.

Notwithstanding, the narratives also highlight a repeating parallel concern amongst SAHMs. That is, a misfit between their perceptions of their own skills, experience and potential - and what they understand to be current employment practices. A significant finding is that SAHMs' encapsulate those concerns as falling into two areas of misfit or barriers. The first pertains to SAHMs' perceptions of negative employers' attitudes towards women like themselves. The second refers to work structures or processes that SAHMs' believe to be missing from current employment practices and actively hinder re-engagement.

Perceptions of Attitudes: A clear finding is that all SAHMs expect to encounter negative attitudes from employers or recruiters. Thus the first element of the misfit revolves around what I term a perceptual divide.   This divide is the difference between SAHMs view of their own competence and expertise (at 6.5.1) and how they believe their abilities will be gauged or perceived by recruiters and employers.

SAHMs overwhelmingly believe that employers' perceptions of non-working mothers are *'that they're not on the ball, that they've somehow lost their edge'* (Belle). They anticipate that employers' attitudes towards them will be based on perceptions of outdated skills and inaction over twenty years and that the real barrier will be an employer's '*perception of what I can or can't do'* (Margaret). Thus a major blockage to re-engagement with the workforce as identified by SAHMs is this presumption of negative attitudes and perceptions from employers. The analysis identifies a number of specific factors which SAHMs' anticipate as key contributors to employers' negative attitudes towards women like themselves:

- SAHMs' length of time away from paid employment
- Non-recognition of skills and experiences acquired through NFP work
- Assumption of lack of general workplace expertise and skill currency
- Current age of SAHMs

These factors are further exacerbated by the interviewees' concerns over what I label an issue of transference - that is how to communicate or transfer SAHMs' self-belief of their skilled capacities across to employers, for as Alex illustrates '*I don't think I'm unskilled, I just don't know how to prove it to a prospective employer'*.

Support for SAHMs' concerns over negative employer attitudes can be found in the literature that speaks to the need of a cultural shift in employment practices. This shift is found to be two-pronged: firstly there is a documented need for employer bodies to better understand the specific characteristics and preferences of this older demographic` (Professionals Australia, 2015; Productivity Commission, 2013; EOWA, 2008a; Hurrell, Botcherby and Darton, 2007; Shacklock, 2006; Hewlett, 2005; Hudson Report, 2004). Secondly, a cultural shift has been noted as being required at organisational level so that older workers are recognized and valued for the depth of life experiences they can bring to a business (Professionals Australia, 2015; McKinsey and Company, 2010; Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2012; Page Personnel Australia, 2014).

Employment structures: The second major area of misfit identified by the SAHM cohort is the incompatibility between the structure of professional work and SAHMs'

time-use preferences at this stage of their lives. Two major elements to this misfit for SAHMs are identified in the narratives (Chapter 5).

The first element of the misfit is the lack of part time or time-flexible professional roles. SAHMs' understanding of the conditions inherent in professional work are shaped by their own past professional careers (6.3.2), and by the conditions affecting their partners' extreme jobs (6.3.3) and other individuals in their networks. They know that those roles are marked by very long hours and pressure and as was discussed in the previous section (6.5.2) none of the SAHMs want to work full time and return to those conditions. The paucity or lack of part time and time-flexible professional roles was identified as a major misfit or barrier between SAHMs expectations of future work engagement and the current structure of professional work. This is a cohort wide understanding that Donna encapsulates when she states that '*we've done all the study and we're qualified and we've got all this work experience, but it doesn't seem to tie in with part-time roles [] I don't know that there's any around for ex CFO's'*.

The second element of work structure misfit identified is the lack of entry points. All participants expressed views on the need for some form of pathway, interface or re-engagement programme specific to older professionals re-joining the workforce after prolonged absences. Ideally such pathways would eliminate the need for SAHMs to '*start again at the bottom*' (Joan). SAHMs discussed these re-engagement pathways as being plausible through either educational institutions or through employer organisations. Universities were noted as being well placed to offer re-fresher courses designed specifically for mature women wishing to re-engage with particular disciplines such as law, accounting, or any of the professions. At an organisational level a re-engagement pathway was acknowledged by SAHMs as an opportunity to both demonstrate already held skills and accrued experience, and to refresh or update specific technical skills. A short period of structured on the job training in an organisational setting was identified as ideal for the majority of SAHMs.

SAHMs work related time-use preferences at this stage of their lives are reflected in the literature (at 3.5.5.1). The part time, non-rigid work times and flexible work condition

preferences identified by SAHMs are not new. These types of conditions are likewise shown in the literature as being the preference of Australian women over 45 as well as of older workers in general (AIM, 2012; Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Holmes, 2007). From a firm's perspective the flexible work practices preferred by this age group have also been found to be good for business (Bloom et al., 2011; AIM, 2012). According to reported figures in the literature these types of flexible work arrangements clearly attract non-working people back to employment (Professionals Australia, 2015 for Australia and Hurrell, Botcherby and Darton, 2007 for the UK).

This position in the literature presents as being at odds however, with the continuance and predominance of professional work being structured along full time ideal-worker and ideal-work norms (AIM, 2012; Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Taylor, 2003; Kalleberg, 2000; Williams, [J] 2000). Furthermore, SAHMs' perceptions of a lack of flexible professional work appear correct. They concur with the literature that shows that in Australia flexible work continues to be associated with those who are less career minded, or with poorly paid or with non-managerial roles (AIM, 2012; DCA, 2012a).

What is significant from this - for a consideration of SAHMs' acumen as fit or misfit against current organisational practices - is that it highlights some tensions or disparities between policy direction at a national level and actual practice at an enterprise level. On the one hand there are peak representative bodies such as AIM, or Professionals Australia who act for a broad spectrum of professions and industries. They identify the strengths of, and lobby for, greater utilisation of older professionals. Then there are governmental and affiliated agencies such as the EOWA and DCA. They commission industry research, drive policy and make recommendations for organisations to more actively attract and harness the skills of older workers wishing to re-engage. On the other hand and in contrast, we have the reported lag in uptake of more flexible and age-inclusive employment practices by business. A lag that is associated with entrenched and progressively outdated ideal-work and ideal-worker norms (in Chapter 3). Although the national climate for SAHM re-engagement (on their terms) appears imminent, the conditions SAHMs seek have not materialized as general or standard business practice as yet.

6.6 The cohort in the *void* – a collective composite

This section presents a composite of the SAHM cohort. The intention is to provide a summative representation composed from a fusion of the common threads across the SAHM narratives. It does not aim to list characteristic pertinent to each SAHM but rather, to superimpose the commonalities shared by many.

The details for the composite were selected from the findings (Chapter 5) in two ways. The first were characteristics SAHMs specifically and repeatedly self-identified with. The second were characteristics that were inferred within the narrative contexts. A good example of this is the issue of computer or current technology competence. Margaret stated '*I can actually use the computer quite well. I haven't lost any of that skill. I've made sure that's inside. You know I'm on my fourth computer since I left the paid workforce.*'

Similarly for example, no SAHM stated 'I am skilled in Skype use', but many spoke about their interactions via Skype. Likewise, no one spoke of specific software knowledge, but all present as competent spreadsheet users and on-line communicators. Thus through the context of the SAHM narratives it is understood that SAHMs position themselves as capable technology users and are not the *technological troglodytes* that Marie referred to in her interview.

The format for presenting the composite was initially challenging. How to best present this material so that it truly reflects the summative characteristics of the cohort? Reflecting on my experiences during the interviews for the second study (in Chapters 7 and 8) led me to a decision. If I was to present this composite to managers such as those interviewed, it would be helpful if it was styled in 'employer-speak'. Thus given the fuller content and context of this thesis I have elected to borrow very, very loosely from standard resume formats to set out the composite characteristics of the SAHM cohort.

Personal Details	▪ Aged 50 (approximate) ▪ Excellent health & fitness ▪ Excellent personal presentation ▪ Resides in Sydney & able to travel as required ▪ Available to commit to new pursuits long term
Career Objectives	▪ To be engaged in meaningful & productive work over the next decade ▪ To work part time or on time-defined contracts or projects ▪ To engage in professional roles that are either paid or unpaid
Qualifications	Degree qualified from an Australian University
Further Development	▪ Life-long learner, committed to on-going education or development ▪ Has completed additional Degree/Diploma/Certificate in academic/software/language/art course.
Technology Competence	▪ Proficient user of office suite software including word-processing, spreadsheets & email ▪ Experienced user of social media including Facebook, Skype ▪ Knowledgeable user of online search engines such as Google

Work Experience	▪ Up to 10 years' experience professional/corporate sector (management)
	
	▪ Up to 20 years' experience
	
	   - in pro bono/volunteer roles in the NFP/Community sector
	
	   - managing a busy & high achieving household

Major Roles (last 20 years)	▪ Coordinating, supporting, monitoring & enabling a professional & high achieving family's activities & schedules ▪ Acting for special causes (E.g. social justice, disadvantaged groups) ▪ Event planning - leadership & administration (people, resources, logistics) ▪ Fundraising – strategic & operational planning, activation & coordination ▪ Lobbying and/or media liaison ▪ Board/working committee projects (strategic, funding, activation)

Strengths & Skills	▪ Proven **professional experience** in for-profit & not-for-profit sectors ▪ Exceptional **communicator** both written & verbal; able to interact effectively across different mediums, ages & socio-economic groups ▪ Exceptional ability to **organise** people & events ▪ Proven record of effectively **managing** groups of people, resources & logistics in multiple scenarios ▪ **Diplomatic** in dealings with a broad spectrum of individuals & situations from government & industry through to young people & the disadvantaged ▪ Very strong **research** ability, able to locate & discern information from both print & online sources ▪ Exceptional **multi-tasker** with very strong associated strengths of **time management**, problem-solving, planning & prioritising ▪ Excellent **work ethic,** & a **mature** outlook ▪ Self-motivated, tenacious, works well collaboratively, independently or by leading ▪ Proven to be flexible & **adapts** quickly to challenges & changing situations ▪ Life-long **learner** committed to ongoing self-development
Interests	▪ Social justice causes – domestic or international ▪ Community involvement on local issues ▪ Cultural & artistic pursuits – performing/visual arts & involvement in art institutions ▪ Very well-travelled & culturally aware ▪ Languages – learning & conversation groups ▪ Reading & book discussion groups

Fig 6.2: SAHM Cohort Composite - a summative representation of characteristics most in common

Chapter 7: Findings

Study II - the Managers

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I present the findings from Study II (the managers). As outlined in the Methods section (Chapter 4) this second study was carried out to garner a current organisational context against which to consider the data that emerged from Study I.

This second study identifies managers' perspectives and organisational practices that might apply specifically to the employment conditions for SAHMs considering workforce re-integration. Contextually, this analysis addresses the 'current employment conditions' (box 3) and 'fits and misfits' (box 4) sections of the Conceptual Framework set out in Chapter 3.

This set of interviews was conducted to investigate the following research sub-questions:

- What is the attitude of managers towards professional women who have been out of the paid workforce for 20 years?
- How do the women's skill development and time use differ from or concur with organisational or corporate notions of skill development and time use?
- What position do managers present regarding recruitment and attraction practices of re-integrating professional women, particularly mothers, to their organisations?
- To what extent if any, are managers addressing the issue of an ageing workforce in practice?

De-identified profiles of the six managers and their current employer organisations are presented first. This is followed by interview data which is presented in the thematic groupings that emerged:

- Managers' Perceptions of strengths and barriers

- Organisation's Work Practices in play
- Suggestions for Re-engagement strategies

7.2 The Profiles

7.2.1 Manager profiles

All interviewed managers are employed in medium or large[34] organisations, operating in the private quaternary and quinary sectors of the labour force. Both of which are generally characterized by higher levels of services or intellectual activity and staffed by well-educated individuals.

All interviewees are senior executives within their organisations (i.e. bearing C-suite, director or vice-president titles), with direct reporting responsibilities to either: national CEO levels, international/regional Director levels or dual reporting lines to both. The managers' educational/professional backgrounds are in law, accountancy, business, management, and IT. They report having between 10 to 35 years' experience in their respective fields, representing a diversity of industries: Information and communication technologies; business [advice] consultancies; pharmaceutical R&D; media/entertainment; investment brokerage/banking; taxation; legal.

Four managers are female (Org 1, 3, 4 and 6) and two are male (Org 2 and 5). When briefing these participants on the context and key themes of Study I, all managers provided unsolicited details of their own familial situations. Interestingly for the overall context of my research on women, motherhood and career, three of the four female senior managers noted that they were not mothers themselves (Org 1, 2 and 3); and both males noted they were fathers, one with a stay at home wife (Org 6) and the other with a student wife (Org 2).

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[34] Medium businesses as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics employ 20 or more people but less than 200; 'Large' indicates businesses employing 200 or more people

Manager	Title/level	Industry Type	Org size
Org 1 (F) Lyn	Partner & Chief of Taxation Reports nationally	Law & Taxation	Medium
Org 2 (M) Tom	COO Reports nationally	Business Strategy & Consultancy	Medium (in Aust) (Large Internationally)
Org 3 (F) Jan	Director - HR Reports nationally & internationally	Pharmaceutical R&D	Medium (in Aust) (Large Internationally)
Org 4 (F) Coral	Director – IT Reports nationally	Business Advice Consultancy	Large (in Aust & Internationally)
Org 5 (F) Sophie	Vice President & CFO Reports nationally & internationally	Entertainment & Media	Medium (in Aust) (Large Internationally)
Org 6 (M) Robert	COO & Board Director Reports nationally & internationally	Finance & Investment	Medium

Figure 7.1: Study II managers' position level and industry and organisation type

7.2.2 Organisation snapshots

Extant literature reveals that attitudes towards older workers and related issues such as age discrimination are 'embedded in the cultures, policies and practices of organisations' (Harper, Khan, Saxena and Leeson, 2006:32). Manifestations of organisational cultures in turn are shown to be found in physical arrangements, formal and informal norms and practices within organisations (Martin, 2002:55). The organisations researched for Study II represent a broad spectrum of industries, professional specialisations and client bases (see Fig: 7.1). What is very notable is that this breath is reflected in the observable diversity of work spaces and cultural tones amongst these six organisations. The following snapshots provide a precis of how the managers described their workplaces and some of my journaled observations at time of interview. The aim here is to provide a very brief contextual glimpse of where the managers listed in Figure 7.1 operate.

Organisation 1 (Org 1 from here on)

Lyn really enjoys her work and being a part of this organisation. She describes the culture of her firm overall as '*a fairly close knit team*' with a '*young attitude*'. Lyn admires her (male) CEO's public and in-house stand on campaigning for more women in senior roles. His active push for more women in senior positions through all levels of the organisation has had a very positive impact on the culture of the firm. The average age of professional staff is in the mid-40s and the CEO is mid-50s.

My observations: This organisation is located in the city. The premises are styled and contemporary. The staff I observed appeared content and lots of on the spot conversations were happening around me as I waited. There seems to be a strong sense of camaraderie here. Lyn was very relaxed during the interview and genuinely seems to enjoy working here. We met at her desk and she ate her lunch as we talked.

Organisation 2 (Org 2 from here on)

Like Lyn, Tom enjoys his work and thrives on the organisation's culture. He describes his organisation's culture as '*generous of mind*', not '*prescriptive*' in its dealings with staff, and '*a relatively mature organisation*' He considers the latter a strength and a contributor to a culture where '*age is valued*'. The CEO is female, and the industry is dominated by women. Tom chooses to work there because of the culture and values of the organisation and precisely because the industry is dominated by women. Like Lyn, Tom also admires his (female) CEO whom he believes sets the tone for a '*great culture*'. The mean age of the professional ranks is 52.

My observations: This organisation is located in a high rise in the CBD. On walking in, I was greeted by a receptionist who appeared to be older than retirement age. Tom later confirmed that the receptionist was indeed in her late 60s and that this is an example of his organisation 'walking the talk' on age and diversity. The premises here are furnished in very bright colours (oranges and greens). The staff dress in business attire but like their work spaces, they also wear many bright colours. Everyone who walked past greeted me. I felt this was a very vibrant and happy workplace. Tom's interview

was full of energy. He speaks very fast, is full of ideas and anecdotes and is very interested in my research.

Organisation 3 (Org 3 from here on)

Jan does not enjoy her role or her organisation. Jan describes the culture of her workplace as '*entitled'*, '*restrictive'*, '*very prescriptive'* and '*in some areas it's very policing and I think it just feels punitive to employees'*. She finds it challenging working to contradictory mandates between the restrictive Australian operation and the overseas headquarters. The average age of staff is 41 and the company is 74 % female with a male CEO.

My observations: This organisation is located in a semi-industrial area in the outer suburbs. The physical spaces of the premises are standard grey and white office furnishings. I did not encounter many people during the visit. The general atmosphere of the place felt drab and sad. The interview itself was quite challenging. I felt as though it took a great deal of effort from Jan to prevent it deteriorating into a grievance exercise.

Organisation 4 (Org 4 from here on)

Coral is unsure whether she likes her role or the organisation she works at. Coral speaks of her organisation in somewhat contradictory statements. She firstly states that it is a very conservative and profits driven culture and that work is always about dollars and '*remaining competitive'*. Later in the interview however, she describes it as '*a great culture. It's very energetic, passionate. We've got really good people working here, good professionals, committed, intelligent, fun. The culture within my team is really good too. It's just it works really well.'*. Yet speaking of the promotion processes and the programmes for the development of women, Coral used words like '*it's all hush-hush'*, '*cult'*, '*voodoo'*, '*really secret'* and '*the black box'* and she compares the culture to a cult '*It's like a cult. I call it a cult.'*   The average age of professional staff in this company is late 20s to mid-30s and of partner's mid-50s through to compulsory retirement age at 62. The CEO is male.

My observations: This organisation is located over multiple floors of a high rise in the CBD. The offices are very stylish with amazing artworks on the walls and impressive harbour views out the windows. I was ushered through three different receptionists, the third one introducing herself as my greeter. I was offered refreshment and newspapers and given a time estimate for Coral's arrival. Coral arrived, looking very corporate and extremely styled and coiffured. The interview took place in a small meeting room, with dimmed lights and a uniformed waiter who took our orders for coffees. Coral constantly checked her phone throughout the interview. The strongest take away from my observations here is that the concept of image is very important in this organisation and a lot of energy seems to be directed toward packaging that image.

Organisation 5 (Org 5 from here on)

Sophie spoke at length about why she finds the culture in her organisation so great. The youth side of the company is aged 23 on average; they are highly creative, party hard, play hard and dress in shorts, t-shirts and thongs to go to work. Management staff has a female skew, is led by a female CEO, and has an average age of 40. They are '*young and dynamic*' and some of the '*very smartest people*' Sophie has ever worked with. She believes the cultural tone is influenced by three aspects: the tone coming down from the international group, the tone set by the CEO, and the tone set by the staff and what they are prepared to work with. The staff members negotiate their work styles, their expectations from the business, and the rewards. Staff relations and interactions are not about having a hierarchy but about having a 'conversation' and being 'collegiate'.

My observations: this organisation is located in an old sandstone building in the city. On approach I encountered a massive, heavy looking metal door flanked by two rather intimidating guards. On checking with them that I was at the right address and not a night club, I was ushered in through the metal doors. What I found on the other side was a cacophony of sounds and riot of colours, smells, and activities. The internal space of the building is fully gutted, with two levels of glassed in office/work spaces wrapped around the perimeters – like an amphitheatre. In the centre of the open space was a large kitchen, where a number of people were preparing food, thus the smells. Towards an edge, there was the shell of a car and people draped in multi-coloured furs were

being photographed on the roof and bonnet. Neon signs up the walls, different tracks of music playing concurrently and a full spectrum of clothing styles completed the setting. Sophie and I sat in one of the glassed in rooms and she pointed out or explained numerous activities as they happened around us. The place and people felt full of energy and it was contagious.

Organisation 6 (Org 6 from here on)

Robert describes his company as small, conservative and ethical. The firm does not market its services and is solely reliant on its exceptional reputation thus it promotes a culture of: *'good corporate citizenship* [] *integrity, professionalism, doing the right thing, being thorough, being polite, not ignoring things that we shouldn't, that kind of thing, and doing things properly. That whole culture has come from* [owner & founder]'.

Average ages are mid 30s for professional staff, 40 to 60 for executives and 60 to 70 for board members. Robert describes the attitude of employees as '*passionate*' working '*long hours*' and then '*going home and reading financial reports*' additionally '*pounds of flesh are given on the weekends too*'. Interestingly, Robert adds that 'w*e're a family … we're a family friendly organisation too*'.

My observations: the words I most associate with Org 6 are sombre and conservative. Premises are located in the financial district of the city. The interview itself took place in the board room – heavily furnished, unadorned and with a portrait of the founder on one wall and a window over the harbour on another. Initially the meeting was rather formal and stilted. However, commenting on the view part way through, led to breaking the ice over a shared interest in sailing. I feel the tone of the interview changed completely over that small aside, and Robert took on a more relaxed and conversational approach.

At the conclusion Robert showed me around. The work spaces consisted of a small number of glassed offices for the most senior managers and one large open space for all professional staff. (Other staff work in a 'back room' I was not privy to.) This space was furnished with identical, linear rows of white/grey desks, fitted with head-high

partitioning between them. The layout reminded me of a panopticon. It was so quiet in this room I thought it was empty, until a head popped up from behind a screen. Robert introduced me to a number of people, in hushed tones. He then escorted me to the lift and presented me with a company logo umbrella (it had begun raining heavily). This umbrella incident was very interesting. As Robert was trying to remove the labels and packaging on the umbrella, he asked one employee for scissors – half a dozen people immediately offered theirs. The panopticon and the umbrella factors illustrated for me the conservatism and command-control style of management I had garnered by that stage.

7.3 Managers' Perceptions and attitudes towards SAHMs

This thematic grouping highlights the personal opinions expressed by managers on two key points of discussion: what they perceive to be characteristics of strength and what they anticipate would be barriers for the individuals in the SAHM cohort, if they were to reengage with the paid workforce

In order to elicit cohort applicable responses and assist managers to more specifically frame their responses, participants were briefed with a synopsis of key characteristics common to all SAHMs. Mainly that the SAHMs: are aged from 45 to 55; are tertiary qualified; are experienced in corporate/commercial roles; are also experienced in not for profit and community roles; have solid managerial and interpersonal skills; are computer literate; have formed and raised their families; are healthy and active; and are now looking to move on to new meaningful activities.

7.3.1 Perceived strengths of SAHMs

One point all managers interviewed overwhelmingly concurred on was that there are substantial benefits to organisations in employing older workers in general.

The analysis of the interview data shows that these benefits are perceived as strengths that older workers possess and all managers broached discussion of those strengths

under a general label of 'skill'. On analysis, that broad category of 'skill' as raised by the managers refers more specifically to two skill sub-sets. These were posed as either personal traits and/or interpersonal skills; or job/profession specific skills and I attend to these separately.

7.3.1.1   Perceptions of Personal and Interpersonal skills

According to the findings by far the most salient SAHM cohort strength identified by all managers is the accrual of significant personal and interpersonal skills due to maturity and the age factor itself.

All managers spoke of older workers in general as having a stronger work ethic compared to younger staff, and this they view as characterised by traits such as greater wisdom and levels of engagement, reliability, and productivity.

In framing his views, Tom referred to benchmarking research his organisation had recently completed with 6800 Australians and New Zealanders. It was found that older workers have stronger levels of engagement both at the job and at organisational level. According to Tom

> *Often you can have people who are very engaged in their jobs but not engaged in the organisation.*

Tom believes that older workers demonstrate engagement at both the above levels and this is what leads to their greater productivity, both of which he sees as key strengths of older staff in comparison to their younger peers:

> *Older workers typically have stronger levels of engagement. So as a result of stronger levels of engagement both job and organisational engagement, they're likely to be more productive than younger workers.* (Tom)

Lyn notes that *'reliability'* can be a strong point of differentiation for an older worker or a woman re-entering the workforce. She illustrates the point by offering anecdotal

samples of comments made by senior colleagues about younger staff members' commitment to their jobs.

A couple of the partners here would have, over the last year, just made some sort of off the cuff statements, which are quite interesting about the people that - that earn them their dollar about the younger gung-ho seemingly great younger lawyers. And they'll make comments like, "they know nothing really" Or "they'll be off wanting to go on a holiday soon". Now, I think they're quite generic statements that you have to be quite wary of, but for an older person or a woman reengaging with work, that's their point of differentiation [] they're going to be reliable and they're not going to be asking for two months holiday, a year into their employment. Those sorts of things are strong points. (Lyn)

For Robert, the most important strengths of an older worker are the accumulation of skills through a life course, such as people management skills, judgement and the ability to think strategically which he states are skills not necessarily learnt in a work environment

What they bring is wisdom and experience and judgement and management skills in managing people, and that's critical because when you're 35, 40 you're still learning those skills from others. When you're 45, 50 you have mature management skills and judgement and potentially I think better strategic thinking, and you don't learn those just at work, you learn from life and experiences. (Robert)

On a similar vein, Sophie believes that an important strength of SAHMs specifically, would be that the women have had time to '*stop and think'*. She explains this by saying that individuals who are focused on '*career progression to career progression'* processes do not necessarily do this. Sophie's view is that in SAHMs having had that career break has enabled them to develop other skills and perspectives *'because they've had that wealth of life experience'* and she believes SAHMs would exhibit a *'more holistic view'* when re-entering organisations. According to Sophie, these mothers would additionally be

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[B]etter at stress management and multi-skilling. [] I think these individuals are better listeners. That counts for a lot. [] They've got diversity of perspective because they've had other experiences. It's maturity. (Sophie)

Commenting specifically on SAHMs also, Tom points to acquired wisdom as a strength for these women. He speaks of wisdom manifesting in mid-life as greater self-awareness. He extends the point by suggesting that SAHMs can use this acquired wisdom, to better identify what their core strengths and occupational interests may be now as they consider re-employment, as opposed to what field they may have originally trained in at the start of their careers.

Often, at the wiser age of 45 you're a lot more wiser to who you are, a lot more tuned on in terms of your own levels of self-awareness and you may have come to the realisation that 'okay, my undergraduate study's in pharmacy and I worked in a pharmaceutical environment to the age of 30, exited the workplace, but really my core strengths are around, I don't know, business strategy or being very, very strategic. I just haven't demonstrated it in a business context'. Or it's around relationship and being a salesperson et cetera, et cetera. So there's two challenges. The world's moved on and so have they, and their occupational interest may be very different to what their qualifications are and this can be both a strength and an opportunity because they can use their 45 years of experiences to make wiser decisions about their re-entry. (Tom)

As noted previously, Robert refers to wisdom as a strength of older people and he elaborated by stating his belief that SAHMs have been actively living, learning, interacting and developing '*other smarts*'

You're not in a complete cocoon, are you? Whatever you're doing over those 10 years you're living, you're learning, you're interacting, you're part of society. You may not be working for pay but …You do develop other smarts and other ideas.

Importantly Robert identified these '*smarts*' that SAHMs possess as being specifically beneficial to organisations, as a conduit for organisations to introduce new ideas and fresh approaches

> (SAHMs) *might have different ideas on how things could be done that benefit an organisation. Organisations are not necessarily open to radical shifts in their thinking. So the learning experience that they understand actually comes from within. But these 50 year old women can be one way of bringing external learning experience to an organisation. To learn externally is actually quite hard I think because it means looking outside your organisation.* (Robert)

In Tom's experience one particular skill women develop well as they mature is their ability to network. He elaborates that according to some in-house data at his company, this is a recognised key strength women have and one that plays out as a key advantage during job search processes.

> *And then the other thing, for me, is networking, which women do naturally and do incredibly well – and your women would be bloody good at it. We had some data - it was in the income category. I think it was about 80 to 120K so it was it was late 90s. So, it was a reasonable income back then, where women would land jobs sort of six weeks faster than their male counterparts in the same income category. We put it down to their superior networking skills.* (Tom)

It should be noted here that networking has also been identified as a barrier to SAHMs re-entering professional roles, and this will be addressed a little further on.

One out of the six interviewed managers identified mothering skills specifically as being important strengths of the SAHM cohort, particularly in the context of her organisation's employment practices. As Sophie explained, at her company there is an on-going need for engagement with mothers as monitors and commentators of youth behaviour and consumer habits, in particular the children's/youths' engagement with

technology based products. Sophie relies on what she called mothers' '*expertise*' to review, blog, and write and in their ability to be

> *Young at heart and can - can converse with youth.* (Sophie)

7.3.1.2   Perceptions of Professional Skills

All the managers concurred that in general the professional skills and past professional experience of the SAHM cohort were strengths. Some of the interviewees however, also drew a distinction between general skills and knowledge within a professional field and what Lyn referred to as '*very specialised subject matter knowledge*' that would require up to date industry or profession specific knowledge.

Regarding professionalism and professional skills in general, Robert considers SAHMs' education and formal qualifications as being important strengths. He believes that women with professional pasts would continue to possess traits that would enable them to adapt to new employment situations regardless of time out

> *The women we're talking about would, I suspect, have tremendous adaptability and good aptitude and have well-formed qualifications and their education is strong. So they can easily adapt to roles, regardless of the fact that they haven't been active in a particular area for a long time.* (Robert)

Robert commented on an observation he has made over time, that mothers are deemed to '*fall off a cliff*' after kids leave home, and maintains that having taken a career break to have children does not detract from these women being professionals

> *We have this idea - your kids leave home and you fall off a cliff. They should be going back to work or pursuing a career or whatever. They're professionals. No reason why they shouldn't come back.* (Robert)

Formal education as well as past professional experience was also identified by Lyn as strengths and she notes that

There's definite possibilities for employing women like these in our organisation. (Lyn)

Other participants identified more general work related skills that are associated with professional work, as SAHM strengths. The abilities to reason, to think critically and to research were specifically identified as professional skills that SAHMs would have retained

You don't lose the skills or the ability to reason or think critically; these are just things that you don't lose. (Jan)

Research skills is something you don't lose. (Sophie)

Like Robert, Jan also commented on proven past career track records as a strength because it is a reliable predictor of future performance

If they've had a good history before they're likely to be very good today. (Jan)

Lyn spoke specifically about the skills of lawyers. Although there are some areas of specialist law practice (for example taxation) that require up to date knowledge she states that there are many areas of law that are more generic '*where the law is less likely to date'*. Lyn believes that the ability to read legal cases, to extract principles and to provide general legal advice, are law practice related skills one never loses. She states that SAHMs would not have lost those particular legal skills

Advising companies on just general legal matters, where the law is less likely to date or it doesn't matter even if there's been advancement in the area of law, i.e., different principles of law coming through the courts. These older women you're researching would have that skill base and the skill to be able to read cases, extract principles, because that's what they used to do[] I think they could easily be employed in a meaningful role within the organisation, because they've got all those skills. (Lyn)

7.3.2 Perceived barriers for SAHMs

The issue of up-to-date professional skills or skill currency as implied in Lyn's comment (above) is one of the five main barriers identified in the managers' narratives. According to the narrative data, managers perceive that the five major barriers re-entering SAHMs would face are: the length of time they have been exited; dated or lack of skills; organisational recruitment practices; SAHM low confidence levels; and a lack of professional networks.

7.3.2.1 Length of Time out

All managers spoke about the length of time SAHMs have been exited from careers as problematic to some degree, in the context of professional re-entry. This time factor is closely linked to managers' perceptions of professional disconnection.

Tom for example drew an analogy between being attached to a bungee rope and short breaks from the workforce versus totally jumping off a bridge and fully exiting work.

> *In some industries it's easy to be on that bungee rope but 10 years is a big separation because it's like, I'm making this decision to actually exit as opposed to be on a bungee rope [] typically inside that bungee rope they've stayed connected all the way through as opposed to, they've actually disengaged for a longer period.* (Tom)

This point of disengagement is also raised by Robert as a barrier. He states

> *If you're a female who's been out of the workforce for 10 years it can be difficult to come back in. So how do they keep in touch?*

For Lyn there would be no '*hesitation'* in hiring a SAHM in principle, if there was a need for her to do so. She states however that her decision would be based on a consideration of '*supply and demand'* and as long as there are candidates with up to date experience, they would be her recruitment preference over a career exited applicant

> *The biggest issue, as you're probably aware is always, why would I take someone who has been out of the workforce for 10 years over somebody who's -*

who has got that much more up to date knowledge you know - the supply/demand. (Lyn)

Coral summed up what she believed to be her employers' position by stating that her company is '*very good*' when women come back to their roles from maternity leave, and if one was to have a child, her organisation would be the place to do so, but regarding the employment of SAHMs she adds

> *To have a decade off, that'd be a big ask.* (Coral)

7.3.2.2 Outdated skills

To most of the interviewed managers, the length of SAHMs' time out of the workforce appears to also be closely linked to a perception of either dated skills or an actual lack of skill.

The issue of dated skills is illustrated in Jan's narrative, where she states that if a re-entrant has '*let that stuff lapse*', that is, not kept up with developments in their field and technology,

> *Then I tend to find that they're a little bit too disconnected to have the right skills to be in the workplace today.* (Jan)

I have noted previously Lyn's belief that some professional skills are not lost during breaks from the workforce, particularly for lawyers. She does expand on this however, by highlighting that conversely, there are certain areas such as tax law that are susceptible to frequent regulatory changes and would therefore require up to date specific knowledge from practitioners

> *If they've not had anything to do with that subject matter for 10 plus years, then I think it - they're not going to appeal to somebody like me []and tax is a classic area of that. It changes so frequently that if you're out of it for a year or two, you will become quite dated. So it's just a fact. It's going to be a challenge.* (Lyn)

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Regarding a lack of skills, Coral assumed during the interview that the SAHMs would be computer illiterate and furthermore would not be up to speed with current business trends.

> *Women wanting to get back into the workforce should perhaps review how things are today and maybe they need to skill up. Maybe they need to, you know, if you don't know how to use a computer that they learn.* (Coral)

A similar assumptive sentiment was expressed by Jan

> *If you don't keep up with the technology and some current trends in the business, it's going to be harder for you to come back in.* (Jan)

These two expressed views on computer or technology literacy are at odds with Sophie's experience who is accustomed to mothers being very tech-savvy in order to keep up, monitor and comment on their children's use of technology.

7.3.2.3 No Professional networks

In the interviews, two of the managers referred to the importance of professional networks in any job seeking process. They spoke from a position that assumed SAHMs' professional networks were either inactive or non-existent.

As has been shown previously, Tom stated that a strength he finds in women is their superior ability to network. However, he further qualifies this by saying that firstly, SAHMs' current active networks are not the ones that will '*get them the gig*' and secondly, the women in this cohort may not '*necessarily have the confidence to go and do it* [network] *in a more formal context*'

In Tom's corporate experience it is unlikely that any job seeker is going to secure an offer of employment through someone they actually know. He believes job opportunities occur at the *'third referral point'* which he explains as:

You've been referred onto someone else who's referred you onto someone else, who's referred you onto someone else. That's typically where the action is [] the referral point is typically three on, it's where the gold nuggets are. (Tom)

Lyn's narrative gives a personal account of how she used to view the process of networking and how her ideas have evolved and how valuable networking has been for her own professional progress

I used to think, networking, networking is men, they do it well, women don't. I think, as I said, that's how I got my job here, because I had networked with - and by networking, I wasn't out drinking and socialising. It wasn't that type of network [] But it is about linking in contacts with people.

She uses her personal experiences to speculate that SAHMs would benefit from maximizing the potential of the connections they already do have

A lot of your study people, I assume that they haven't got an immediate network or that they might not think they have [] it could be that some of these women, without knowing, are in a network. [] you said they had been on boards or executive roles or through their children, if they've been involved in school, they actually know other women. Maybe those other women have partners, husbands, friends who are in these commercial jobs. [] it's maximising the potential of what they - of the connections that they have. (Lyn)

In considering Lyn's view with Tom's proposition of a *third referral point* it may well be that a lack of current professional networks is a barrier for SAHMs but what the managers also identify is the potential to eliminate this barrier through leveraging off the women's current private relationships and networks.

7.3.2.4   Low Confidence

This leveraging however, is likely to be impacted by another factor identified in the managers' interviews as a possible barrier to re-entry, and that is SAHMs' levels of confidence.

Tom addressed the issue of confidence and called it the '*self-belief and self-efficacy*' challenge for SAHMs

> *This is all anecdotal but my view would be most women in those positions I would daresay just lack self-efficacy in terms of belief, in a corporate environment, you know? So there's a couple of challenges as I see, for those women. It's the self-belief and self-efficacy challenge. Because these do impact how they position themselves for re-entry. It's what I call the re-entry point. So they've got a number of challenges. One, defining what that re-entry point is [] So, it's understanding what you're good at. So, the how to pitch. There needs to be a bit of self-awareness building. Most of women have got it intuitively, but if we can put some frameworks around it for them it will help build their confidence a whole lot more, which is that other piece, it's a self-belief thing, it's a confidence factor. I've seen it every time.* (Tom)

7.3.2.5   The Recruitment gatekeepers

Robert identified employer attitudes as the first barrier or '*hurdle*' SAHMs would face when embarking on re-employment

> *I think the first hurdle is that you've got to have an employer that is open-minded to take on somebody that has been out of the workforce for 20 years. That's kind of pretty fundamental. Otherwise they don't even get through the front door.* (Robert)

Tom foresees two obstacles for re-entering SAHMs. The first challenge or barrier he identified pertains to SAHMs personally, the second challenge he refers to is the processes the women will encounter at organisational level, specifically

> *The way organisations recruit people, there are too many gate keeping processes and structural inhibitors.* (Tom)

Traditional organisational recruitment Tom believes is a *mechanical process* designed to fit a client's recruitment *shopping list*

That type of recruitment process is quite literally a process driven by productivity in terms of how can we get, in the shortest possible time frame, three candidates on a seat, in front of a client. (Tom)

Tom's view is that re-entering SAHMs need to think of recruitment in terms of '*hidden versus visible recruitment*' markets and steer away from the visible market, namely, advertised processes being carried out by recruiters on behalf of organisations

I think something like 45 per cent get their gigs via referral, then the other percentage get it by the visible marketplace in terms of recruiters. So you've got a situation where half the marketplace is owned by - if I could call it that - the recruitment sector, who have got a brief off a client. You've also got the situation where - so the clients are paying a fee, whatever that fee is, 11 or 14 per cent. They've been given a brief in terms of this is the skills and the experience and competencies et cetera, et cetera and often there is no fit in a traditional recruitment context for none of these individuals, these women, are not going to be able to tick the boxes. So that immediately sort of shuts them out of 50 per cent of the marketplace, right? (Tom)

Re-entering SAHMs he believes need to concentrate their efforts in the hidden employment market where they can capitalise on and further develop what he has previously noted as a SAHM strength - their ability to network.

Managers give a recruiter a brief and none of these women fit the brief. So how else do they enter the organisation other than by the networking route and often it's a skill piece associated with being a savvy networker. (Tom)

Perceived strengths	Perceived barriers
Personal/Interpersonal skills	Length of Time exited
Maturity	Professional disconnection
Wisdom	
Strong work ethic	
Adaptability	Dated skills
Reliability	In profession
Superior networking ability	Technology
People management	In business
Good listeners	
Good at multi skilling	
Good at multi-tasking	
Mothering expertise	Current recruitment practices
Greater self-awareness	The visible recruitment market
Professional skills	Employer attitudes
Professional track record	
Formal Qualifications	
Latent profession specific knowledge	No professional networks
Research ability	
Critical thinking ability	Low confidence levels
Strategic thinking ability	

Figure 7.2: Summary of perceived strengths and barriers accredited to the SAHM cohort, as identified by the interviewed managers.

7.4   Work Practices

In the interviews, all the managers spoke about different employment practices and work arrangements that were available in their respective organisations. These were addressed as being of contextual pertinence to older employees or women returning to work (albeit the latter was addressed by managers in reference to returners from maternity leave.)

7.4.1   Types of Flexible work in place

All interviewees reported having flexible work practices at play in their organisations. For the majority of the organisations studied (orgs 1, 2, 4, and 5) flexible work is the norm company-wide and is available to all staff. As Tom comments

> *We provide a lot of room, I guess, in terms of flexibility to work around work and family and work, and we keep it all going.* (Tom)

For two organisations (Org 3 and 6) offering flexible work options is more an issue of legal compliance, and a situation about which Robert states,

> *The Fair Work Act provides quite a lot of legal support and obligation on employers to deliver that degree of flexibility if it can be accommodated within the job description of the individual.   If they can do their job with flexible working hours then we'll look to see that we can accommodate that.*

Thus in Org 6, flexibility is treated as an accommodation of a specific individual request or circumstance, rather than an open, company-wide offering of flexible work options.

> *We don't have a company-wide flexible working hours' policy that everyone swings off. That would create chaos.* (Robert)

Robert qualified his notion of '*chaos*' by explaining that some of the professional roles within his organisation simply do not lend themselves to flexible work conditions. He

explained that hours and days worked particularly by finance personnel are dictated by external factors that his company has no control over, for example the stock exchange trading hours and the operating hours of their client base which is made up major financial institutions. His company's in-house lawyers however, are not as dependant on those external factors and are the professional group that most avail themselves of flexible conditions

> *Lawyers, definitely. So we do with them. Lawyers have a fair bit of flex in their work arrangements. They work from home, they work here, they have flexible hours. So we support it. It absolutely exists.* (Robert)

Jan's narrative reveals that flexible work arrangements at her firm are predominantly focussed on offering part time hours in situations where employees are returning from maternity leave. The company's expectation however, is that such part time arrangements be temporary and that returners ramp up to full time employment

> *We do have women though that when they do come back from maternity leave will come in part-time and gradually ramp back up. We find that that works quite well. We'll usually negotiate with the employee and if they come back and say - like I had one woman who came back after three years and she said, I only want to work two days a week now. We said, gosh, your position's full-time and we really would find it difficult to find somebody to fill the other three days to maintain continuity in the job, but what we can do is we can do three days a week for a period of six months to let you get used to the environment, find childcare for your child, all of those sorts of things that would make it a little bit more navigationally easy for you. Then at the end of that six months we will need to revert it back to a regular full-time position.* (Jan)

According to Jan, the limited flex work options offered by her employer are a result of a recent organisational cultural shift, in response to legislative changes. She believes that prior to the laws changing, managers would willingly

> *Do things and always try to accommodate people as best we could.*

Whereas what she finds currently is that staff have adopted an attitude of entitlement and managers, one of fear

> *Now I feel like it's probably more driven out of fear and risk of litigation, which is a little bit sad because I think it was - it's made it a little bit harder to be flexible. There's a lot of paperwork now that goes along with it and people feel very entitled. But now managers are feeling like they can't say no.* (Jan)

Jan also commented that she personally finds the administration of flexible arrangements and the associated paperwork '*very cumbersome*'

> *I find that very cumbersome, that if somebody wants to apply for a flexible work arrangement they've got to fill out this form and that form and you've got to keep a record of it and you've got to do a new contract.* (Jan)

Managers' personal attitudes towards flexibility also varied. Four of the interviewees reported flexible arrangements as positive work processes that they engage in themselves (Orgs 1, 2, 4 and 5)

> *I've got a flexible work arrangement with my team. They just need to tell me what are their preferred working hours. In my team I have people who will come in late and stay late, and I have people come in early and go early. I'm a firm believer in that, so all my teams - I've worked that way. So I come in early and leave early, and they know if they need to get me they need to come in to get me. But whatever works best for an individual, because some people are morning and some people are evening people. So I let that flexibility run.* (Sophie)

The two managers (Org 3 and 6) that facilitate flexible work options for employees more from a position of it being a legislative requirement do not work flexibly themselves.

We have a number of people simply because - and again I would probably say this is due to the legislative nature of flexible work rate, we find that it's actually very difficult to say no to a flexible work arrangement, or if a woman is returning from maternity leave to accommodate and at the very least a short-term accommodation of part-time work. (Jan)

7.4.1.1 Characteristics of flexible arrangements in use

According to the managers' narratives, the four organisations that actively promote and engage in flexible work across positions and levels, appear to share some operational characteristics

Corporate Culture

Firstly, senior management set the tone for a corporate culture supportive of flexible work practices by either actively promoting and/or participating in flexible work arrangements themselves. For Coral having this top down support is important

The firm promotes a flexible working arrangement. (Coral)

At Tom's organisation the corporate culture promotes a non-prescriptive approach by supporting individualised work arrangements for each employee, that is, each employee negotiates their own flex work arrangement

So an organisation like ourselves, we are quite generous of mind as well as generous in not being overly - what's the word? Not being overly restrictive in terms of how we want people to engage with us. Or prescriptive is probably the word. (Tom)

Secondly existing flexible arrangements are openly communicated therefore reinforcing corporate culture around flexibility. At Lyn's organisation for example they have an electronic '*daily list'* showing all staff movements and availability.

A daily email that just tells us who's in, who's not and there's always the standard "X works this day, Y works this day, It's Z's day off today". Those sorts of things, so everyone's on notice. It tells you who's sick, who's on annual leave. Tells you who's on a business trip. Then, there's a section called Part time and I can see one, two, three, four, five, six, seven names on it today and they would always be on there and we're talking about two partners, one's special counsel, which is the next level down and a senior associate, who's a man. Just in this area, of maybe, 40 staff. (Lyn)

What this list does additionally, is that it highlights the position levels of personnel who engage in flex work pointing to a third manner of enacting a corporate culture of support for the system in the four organisations. It demonstrates and reinforces that senior and professional levels of staff are participants also. Sophie expressed a similar sentiment, all staff members at her organisation know that senior staff work flexibly and this creates a '*mindset*'

I'd say half the senior management team have got kids between the age of three and eight. So they're quite good at leaving at three o'clock, going to do a pick-up, taking their kids home and then working for a few hours afterwards, because they've got that mindset it works; the flexibility works. (Sophie)

Team based

The negotiations on the specifics of the flexible work arrangements at the four organisations are carried out at individual work unit or team levels, they are not managed by a centralised HR or administrative system

So it's all decided at individual work unit level; not at senior management level. So it's a negotiated agreement. (Sophie)

Coral states that what makes flexibility work at her organisation is that accountability is placed at the individual work units, and this in turn generates trust from employees

It's giving back that accountability to the team saying manage your own time. You know what my guidelines are. You know what I expect of you. Work towards that and we'll be fine. That's the way it is. I think it promotes trust having that flexibility. (Coral)

Types of flexibility

The types of flexible work arrangements the four managers spoke on are characterised by fluidity and negotiation rather than rigidity and pre-set conditions.

In Tom's organisation there is a clear distinction between support staff's and professional staff's work arrangements. All professional staff work under an associate structure where both employer and employee can negotiate how much they work and how often. This is a process that is supply/demand driven and is negotiated via what Tom calls a *transactional* negotiation. Tom also highlighted that this type of structure has been particularly useful for women who wanted to remain attached to the *bungee rope* (mentioned previously)

It's a supply and demand thing, so they might say to us look, I'm available three days a week and I'll say that's great but I can only buy two days a week for the next couple of months because it's quiet. Or they'll say I'm available three and I'll say we're actually really busy, can you give us a couple more, yes or no? If they can't, they can't and I live with that. So it is a total transactional piece in terms of I need you and you need me and let's treat each other respectfully and try and do a deal. (Tom)

Supply and demand are factors that also dictate work models at Sophie's organisation. Given that much of the professional work in this company revolves around producing or publishing programmes, most of the flexible work arrangements are tailored according to project specific requirements. Additionally, this organisation offers permanent part time options as part of their flexible work model.

We do have people who work part-time, but they'll be full days. It might be two full days a week or three full days a week. Then we have people who work on specific projects. They might work 15 days in one month, nothing the next month and then another 15 days. So it varies depending on assignment and what's involved. (Sophie)

In these four organisations it is the norm that many of the professional staff regularly work from home.

People work from home …a lot of people work from home on Fridays. The type of people that we've got they're all professionals. They all manage their time. If they want to work from home a day a week yeah go for it. We all do that. It's just because - it just helps you to be better organised. I know I work from home every Friday and I get so much more work done and it's just that flexibility. (Coral)

Additionally, hours worked are dictated by the nature of the project or work at hand

Then I guess media being production-based, if you've got award ceremonies, et cetera, you've got to work late nights. There's the hangover the next morning and people will wander in. But they've done 17 hours the day before, so if they come in for three hours, it's not a big deal. So it's really much more project work based rather than, have you technically done your 38 and a half hours this week or not. (Sophie)

The general expectation in these four organisations is that staff self-manage their time use according to workload

People pretty much manage their own time. I don't tell them you've got to come in nine to five. I find when you don't dictate those things people don't abuse it. (Coral)

This fluidity is made possible in part by the manner in which productivity is measured. As Tom explains he does not care if he sees his staff or not if they are achieving their agreed to billable targets

> *We measure people based upon billable days, sales contribution, you know, all those other bits and pieces, so there's still an expectation that people hit all their numbers around that. But if you're a senior, for example, your target is say, 55 per cent billed days and then you've got a billings contribution number or sales contribution number, but if you hit those 55 I don't care if I don't see you, I don't care if you work...where you actually work from. It doesn't bother me at all and it doesn't bother anyone within the organisation.* (Tom)

Similarly for Coral, she focuses her attention on work outputs not staff presence

> *My stance on that is as long as you get the work done I don't really care whether you're here or not.* (Coral)

7.4.2 Recruitment in practice

7.4.2.1 How managers recruit currently

Most managers interviewed recruit new staff through a combination of mediums which includes internal staff moves, social media or specialist recruitment agencies. In a minority of instances, recruitment has been through known contacts and word of mouth.

One organisation however, does not use social media at all (Org 6). As Robert stated their preference is to groom for succession in-house thus their recruitment process begins with the question: can we fill the position internally?

> *If we can't then we know that we have to go outside. We do try to put resources into developing our staff internally so that they can progress and take on the senior positions.* (Robert)

Robert believes that his organisation's uniqueness and reputation in the industry generates a '*massive response*' from would be applicants and this has resulted in the firm no longer carrying out their own recruitment, the process is now fully outsourced to specialist recruiters

> *So we would use one or two consultants, depending on whether they're back or front office.* (Robert)

Conversely, at Coral's organisation the majority of the recruitment is carried out on social media and on-line systems and the use of recruitment agencies is a rarity. Coral explains that she is generally distanced from the recruitment process and her personal involvement occurs mainly at two points: at the beginning in co-designing with her managers, the role to be filled and at the end ensuring short listed candidates have the requisite '*behavioural, cultural fit'*.

> *We do the job description. It goes to our recruitment team [] They filter through all of the candidates that apply for the role and we get a shortlist. [] my team would do the first level of interviews and the second round interviews I would do [] We use LinkedIn. So a lot of jobs we recruit for are posted on LinkedIn. There's Twitter. We're a bit - the firm is big in social media [] Seek. There is Seek. There's also a facility within our website to submit your resume if you wanted to. But I think that's probably the general way through advertisement through websites - so in addition to LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, we also do the more traditional Seek.com, Careerone [] if we can't fill the role through our recruitment process within a period of time would we go to an agency. So all the technical questions, you know, how to do stuff I leave to my senior managers to do. I'm really looking at behavioural cultural fit within, because we've got to make sure that that's right.* (Coral)

At Jan's organisation there are very tight headcount restrictions in place and this determines how much external recruitment can take place. Therefore the majority of the recruitment in this organisation revolves around internal staff movements, sourcing in-house candidates nationally and internationally.

We do a lot through internal referrals, we do a lot through our own internal development and growth here. We have a very high percentage of internal movement within the company, so whether they're from Australia here or other affiliates around the world. (Jan)

It is only when this internal process does not generate suitable candidates to fill vacancies that Jan looks to other sources such as recommendations, specialist recruiters and industry groups, or social media

When you start to go externally, primarily we look to word of mouth from employees. We tend to go with maybe pharmaceutical recruiters that specialise in the industry. Sometimes we'll look at industry specific groups or certain groups that if we were trying to target - but we rarely do that. So typically we'll use internet, social media, our own company posting system, word of mouth, so employee referrals and we use external recruiters. (Jan)

In Sophie's organisation the majority of the recruitment is done via on-line systems. Additionally, they actively recruit for freelance writers, bloggers and critics through engagement with on-line media products and programs aired on-line. This organisation has strong established freelance working relationships with youth and mothers which Sophie capitalises on for this particular recruitment need

We actively seek freelancers to fill that gap. (Sophie)

Aside from standard professional recruitment, two managers also spoke specifically about their graduate programme recruitment practices. Coral's organisation begins with posting the recruitment campaigns on social media and follows with university campus visits

We've got a graduate program that's posted on Facebook. [] so twice a year basically we go out to all the universities and we invite the top talent, or we try and attract the top talent particularly in accounting tax, law, consulting and IT. [] they're invited to submit an application and then they are interviewed. They

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have to do group assessments. It's a long process that they have to do to be accepted into the graduate programme. (Coral)

Robert's organisation on the other hand outsources the process to professional recruiters as they do with their regular recruitment

We go through an agency there as well. (Robert)

7.4.2.2 Actual experience in employing SAHM-like candidates

I wanted to ascertain if any of the interviewed managers had ever employed a re-entrant fitting the SAHM profile. Three of the managers reported having done so however, on analysis there are some variations on how these women are re-employed and also in how long they had been exited.

Sophie believes her organisation to be an ideal environment for women wanting to re-enter the workforce. That, she explains is partly due to the audience her company targets its products and services to, and partly because they already have established albeit non-permanent working relationships with mothers in the community. It is these women's expertise as mothers that is of value to Sophie's organisation

> *We've got a youth demographic and we've got a kids' demographic, we also very much engage with mothers as social bloggers [] That really is about getting their expertise back into our organisation. So they write articles for us, they do blogging, they all do product reviews, content reviews. it's actually core expertise We look at core expertise. We don't actually look at age demographic or culture per se. It's actually about the expertise.* (Sophie)

As was noted in the previous section however, Sophie employs these women only as freelancers and all the work they engage in is piece work or project based.

Jan stated that she has employed a re-entering professional woman that had been sourced through in-house contacts, however, at interview Jan could not provide many details and it was unclear how long this particular re-entrant had been out of the workforce or what her professional credentials and experience were.

I've actually hired somebody here that's been out of the workforce for a while and when I saw what she had done before, but that she hadn't been in the workforce, right away I called her immediately. (Jan)

Interestingly the participant from the smallest of the interviewed organisations is the one that claims to have recruited re-entrants that appear to most mirror a SAHM profile. Robert asserts that in his organisation they have employed two re-entering lawyers:

We've done it. We've done it twice. Both lawyers. First one was our first in-house lawyer, she was early 50s I think when she joined us. I think she might have been out for 20 years. The most recent one, who has been with us now for probably seven or eight years has gone through a similar process. Also a lawyer she'd had time out to have children and she'd had some years totally off and worked a little bit of part time. But I don't think it was 10 years. I think it was more like five years, something like that. (Robert)

It appears from Robert's comment that the first re-entrant had been unattached to the workforce for 20 years and re-entered as a middle age woman. The second re-entrant Robert referred to however, is more a case of what Tom has previously referred to as the *'bungee rope'* scenario. This second re-entrant was career exited for a significantly shorter time and appears to have maintained some connection with the workforce by having '*worked a little bit of part time'*.

Overall the interview data indicates that out of the six organisations participating in this study only one mid-age, fully exited career woman has re-entered the workforce and been re-employed in a professional role.

7.4.2.3   Traits the managers would seek in SAHM-like candidates

When referring to the specifics managers would look for if recruiting SAHMs all responses focused on broad traits these managers would seek. What the interview data also demonstrates is that the majority of managers did not engage in any consideration on how re-entrants might position themselves firstly in an applicant pool and secondly

how they could demonstrate their potential to be considered as an applicant. The broad traits identified from the managers' interviews are as follows:

<u>Work ethic and experience</u>

For example, Robert responded very broadly stating that he would seek in re-entering women the same attitude to work and expertise he would seek in any candidate

> *I would employ anybody who I felt had the right qualifications, the right experience and the energy and enthusiasm to get out of bed and come to work every day.* (Robert)

He offered no suggestion as to how SAHMs might position themselves as applicants.

<u>Ability to sell the difference</u>

Lyn believes that she would view re-entering SAHMs in a similar manner to any other candidate if they were able to identify their point of difference and then were able to *sell it*.

> *If you've got a lot of people competing for the job, that's where it becomes a little more difficult, so I think the women would really need to start to find a differentiating point of view and really go and sell it. Then, I would be quite open-minded. I would never disregard them.* (Lyn)

Like Robert, she was not able to identify how SAHMs would be able to position themselves in an application process when there are '*a lot of people competing for the job*'.

<u>Capability</u>

Coral believes that no role can ever be filled by a person who has all of the required experience and that it is usually a case of '*80/20 or 60/40 or whatever'* fit. Thus for her the core factor she would seek for in any applicant is '*capability*'

> *But really what you're looking for is simple - "can this person do the job"? Right, I think it comes down to capability. And I think you would know by*

looking at their past experience. It could be that they were a manager. You look at what did they use to manage? What was their area of accountability? and from that you try and relate it back to the current position that might be on offer and assess whether they could do it. I think a lot of that decision process has to do with 2 things: capability, and cultural fit into the firm. And also I think it's how flexible are they likely to be to adapt to change within the scenarios that happen in a role?[] So I don't think it's about 'it's a 45 or 50 year old person, do I want to employ this person or not', I think it's more about capability and it's about those other factors – flexibility and cultural fit. (Coral)

Coral added that this ability to be flexible is an important indicator to '*capability*' because roles themselves change over time and illustrated her point with her personal employment situation saying that her current role is completely different to what it was two years ago

So it's about how could these reentering women adapt to those changes? Are they likely to be able to? That's what I'd look for. (Coral)

Expertise vs qualifications

Sophie was more SAHM focussed in her response to what traits she would look for, perhaps because as previously noted, her organisation already has an established practice of recruiting mothers as freelancers. In terms of recruiting SAHMs as permanent employees Sophie would focus more on skills acquired through life experiences rather than on formal qualifications

As an employee? They could fulfil roles like event management or - yeah, we would have - there are a number of roles. There would be event management. There would be monitoring - so now there is regulation which requires us to monitor Facebook sites and the content that goes on to our pages. So those sorts of roles. Monitoring sites, even content creation. Yeah, we could, because it's an expertise that they bring to the table. It's not - we don't look at it as educational qualification. It's what do you bring, either from a creative

perspective or from an objective perspective - what's the skill set that you bring? And that comes more from life experience, from having been involved in different activities, not necessarily formal qualifications. (Sophie)

Need a *bungee rope*

For Jan the implied benefit to hiring a SAHM re-entrant is that she can '*get them before another company does'*. However, Jan qualifies this by saying that the factors she would look for in someone '*dipping their toe back in the market'* are a good work history and some level of engagement with their professional field and technology.

> *I think so much depends on the person, but I find that when I see CVs that are persons like your research group, it can go either way [] Because if they've had a good history before they're likely to be very good today. If they have kept up with their field to a certain degree or with technology to a certain degree, they're still just as valuable as they were 10 years ago or whatever, when they left the workforce [] when you see a CV of a woman like that you're immediately intrigued, you call right away because it could go either way. I tend to think of it sometimes as a very positive thing because I can sometimes get them before another company does. If they haven't been on the market necessarily and it's somebody that's dipping their toe back in the market, they can be quite valuable and sometimes they don't even realise it yet.* (Jan)

7.4.3   Approach to Diversity

Only two of the managers interviewed believed their organisations pro-actively supported and encouraged diversity in the work place. This is a position reflected by Tom's opinions stated at interview, that there is a general lack of focus on '*the diversity piece'* in Australia. He credits factors such as '*gate keeping processes'* and '*structural inhibitors'* as holding back organisational performance or progress particularly in relation to women and work

Australia's way behind in terms of women in the workplace stuff. This place is so narrow minded when it comes to senior women, like, the Kiwis are way ahead of us.

He believes that this is additionally demonstrated in the types of individuals who are consistently retrenched across industries

What I do see is an overrepresentation of pregnant women or women on maternity leave, who are retrenched. I see, I see an overrepresentation of non-English speaking background individuals and I see an overrepresentation of older workers retrenched. Absolutely, absolutely. I see it time and time again.

Commenting specifically on his current employer, he deems the organisation places a great deal of value on diversity in general and very pro-actively recruits to maintain a gender, age and cultural diversity mix. He believes this to be an unusual position in Australia's organisational scene. For Tom, actively pursuing diversity is good business practice and it is a process of value adding

The diversity piece, it's important to get that mix. Because you get a different view of the world in terms of you get some wisdom at the take, get some energy, you - the older individuals will often help build that capability of the younger ones coming through. I couldn't stand a monoculture or mono-aged organisation - it'd send me nuts. It adds value, simple as that.

Lyn credits her CEO as being a very active and vocal driving force in instituting changes that have put in place more equitable work practices and in particular, gender balance. He is credited with pushing for more women in senior roles throughout the practice such as partners and senior counsel and has implemented performance measures tied to diversity and inclusion

A lot more proactive in actually monitoring people on their diversity performance,... managers will actually be - have their own performance

measured on whether they've got diversity in the team and that can be very much women, at the moment. (Lyn)

In sharp contrast, Jan's organisation has no active diversity policies or practices in place

There's very little focus on diversity here. We're very - we have a high female population so that's not really even thought about. We don't have to put programs in place to, let's say, hire more females because we've already got such a high number but we don't have significant ethnic diversity or other groups.

Coral was unaware of specific diversity policies and explained that aside from the senior partners who are mostly aged late 50s to early 60s, the majority of the staff is '*predominately young'*, and this she does not consider to be a problem

I don't think we have an issue with age. Do I think we have a problem because our workforce is predominantly young - I don't think that's a problem. (Coral)

She does elaborate however that what could fall under the banner of diversity is that there are numerous in-house initiatives to retain and attract talented women from within the firm. These programs she describes as '*complex*' and that in reality selection is based on '*dollars'* generated.

It's very complex, very matrixy. Because you've got the CEO, the CFO and everyone kind of - but it kind of works in some weird way. So I think anyone can nominate someone to become a partner. So it would be about - you have to go through the pathway to partnership which is this program that I think goes on for about a year. You go through this intensive reviewing program to see whether you qualify for that. Then it's basically - you know ultimately I think it's really based on how much revenue you bring into the firm really. It's all about dollars. (Coral)

Robert does not think of managing diversity as a separate issue to treating all staff fairly and therefore has not thought on what a diversity strategy would entail in his organisation.

> *I think it's just a question of you treat people decently, male or female. So I suppose we target everybody. It's not something I actually think about.*

7.4.4 Approach to an ageing workforce

At interview, all managers considered the implications of an ageing workforce on their current recruitment practices and succession planning strategies. Overall, the interview data points to a prevalent position of organisational inaction on this issue.

Lyn commented on a general state of uncertainty regarding the reality of an ageing workforce versus what she observes is actually happening to older industry peers but made no further comment on how her organisation is addressing the matter.

> *I'm actually feeling quite mixed at the moment about what I'm reading about - like, I'm hearing, okay, we need older people, more experienced people, and I think, this is good, moving towards that category myself but at the same time, I'm constantly reading and hearing anecdotal stories, the banks laying off people all the time. Making them redundant. Two of the people that I had at* [previous organisation] *they are being made redundant and they're - one's 60, one's sort of mid-fifties. It seems to be the older people that are in this position. It's just a bit conflicting.* (Lyn)

Tom based his comments on observations he has made in dealing with his company's extensive corporate client base. He believes that in Australia organisations are not being responsive enough in designing policies to address a shrinking or ageing workforce

Even though it's on our doorstep here and now; organisations just aren't being strategic in terms of having a more strategic approach integrated with all of their other people systems or other bits and pieces, to address it. (Tom)

He believes that there are structural hurdles that need to be removed at a national level and attitudinal changes that need to occur at organisational level

There's inflexibilities created by superannuation schemes or there's disincentives created by managers who feel like they've got to have someone five days a week. (Tom)

Tom referred to superannuation scheme rules as an example of a '*structural hurdle*' that prevents many organisations from offering alternative work arrangements to older employees

You've got a situation where you've got some sort of defined benefit super scheme, which says that you will get paid a percentage of your final year's salary for the rest of your life. So what happens, of course, is rather than people transitioning down incrementally over time, they stop because if they transition down to two days a week, their defined benefit's super will only pay them rather than - you know, their final year's salary might be let's say they're a senior person, $275,000. So, rather than getting 75 per cent of that, they will only get - and if they transition down to two days a week, they only get 75 per cent of $100,000 or two days' work. So everywhere there's all these structural disincentives that are preventing more flexible approaches to older workers or retaining older workers. That's all I've got to say on that. (Tom)

Robert referred to the issue of supply and demand as the reason his company does not have ageing workforce plans in place. He believes that being in a boutique and much '*sought after*' industry there is no need for an ageing workforce strategy currently. He acknowledges however that change is coming and that his organisation does need to plan for succession across levels, including the Board.

Well, in our industry I think there is - it's a buyer's market [] so there are fewer jobs around in funds management and more people looking for jobs. So I wouldn't regard there being a big shortage in our industry. It's a pretty sought-after industry. [] We're stable and we've got a low turnover as an organisation. But we do need to plan for the future at all levels in the organisation because there's change, the board has some pretty senior people on it. They're not going to be board members forever, so we need to plan for that succession. (Robert)

Jan described how she plans as a manager and in particular her role in succession planning across the whole organisation. Jan stated that she plans "*up to about seven years out*", however she has not considered the ramifications of an ageing workforce in any of her plans or policies to date. For Jan there are some significant headcount restrictions in place that are set by the overseas head office that impact on her ability to enact change regarding personnel. She stated that need, will drive change – but not just yet.

Something like 65 per cent of our workforce is going to be over 65, or some crazy statistic, but today as I look at it, I don't have the headcount to mess around. With so many people being in the older age groups, there's going to be a need there. Yes, something will happen, something will shift it; we just can't see it right now. Something will definitely happen, headcount at the moment, that's a huge issue.[] we're just so limited on headcount, this is a small affiliate and when you're lucky to get one headcount you've got to have somebody that's skilled up right then [] which is a shame because it eliminates two different types of people. It eliminates young, right out of university and it eliminates people that are just coming back into the workforce. (Jan)

In the interim, Jan's recruitment strategy is based on a current practice holding-pattern

Get them wherever we can take them, wherever we can get them, but I think we'll continue to do a lot of internet and social media hiring. (Jan)

At Sophie's organisation there is no ageing workforce strategy, nor does she believe it would be possible to have one in place. Sophie claims that due to the fast paced nature of her company's business and the technologies that drive it, it is not even possible to ascertain if the organisation will still be around in ten years' time.

> *No, we don't have an ageing workforce strategy. That's an interesting question, because this organisation doesn't know where it's going to be in ten years' time because of the media landscape changing so quickly. So there's so much uncertainty, no one has an idea. [] I don't think in this environment we'll be able to have an aging workforce strategy, personally. I think people will have to - people will ultimately move out, because technology and creativity will move so fast that to be in the zone or in the buzz it's going to have to be young people.*

The way in which this organisation is part-tackling a lack of people resources is by firstly, developing technologies to handle certain processes and tasks

> *So we're using technology to streamline processes, and now technology does more than what people can do. So whilst we have an ageing population and we won't have the same pool of resource, but we will have...more streamlined and then we'll use the technology to fill the gap.* (Sophie)

and secondly, by addressing the dwindling people resources issue through more aggressive recruitment of *'young people'*.

7.5   Recommended re--engagement strategies

7.5.1   Strategies for organisations

There was overwhelming acknowledgement in all the manager's narratives that current recruitment practices are not positioned to successfully attract or manage career exited re-entry applicants. Four of the interviewed managers recognized that to enable SAHM re-entry to the workforce there would need to be some type of shift to current

recruitment practice at an organisational level. These interviewees made broad comments related to what those changes might entail. Tom on the other hand was more detailed about the changes he envisages. Their suggestions revolve around a central idea akin to a re-integration scheme.

Robert expressed the view that as a manager considering a re-entering applicant his first issue would be how to assess the '*re-connection*' point. He perceives that there may not be enough '*evidence*' or '*track record*' on which to consider re-entrants and suggests that the creation of a re-entry or interface programme which he called a '*stepping stone*' would be a useful process for both employer and re-entrant to demonstrate fit

> *Yeah, there might have to be a stepping stone of some kind. [] So they can prove*
> *to themselves and to prospective employers that they've got what it takes.*
> (Robert)

This he suggests, could be followed by a process of '*aggressive*' progression

> *I think the progression could be more aggressive because of their seniority and*
> *what that brings.* (Robert)

At Lyn's legal firm there is, in theory, a ramp-up accelerated programme available for experienced professionals joining the firm from other organisations However, she believes this programme '*hasn't been well done*' and is not as fruitful as anticipated because it has not been formally managed or monitored.

> *It requires management, and I don't know that they've quite got it, because they*
> *promise you to go on an accelerated learning program, but in reality, they've*
> *done nothing about that.[] There's little formal anything written about it and the*
> *HR person, sort of, apologised about eight months in that they've not really done*
> *anything about this.* (Lyn)

In Lyn's view what would make a ramp-up programme successful would be the appointment of an in-house sponsor, who would not only drive the programme but also be '*actively a bit more supportive*' of individuals undertaking the programme, and additionally be accountable to the firm for achieving results

> *The key is, I think, you need to have a sponsor and someone who really believes in making it happen and making it work, from the organisation's perspective.[] A sponsor in - of the program itself, where their results have to be formalised and there needs to be accountability, probably, on the organisation's part.* (Lyn)

Jan also believes that a ramping-back type programme would be of benefit to re-entering personnel and wishes it were possible at her current organisation

> *I would love to have people come in and do ramping-on types of rotation programs.*

and framed her comments based on her experiences of successful arrangements at a previous place of employment

> *When I worked at* [previous employer] *we did off-ramp and on-ramp types of things which is again, you bring people in slowly to get them re-acclimatised to the work environment, say working mums after they've been out.* (Jan)

A reintegration strategy Tom firmly believes in is designing a re-entry programme modelled on existing graduate intake formats. He believes that large organisations in particular could both accommodate and benefit from such programmes

> *From an employer perspective particularly after say, 10 or 15 years, I would probably handle it a bit like a graduate piece. Let's get you back in and back on the boards - in terms of on the running boards [] So I'd be getting them onto some sort of rotational process for the first 12 months and let's see where the best alignment is in terms of your occupational interest and job fit. Let's get you reintegration via like a graduate program. [] I think big organisations,*

institutions, the banks the miners, et cetera, et cetera, they could get a lot of value out of some sort of graduate process for older professional women. (Tom)

Similar to Robert's notion of '*aggressive progression*', Tom also believes that a SAHM re-entry model designed around a graduate intake programme should incorporate fast tracking components. He offers as explanation that traditional graduate programs

Actually manage to piss graduates off because they give them non meaningful work and the rotations are too long in areas that aren't aligned to their interests. (Tom)

Tom added that a SAHM specific programme should be accelerated with '*fast paced movements*' to capitalise on each woman's capability and capacity

Once the rotation is over, boom, you might be able to even fast track them two or three levels straight away. (Tom)

7.5.2   Strategies for SAHMs

In identifying specific strategies for SAHMs to adopt as part of a re-entry plan, all managers referred back to points they addressed earlier in the interviews when commenting on SAHM strengths or the traits the managers would seek in SAHM re-entrants. In essence these suggested strategies centre on issues of either positioning or targeting. The first relates to SAHMs' personal preparation for re-entry and the latter refers to where to target their application efforts.

<u>Positioning:</u>

In terms of recommendations as to how SAHMs should position themselves for re-entry the managers' narratives point to a cumulative three step plan of action

The first step would be to identify what the current interests and strengths are. This is exemplified by Tom's narrative where he states an important part of re-entry preparation rests in identifying both occupational and motivational interests because the career choices SAHMs made two plus decades ago, may no longer be relevant

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What is it they want to do next? [] the world's moved on and so have they and their occupational interest [now] *may be very different to what their qualifications are.* (Tom)

The second step would entail each SAHM defining what her point of difference is. This is a point raised by most of the interviewed managers as an important process SAHMs should be entering into. According to Lyn, it is about finding their *'niche'*. This would be possible by reflecting on past experiences in and out of the workforce and through that, identifying what they can *'package and market'* to their advantage, what their *'point of difference'* is. Lyn believes SAHMs

Should be saying we do have experience. We have a proven record. We've had a break, but now we're going back into the work force and we're reliable. We have our life experiences and our former commercial experiences. (Lyn)

Tom considers the out of the workforce experiences also and stated that SAHMs need to capitalise on their expertise and connections made through *'unpaid route'* activities

There's a lot to be said about voluntary placement in terms of helping you build networks and demonstrate credibility. (Tom)

Another element that can be added to the differentiation equation according to Robert is that having formed their families, SAHMs are now in a position to

Re-join the workforce productively for a pretty serious amount of time [] another 10 to 15 years. (Robert)

The third step in the plan involves preparation. This is a step that according to Coral all SAHM re-entrants should begin with the question

How do I prepare myself to go back to the workforce? (Coral)

and this she suggests would entail a process of critically examining current skill levels and identifying areas where SAHMs need to *'skill up'*.

Additionally as part of the preparation process, both Lyn and Tom suggest that SAHMs make use of their current networks to generate new contacts.

<u>Targeting</u>

There are three broad strategies garnered from the managers' interviews that recommend where SAHMs should target their re-entry focus: having realistic expectations, picking the right pitch and getting help.

The first recommendation is that SAHMs be realistic in their expectations of seniority and position levels upon re-entry. That is, that they align their expectations to be more commensurate with experience rather than with age

> *There's no escaping the fact that if you take time out from the workforce you can't, all other things being equal, expect to come in at the level that your peers are operating at after 10 years.* (Robert)

This is a point somewhat mirrored by Tom who similarly addresses this but more from a position of finding the right *pitch* to target as the appropriate re-entry point

> *What is the re-entry point for these individuals? When I talk about re-entry point, what level in the organisation should they pitch for?* (Tom)

As has been shown previously, Tom firmly believes that SAHMs should focus their attention on the invisible recruitment market and thus his second recommendation on where to *pitch* pertains to that

> *I'd say to them don't even bother about the visible marketplace. Just forget it. You're pissing in the - sorry. You're wasting your time.* (Tom)

The final recommendation by Lyn and Tom is that SAHMs consider engaging professional assistance such as a coach or mentor

> *Get a performance coach like a mentor, performance coach, whatever.* (Tom)

7.5.3 A Strategy for whom? – the pain and the brand piece

Tom believes that in Australia no real consideration is being given by most organisations to changing their work cultures and practices, nor to preparing for imminent demographic changes. He believes that change will not happen in this country until organisations are '*in pain*'. Tom describes this pain as financial ramifications and consequences associated with their '*inaction on locking out whatever percentage of the workforce*'. Tom reasons we need a marketing campaign promoting '*older workers*' as a specific '*brand*' that will alleviate employer's impending '*pain*'.

> *Tom: So, one, there needs to be pain; two, even though this has been articulated in study after study, it needs to be more broadly marketed. It's a marketing and branding activity, which is a broader thing in terms of older workers' brand and reputation piece, is the value associated with older workers, in terms of high levels of engagement, lower levels of absenteeism, all the skills and wisdom they can bring to the table et cetera, et cetera.*
>
> *A: So a marketing campaign of some sort?*
>
> *Tom: Yes, yes, so this is a branding activity associated with older women reintegrating with the workplace. So, what's their brand? Right, in terms of their brand and reputation. So this is a classic - let's think of it as a consumer item. Let's think of it as, or let's think of it as a motorcar. So, what do they differentiate as, what do they stand for? So what's the brand promise, what's their actual performance, which is what they deliver, which in turn, creates that reputation. So it's a brand packaging thing to say well, with this you get this, this, this and this and this is how it's different from what you can otherwise get and you can have it now as opposed to keep re-advertising, re-advertising, re-advertising, re-advertising, and still not finding someone because we've got a full employment market. So it's the pain piece and it's the brand and reputation piece. As I said, millions of studies have been done but it's well, how do we gurgle it up in the psyche?*

Interestingly, the idea of a marketing campaign to raise national awareness was also proposed in the SAHM narratives in Chapter 5. What SAHMs and Tom could not

identify was how such a campaign could be enacted, or more specifically where the responsibility for creating and driving such a campaign ought to sit so that it can be '*gurgled up in the* [Australian] *psyche*'.

Strategies for Organisations	Strategies for SAHMs
Address structural inhibitors	*Identify point of difference & pitch*
Encourage open minded attitudes	*Focus on invisible job market*
Create a formal re-entry programme & similar to a graduate intake programme	*Network to get to 3rd referral point*
Rotate & fast track new re-entrants	*Explore & plan to current interests*
Allocate in-house sponsor	*Use a Performance coach*
Branding & marketing campaign	*Branding & marketing campaign*

Fig 7.3: Summary of reintegration strategies for organisations and SAHMs as suggested by interviewed managers.

Chapter 8 – Discussion - Study II, the Managers

Organizations cannot survive for long when their guidance systems are blinded by assumptions that can only see things as they once were.

Alf Chattell (1995)

8.1   Introduction

The aim of Study II was to investigate the part of the main research question that relates to organisational practices that may support or hinder SAHMs' re-engagement with professional employment.   An accompanying purpose was to garner current business perceptual contexts within which to further consider the findings of Study I.

This penultimate chapter then, is the discussion of Study II (the managers), and builds from the managers' interview findings which were analysed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is structured around the major themes that emerged from those managers' stand points, and it is framed by four research sub-questions.   The chapter concludes with future actions compiled from the analysis of managers' interviews (Chapter 7).

8.2   Managers' attitudes towards SAHMs

Related sub-questions:

> 7. *What is the attitude of managers towards professional women who have been out of the paid workforce for 20 years?*

> 8. *How do the women's skill development and time use differ from or concur with organisational or managers' notions of skill development and time use?*

8.2.1   Managers' Perceptions of SAHM Strengths

As was noted in the findings (Chapter 7), at the beginning of each interview, managers were briefed on the key characteristics that had been found to be distinctive of the SAHM cohort (Chapter 5).   Nonetheless, managers presented as having some initial difficulty connecting with the specificity of characteristics and commenting on issues that may or may not be relatable to SAHM-like women.   This initial inability to connect with the specifics pertinent to SAHMs was also apparent when discussing recruitment practices of women, and these I discuss further on.   The result of this was that on numerous instances through the interviews, managers referred to both SAHM-like women and to older workers[35] interchangeably.   This is well illustrated in how managers framed their professional perceptions and attitudes towards SAHMs, whereupon all interviewees began with positive but very broad statements about older employees in general.

The findings point to agreement from all managers that there are substantial benefits to organisations in employing older workers.   A view they based on their perception of the strength of certain behaviours and traits that they have come to associate with mature-aged or older employees.   The specific skills identified by managers (in Chapter 7), fall into two broad groupings: personal and professional.

8.2.1.1   Personal Skills

By far, the most mentioned attributes of older workers relate to their personal skills and these are noted predominately as: strong work ethic, wisdom, engagement, reliability and greater productivity.   Skills noted as more the strengths of mid-age were identified as what Robert (Org 6) called the '*other smarts*' and refer to that which is learnt through a life course, that is life experience.   The 'smarts' most noted by managers are: self-awareness, maturity, diversity of perspective, holistic in approach, judgement, multi-skilling, strategic thinking and interestingly, people management skills.

The findings show a skill specifically attributed to women is '*their superior networking skills*' (Tom, Org 2).   This was identified by one manager as being a key strength women have developed well by middle-age and one that plays to their advantage in job seeking processes.

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[35] The general consensus amongst interviewed managers for 'older worker' appears to be 50s.

The mid-age life skills of SAHMs were also noted as a valuable conduit for introducing new ideas or new ways of doing things into an organisation '*these 50 year old women can be one way of bringing external learning experience to an organisation*' (Robert). Additionally, the career break SAHMs have had, in itself, is seen as a strength by another manager. Sophie (Org 5) identifies this break as valuable in developing alternative perspectives and more holistic views which would be strengths on re-employment.

The specific skills of mothers were identified by one manager as being important strengths within the SAHM cohort. In the business and products context of Sophie's organisation, mothering '*expertise*' and the ability to be '*young at heart*' and being able to '*converse with youth*' were noted as very valuable. These are skills her organisation actively seeks and recruits for, on an ongoing basis.

8.2.1.2 Professional Skills:

The second group of skills identified in the narrative data (Chapter 7) relates more to work-place skills. Unlike their comments on personal skills, when speaking of professional skills all managers focussed their discussion on that which they believed to be more pertinent to SAHMs, rather than mature people in general. Here too, all the managers concurred that, in general, the professional skills and past professional education and experiences of the SAHM cohort were strengths.

Overall SAHMs' career breaks were not seen by managers as having detracted from the women's ability to operate as professionals, in a professional setting. This continued professionalism was noted as a strength factor that would enable SAHMs to '*easily adapt*' to re-entered roles (Robert).

In terms of SAHMs' formal education and past career record, these were acknowledged as good predictors of future professional performance. Additionally, managers identified a number of professional skills that they believe would have been retained by SAHMs, the most noted being: reasoning, critical thinking, the ability to research, and the ability to read and extract principles.

There are some apparent connections between managers' perceptions and the literature. The managers' general consensus of an older worker as being approximately 50 years old, fits in the younger of two mature-worker groupings (45-54) identified in the literature on older Australians (Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Gong and McNamara, 2011). This age related finding is also of some significance because it links to trends in organisational behaviours identified in the literature. Namely, businesses are found not to be recruiting above an average age of 50 (AHRC, 2013), and jobseekers' are found to believe that age discrimination from employers begins at 48 (Chandler Macleod, 2013).

There are two issues with considering the interviewed managers perceptions of SAHMs against extant 'older people' literature. One, as Marcus et al. (2016) identify, there is very little research on age based stereotypes, in work contexts. Two, the term 'older' workers is too broad, covers an age range of 20 years (Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Gong and McNamara, 2011), and a myriad of contextual and historical circumstances (E.g. work histories, gender differences, different industries).

What this means is that in grouping SAHMs within the broader older people category, the nuances and specificities of SAHMs are lost. The most obvious specific is a gendered divide between male and female older workers, as to why they seek re-entry to employment. For example, older men are more likely to be winding down from full time jobs whereas SAHM-like women are more likely to be ramping back into employment after extended time out caring for families.

Regardless of what managers meant exactly by 'older', their general perceptions and attitudes towards SAHMs and older workers, concur with the more positive attitudes and stereotypes found in the literature. In particular the identification that mature workers have stronger work ethics, commitment and reliability (Arrowsmith and McGoldrick, 1997) and greater experience, effectiveness and interpersonal skills (Metcalf and Thompson, 1990).

The significance of the managers' perceptions of SAHMs' strengths can be further considered against extant skills literature. Clearly the professional skills identified by managers fall under the employability skills construct (Chapter 3), but as Smith Ferns and Russell (2014:143) warn, "just about every ability, capability and pro-social attitude ever identified" could also. It can be similarly argued that the personal and professional

skills managers identified as SAHM strengths fall under the broader umbrella of soft skills (Chapter 3). These concur with the literature that identifies soft skill as inter and intra personal behaviours, social competencies and types of practical behaviours (Marks and Scholarios, 2008; Joseph, Ang, Chang and Slaughter, 2010). These are skills that are deemed to be increasingly important in employment contexts (Hurrell et al, 2012; Schultz, [B] 2008; Gibb, 2014) particularly abilities that enable getting on with others (Grugulis et al, 2004; Dickerson and Green, 2004). However, even though the literature shows that soft skills are becoming increasingly important for employability in all industries, the interviewed managers do not identify the perceived soft skills of SAHMs as sufficient for employability.

8.2.2 Managers' Perceptions of Problems for SAHM re-engagement with employment

Although the attitudes of the interviewed managers' are found to be positive overall towards the concept of SAHM re-engagement with professional work, and professionalism, a number of in-practice problems were also identified. The material from Chapter 7 reveals that there are four main issues that managers perceive as problematic for SAHMs and present as barriers to their re-engagement: length of time exited; lack of skills; lack of professional networks; and current recruitment practices.

8.2.2.1 Length of time of exits

A very clear message from all managers is that the length of time that SAHMs have been exited from careers is very problematic, in the context of professional re-engagement. The findings show that there are two elements ascribed to this problem.

The first is that managers perceive this time factor as total professional disconnection. As Tom commented, SAHMs have totally jumped off the bridge as opposed to holding on to a *'bungee rope'* through which they could have retained some form of career connection. There was very minimal consideration given by managers as to what sort of activities SAHMs were actually involved in for 20 years that could have emulated the holding on to a 'bungee rope' principle. Only two managers briefly referred to

volunteer activities as being of some value, and this was only in reference to developing connections and networks.

The second element of the perceived problem is one of supply and demand. Whilst managers report that they would have no hesitation in hiring a SAHM-like candidate in principle, none believe this is feasible or actionable as long as there are available candidates with '*much more up to date knowledge*' (Lyn Org 1). The overall view is that managers are still able to source up-to-date candidates, despite the shrinking workforce. This links in with the managers overall position of inaction on preparing for the ramifications of an ageing workforce, which I discuss further at 8.5.

8.2.2.2   Lack of the right skills

The findings (Chapter 7) also demonstrate that for all the managers, the length of SAHMs' time out of the workforce is closely linked to a perception of either dated skills or an actual lack of skill. It was noted earlier (at 8.2.1) that managers believe some professional skills are retained during breaks from the workforce. Conversely, managers are also found to believe that SAHMs would not be up to date with technical, profession specific skills and knowledge, and current business trends.

According to the findings (Chapter 7), profession specific skills as addressed by the managers, appears to refer predominately to regulatory or statutory knowledge in law and finance matters. Interestingly, there is no evidence in the interview data to identify what the term 'technical' skill actually refers to, other than legal and financial matters. Business in five of the organisations researched revolves around people, legal and financial products and/or professional services. Only Org 3 has a science and research arm of business and products that would be classified as scientifically technical, but here too, the manager interviewed did not elaborate on technically specific skills they would seek in candidates. Thus, based on the interview findings, 'technical skill' remains a nebulous term.

Technical skill can also be commonly associated with information technology (IT). On this point, one manager (Org 4) was found to assume that SAHMs would be computer

illiterate. This is in sharp contrast to the views of another manager (Org 5) who through the type of work carried out by her organisation has found mothers are generally tech-savvy.

Here again, as on the issue of length of time out (at 8.2.2.1), there was no consideration given by any of the interviewed managers, or questions raised, as to what sort of training and development SAHMs may have undertaken in 20 years.

8.2.2.3 Lack of the right networks

A third problem identified in the findings (Chapter 7) pertains to networks in a business context. The interviews highlight the importance that managers place on the need for active professional networks for any job seeking endeavour. They spoke from a position that assumed SAHMs' professional networks were either inactive or non-existent. Even though 'superior' (Tom) networking ability has been identified previously as a strength of women (at 8.2.1.1), SAHMs' current networks are not perceived by the interviewed managers as the ones that are going to 'get them the gig' (Tom), that is the job they may seek.

Although a lack of current professional networks is identified as a barrier for SAHMs, the analysis also identifies the observation that there is the potential to counter this barrier through leveraging off the women's current private relationships and networks. Job opportunities are identified in the findings as occurring at a 'third referral point'. Thus the recommendation is that SAHMs leverage off the people they currently know and maximise their current/known connections to get to the suggested third point of referral.

The significance of these identified barriers is that what the managers are really saying is that they do not consider SAHMs to be employable in professional roles. Although managers recognise and acknowledge SAHMs would be skilled in generic interpersonal and professional competencies (at 8.2.1), they do not believe the women are skilled in the right areas. The overall message from all managers is that there is a certain

'something' missing or a misfit, which was perhaps best labelled in the interviews as a professional 'disconnect'. Managers' expectations of work related time use appear to require some continuity and are well illustrated by Tom's analogy of holding on to the bungee rope. This is a position based on dominant norms of work, one of which is that the majority of Australian women remain attached to the paid workforce in some way.

In juxtaposing the findings of the two studies (Chapters 5 and 7), notable differences are found between SAHMs' and managers' respective perceptions of the applicability of SAHMs' skill development and the 20 years' worth of experiences, for professional re-employment.

The length of time out of the professional workforce is clearly seen by managers as an exit. It is also so by SAHMs. Managers however, see those exits as total disconnection with the world of work. SAHMs do not. The women couch their activities and time use over the last two decades as alternative work sites, work types, and skill development opportunities.

For the managers, SAHMs' 20 years of disconnection from the paid workforce equates to what some literature addresses as a diminishment of human capital, re-employability skills and prospects (Probert and Murphy, 2001). It is also clear that managers' perceptions are accompanied by a lack of understanding of what it is that SAHMs have actually done with their time for 20 years. This point echoes the literature that tells us that employers have difficulty in predicting the human capital held by women who have not participated in the paid labour force for some time (Theunissen, Verbruggen, Forrier and Sels, 2011). This is illustrated in the manner in which managers and SAHMs referred to professional skills in their respective interviews.

Whilst managers acknowledge that SAHMs would have retained their professionalism and that their interpersonal skills have been enhanced, at interview, they did not consider that there may have been other skill development, since exiting careers. When managers spoke of SAHMs' profession specific skills they generally referred to those skills as having been acquired in some distant past and are now obsolete. When SAHMs referred to their own skills, they emphasised not only having retained, but also having augmented their professional skills (whilst acknowledging some need for short, case specific refreshers (at 6.5.1.1).

This may be in part because managers do not understand what SAHMs have engaged in, in their alternative work sites. The overall presumption at interview, was that SAHMs were at-home-mothers, with the emphasis on the 'at home'. Managers did not engage in any consideration that what SAHMs do for example as volunteers might be professional work, or business skill enhancing. SAHMs on the other hand clearly consider their volunteer work as a platform to both exercise and further develop professional skills.

Furthermore, managers did not consider that SAHMs may have engaged in further education. The SAHM cohort on the other hand demonstrates an overall commitment to further learning, much of which has work place relevance. This is well illustrated in the findings (Chapter 5) where it is shown that seven SAHMs have undertaken tertiary degree studies, half have undertaken some form of formal software training and three quarters of them a host of other structured courses, at various types of institutions.

A problem that was highlighted in both studies is that there is no means or process through which managers could understand the extent or detail of SAHMs' employability potential. Conversely there is a strong need for some form of mechanism through which SAHMs could demonstrate skill, fit, or suitability in an organisation. To paraphrase Alex, SAHMs don't think they're unskilled, they just don't know how to demonstrate it to a prospective employer. (The need for re-entry pathways is discussed further on at 8.5).

8.2.2.4 Recruitment practices

The three barriers discussed previously are identified by managers as problematic from SAHMs' positions. The fourth set of problems however, they locate at the organisational level.

The findings (Chapter 7) show that there are a number of recruitment practices that are perceived by the managers as problematic for re-entering SAHM-like women. The first is one of negative attitudes from employers and recruiters based on the extended length of time SAHMs have been exited from the paid workforce. Even though the attitudes of the interviewed managers presented as open to the idea of SAHM-like women's re-

engagement in principle, the general consensus of the interviewees was that SAHMs would not be considered as readily employable by organisations.

The other problematic practices are more to do with the '*mechanical*' and '*gate keeping processes*' of recruitment (Tom). Two such processes are identified in the interviews. One pertains to agency recruiters, who operate in one half the recruitment market, or the visible sector of the market. This is where a client engages the services of an agent to carry out the recruitment process on behalf of the client's organisation. In this process positions are advertised and the agent's goal is to get candidates in front of a client as quickly as possible. It is a productivity driven process (i.e. driven by time vs dollars) and works to a specific brief from the client.

The managers' position on recruiters as a barrier confirms views expressed in literature. This is a problem explicitly identified in the reports by the Australian Law Reform Commission (2013) and National Seniors Australia (2012). Recruiters are noted as being influential gatekeepers in employment process and recruitment agents' behaviours and attitudes specifically are found to be problematic for mature age workers.

The second process identified (Chapter 7) also operates in this 'visible' recruitment market and it is the on-line, social media recruitment drives that five out of the six researched organisations carry out themselves (the exception is Org 6). An issue associated with these on-line systems is that the online job application processes are initially culled by key-word sensitive software. Failure to provide a required or expected response or to meet a given criterion prevents further progression through the application process.

Both of these visible sector processes work to a brief, or a 'shopping list' of what is required by the employer organisation. The problem according to the managers is that none of the SAHMs will fit these briefs. The findings (Chapter 7) identify the recommendation that SAHMs concentrate their job seeking efforts instead on the other half of the employment market, the 'hidden' sector. This is a sector where roles are not advertised, agents are not used but is instead driven by personal relationships, referrals and networking. According to Tom this is where SAHMs can play to a key strength he had highlighted previously – the women's ability to network.

8.3 Work practices that affect women's employment conditions

Related sub-question:

> 9. *What position do managers present regarding recruitment and attraction practices of re-integrating professional women, particularly mothers, to their organisations?*

8.3.1 Flex work in practice

It has been identified in the literature that the most significant work condition sought by women over 45, as well as older workers in general is flexible time. (Professionals Australia, 2015; ACCI, 2012; National Seniors Australia, 2012; DCA, 2012b; Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2008; Holmes, 2007; Hurrell et al., 2007). This time use preference was very clearly demonstrated in the SAHM interviews (Chapter 6). Given the importance SAHMs place on time use flexibility as an attracting or deterring factor to their considerations of workplace re-engagement, it was of contextual value to ascertain what flexible practices are in place in the researched organisations.

The managers' interviews confirm that flexible work is practiced at all six organisations but to varying degrees and in a range of ways. This supports findings in the literature that there are many types of flexibilities (AIM, 2012; DCA, 2012a).

For four of the organisations (Orgs 1, 2, 4 and 5) flexible work is available to - and used by - most professional staff levels, but not by all employees. The most common types of arrangements are negotiated start/finish hours and working remotely from home. Only Orgs 1 and 5 offer permanent part time options under their flexible work structure, and for Org 5, these need to be full days, not part of a day. Additionally, in Org 5 project work can be carried out in blocks of continuous days (e.g. 15 days on, one month off).

In Org 2 all professional staff works to an associate structure, where theoretically a contract can be negotiated to emulate part time, or preferred hours. This however is

restricted by a work-supply and worker-demand factor at each negotiation, with each employee.

In Org 6 it is a split-by-profession situation. All the finance personnel are tied to international stock markets' work hours and according to Richard it would create '*chaos*' for those roles to be structured flexibly. Thus none of the finance related personnel and management work flexibly. In fact, it was highlighted in the interview, how much extra these professionals work after hours and on weekends. This was couched in terms of extra '*pounds of flesh*' given. The time commitment ascribed to these roles is instead indicative of extreme jobs (Chapter 3). The legal employees in this organisation, however, do work flexibly. The most common arrangements are identified as also being flexible start/finish hours and the option to work remotely from home. Once again, no part time roles were identified.

The dominant position in Orgs 4 and 6 is that even though flexibility is available on start/finish times and the option to work remotely, roles are still structured to full time equivalence.

In the remaining organisation (Org 3) it is a different timbre. Flexible work is treated as a matter of legal compliance and only offered to accommodate specific requests. The predominant offering here is temporary part time hours for maternity leave returners, and this only for six months.

What stands out from the findings is the difference in attitudes towards flexible work from the managers of Orgs 1, 2, 4, 5 and those of Orgs 3 and 6. The first grouping is characterised by flexible work practices that are reported to be driven and supported by corporate cultures and senior management. Flexible arrangements are negotiated either one on one or within individual work units and not driven by centralised, company-wide functions such as HR departments.

The attitude of the two mangers of the organisations in the second grouping is quite different. They offer flexible work options from a position that it is a legal requirement. In Org 6 there is no '*company-wide flexible working hours' policy that everyone swings off*' (Robert) and flexibility is treated as an accommodation. Jan speaks of flexible work in her organisation (Org 3) as being driven by an attitude of entitlement from staff and one of fear of litigation from management.

These findings concur with the literature that reports that whilst many employees now have access to basic flexibility, meaningful flexible careers are not yet standard business practice in Australian organisations (DCA, 2012a). They additionally confirm the lag in uptake of more flexible and age-inclusive employment practices by business (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2012; Duneman and Barrett, 2004; Shacklock, 2004).

The implications for SAHMs' re-engagement conditions are clear. The analysis of SAHMs' interviews (Chapter 5) indicates that the women refer to their preferred work time flexibility as being one, two days or up to a part time load. Additionally, and as discussed (at 6.5.2) what SAHMs mean by time flexibility is having the freedom to self-manage their work's time allocation and use.

What this means in the context of the analysis of managers' interviews (Chapter 7) is that most of these organisations would not accommodate the flexibility SAHMs seek for re-engagement. Org 1 is the one exception that could perhaps accommodate such preferences given their cultural emphasis on flexibility for all professional staff, regardless of gender and position level. Orgs 2 and 5 present as also being possibilities, given their current practices on flexibility and individually negotiated work agreements, however as previously noted, those agreements are quite reliant on a supply and demand factor.

8.3.2   Women-specific employment and recruitment practices

The analysis of the interviews sought to garner the details of how the six researched organisations recruit and/or employ women in general as a context that might inform practices pertinent to re-entering women. The findings show that overall there are very few practices in place at the organisations studied that specifically target or address needs or particularities of female employees or candidates. A position that is encapsulated by Tom's comment: '*Australia's way behind in terms of women in the workplace stuff. This place is so narrow-minded when it comes to senior women.*' Nonetheless, three areas of practice that address women's employment have been identified from the findings that help inform the organisational conditions affecting re-

entry for women: developing from within; maternity leave re-entries; and fully exited re-entries.

8.3.2.1 In-house development

According to the findings (Chapter 7) only one organisation pro-actively promotes the development and advancement of professional women in-house, and two others in part. In Org 1 (employing a large number of specialist law professionals) the CEO is noted as being a very active and vocal driving force in instituting changes towards more equitable work practices and in particular, gender balance. This has resulted in more women moving into senior and very senior roles throughout the different levels of practice. All managers' performance measures at time of interview were specifically tied to how they enact diversity and inclusion practices. As was discussed previously, this is also the organisation that was found to have the most flexible-friendly work practices operational across all levels and for both women and men. A factor that is closely associated to enabling women to move up the ranks.

In Org 4 there are numerous in-house programmes and initiatives to retain and attract talented women from within the firm – in theory but according to the interviewed manager, not necessarily in practice. Coral notes that these programmes are '*matrixy*' or '*very complex*' and '*voodoo*' and that in reality women are selected into these development programmes based on how much revenue they generate.

In Org 2 no women-specific development programmes were noted at interview, however, a great deal of importance appears to be given to development for all and for diversity in general. This manager states that his company very pro-actively recruits to maintain a gender, age and cultural diversity mix and the entrenched company culture is that diversity is good business practice.

8.3.2.2 Maternity leave returns

The interviews demonstrate that re-engagement conditions for maternity leave returners vary amongst the organisations researched. Furthermore, the conditions here appear to

be aligned to the overall positions presented by managers previously on flexible work practices in their respective organisations.

The findings (Chapter 7) show that the predominant theme for five of the organisations presents as one of accommodation, or a case by case process of assessment and negotiation. For example, maternity leave returns for Orgs 2 and 5 are managed in similar fashion as their contracts of employment. Org 2 employs all professional staff, including maternity leave returners under an associate structure where each employee negotiates the days, hours and terms of their employment. Similarly in Org 5, where work is structured as project work, freelance or piece work. However, there was no discussion at interview of the conditions that would be applicable to permanent staff, in this company, other than a culture of good flexible work practices, including permanent part time roles.

The one exception to this pattern of negotiated returns appears to be Org 3. The clear message from this interview is that this company supports maternity leave returns on a part time basis during a short ramp up period. The expectation however, is that these part time roles quickly convert back to full time, usually in six months.

8.3.2.3   Re-engaging fully exited women

The interviews demonstrate that half the managers, report having employed women who have been fully exited from the workforce. On closer analysis however, there appear to be a number of differences amongst the circumstances or candidate characteristics surrounding these re-entries.

Sophie (Org 5) believes her organisation is an ideal environment for women re-entering the workforce and noted the company's established record of employing many re-entering mothers. These roles however, are predominately on a supply-and-demand basis, contract based, and not permanent. The roles are mainly as event managers, web site monitors, writers and bloggers.

Jan (Org 3) noted in her interview that she has employed one re-entering woman who had been out of the workforce *'for a while'*. No further details were provided on this re-

entrant, except that the candidate was sourced through in-house contacts and not an external recruitment process.

Interestingly the participant from the smallest and most conservative of the interviewed organisations is the one that has recruited a re-entrant that appears to most mirror a SAHM-like profile. As has been noted previously, this is also an organisation that does not actively promote diversity or flexible work practices. Robert (Org 6) asserts that in his organisation they have employed two re-entering lawyers. One had been away from her career for approximately 20 years, the other for approximately five years. The first re-entrant had been fully exited, the latter is reported to have carried out some part time work in those five years thus remaining attached to the workforce by what Tom has previously called the 'bungee rope'.

Overall the findings from the interviews confirm that out of the six organisations participating in this study only one mid-age, fully exited career woman (exhibiting SAHM-like characteristics) has re-entered the workforce and been re-employed in a professional role.

8.4   Ageing workforce strategies in practice

Related sub-question:

> 10. *To what extent if any, are managers addressing the issue of an ageing workforce in practice?*

The literature in Chapter 3 describes the demographic changes occurring in Australia and the predicted impact of an ageing population on our workforce in the imminent future. The above research sub-question positions organisational strategies on ageing as one of the points of enquiry by this research.

As was previously shown (at 8.4.2.1) only two of the organisations pro-actively support and encourage diversity in the work place (Orgs 1 and 2) and Org 1, is predominately focussed on gender related issues. Additionally, the findings from managers' interviews

indicate that five of the six organisations researched have no strategies or practices in place to deal with or manage for an ageing workforce. The prevalent position from these managers is one of inaction or a wait-and-see stance. The identified positions from the managers are summarised thus:

In Org 3, even though Jan describes how she plans for succession seven years ahead she has not considered the ramifications of an ageing workforce in any of her plans or policies to date. She believes that need will eventually drive change.

In Org 4 Coral does not believe the ageing workforce is of concern to her organisation nor that there is '*an issue with age*' noting that the current staff are predominantly young.

In Org 5, there is no ageing workforce strategy, nor does Sophie believe it would be possible to have one in place. Sophie claims that due to the fast paced nature of her company's business and the technologies that drive it, it is not even possible to ascertain if the organisation will still exist in ten years' time. This company's interim position is to automate as many processes as possible to minimise recruitment needs.

In Org 6, Robert believes that being in a boutique and much sought after industry there is no need for an ageing workforce strategy currently. He acknowledges however, that change is coming and that his organisation does need to plan for succession across all levels.

Organisation 2 is the exception. Here ageing is treated as part of the company's overall diversity agenda. As has been noted previously this organisation very pro-actively aims for a balanced and broad range of ages and cultural mix in their employee numbers.

Tom (Org 2) is passionate about what he labels the '*diversity piece*' and expressed additional views based on observations of his vast corporate client base. According to this manager, Australian organisations are not being responsive enough in addressing the expected ramifications of an ageing workforce. Tom believes that there are two factors that contribute to this lack of response. The first pertains to '*structural hurdles*' that prevent many organisations from offering part time or alternative work arrangements to older staff wishing to work but under reduced hours' arrangements. These structural hurdles affect retention practices mainly.

The second factor however affects both retention and re-engagement practices and pertains to dominant organisational cultures that Tom believes perpetuate negative attitudes and discriminatory practices towards older workers. He believes that change will not happen until organisations are '*in pain*'. That is, the financial ramifications and consequences associated with their '*inaction on locking out whatever percentage of the workforce*'. According to Tom, organisational and broader cultural perceptions of older workers need to change and he suggests that what is needed is a targeted marketing campaign promoting the merits of '*older workers*' as a specific and marketable '*brand*'.

8.5 Recommendations for future Practice – what needs to happen

8.5.1 Managers' recommendations for SAHMs re-engaging

An additional finding on the point of re-engagement pertains to what managers would look for if they were to actively recruit SAHM-like or fully exited women. All respondents concurred that they would seek the same characteristics as in any other type of candidate.

What the interviewed managers were not able to specify though, was how SAHM-like applicants would be able to position themselves in a professional applicant pool through current recruitment processes; and secondly how they could demonstrate their potential to be considered as an applicant.

Nonetheless, some suggestions are offered in the managers' interviews as to how SAHMs may best prepare to position themselves for approach to the labour market, under current recruitment practice regimes. The recommendations made by managers address both how to prepare and where to target their efforts.

In terms of how SAHMs could prepare for re-entry, the combined suggestions from the interviewed managers result in a three step plan of action.

First, identify the re-entry point. That is, identify what current occupational and motivational interests and strengths are. This is based on the managers' beliefs that

SAHMs' career choices and interests two decades ago may no longer be relevant or applicable.

Second, define what the point of difference is. This would entail both the finding of a niche area of interest and reflecting on past experiences to identify what SAHMs can market as unique strengths. This is seen as an essential step particularly by the managers that are driven by the supply and demand factor noted previously. SAHMs need to identify their point of difference that would position them as an employer's choice over a candidate with more up to date skills or credentials. Some of the suggestions made by managers as valuable points of difference include the perceived strengths of SAHMs previously noted (at 8.2.1) as well as being able to re-join the workforce unencumbered for '*a pretty serious amount of time*' (Robert).

Third, prepare. This would entail a process of critically examining current skill levels and identifying areas where SAHMs may need to skill up. Additionally as part of the preparation process, SAHMs are advised to make use of their current networks to generate new contacts. This will assist in achieving the 'third referral point', which as discussed previously is instrumental in job seeking processes within the invisible recruitment sector.

The second group of recommendations garnered from the interviews (Chapter 7) pertains to how managers' perceive SAHMs need to pitch their re-entry efforts.

First - pitch at the right level: This recommendation is that SAHMs be realistic in their expectations of seniority and position levels upon re-entry. That is, that they align their expectations to be more commensurate with experience rather than with age.

Second - pick the right sector: As previously discussed, SAHMs are urged to focus their attention on the invisible recruitment market and ignore the visible recruitment sector.

Third - get help: SAHMs are advised to engage professional services such as a career or performance coach.

8.5.2 Managers' recommendations for organisations – creating re-entry pathways

The previous section outlined the interviewed managers' recommended actions for SAHMs considering re-engagement with the workforce. This next section focusses on what managers discussed as what would need to happen and/or change at organisational levels to attract and recruit SAHM-like women.

A very clear message from the managers' interviews is that current recruitment practices are not structured or suited to either attract or cater to re-entering, career exited SAHM-like women or older professionals. Interviewed managers concur that to enable SAHM re-entry to the professional workforce there needs to be some type of addendum to current recruitment practice at an organisational level. This addendum is identified in the findings as the creation of a '*stepping stone*' (Robert), a targeted '*re-entry programme*' (Lyn), or something akin to a '*graduate piece*' (Tom). In essence, the analysis points to the need for the creation of recruitment pathways that are specifically tailored for professional women and/or older workers re-engaging with employment. On this point, most of the managers reverted to speaking on SAHMs and older workers interchangeably, as these types of re-entry suggestions were deemed applicable to both groupings.

The findings point to a number of components that managers noted would be needed for such a re-entry pathway programme to be successful. Collectively, those components provide a skeletal guide for such a programme.

1. Design a professional-women re-entry programme modelled along existing graduate intake formats, but more accelerated.
2. Incorporate rotations to find best fit and alignment between corporate needs and re-entrants occupational interests.
3. Allocate meaningful work to re-entrants
4. Once rotation is over, incorporate '*fast tracking*' (Tom) and '*aggressive*' (Robert) progression through levels, commensurate with re-entrants' capabilities and capacities

5. Appoint an in-house sponsor to both drive the programme and also support the individuals undertaking the re-entry programme.

6. Build in monitoring and accountability measures for the success of the programme

Regarding components 1, 2 and 3, Tom (Org 2) believes that organisations, particularly large institutions '*could get a lot of value out of some sort of graduate process for older professional women'*. He cautions, however, that graduate programmes fail when the work assigned is not meaningful, and when the rotations are too long or not matched to participants' occupational interest. This leads to the need for component 4, where acceleration and fast tracking were noted in the interviews as integral for older re-entrants to account for prior and accumulated experience. Regarding components 5 and 6, the appointment of a sponsor and the formalised allocation of accountability were flagged by Lyn (Org 1) as fundamental for the proposed programme's success. This is based on previous experience with a similar type of ramp-up programme that did not quite work because no one was taking ownership or driving it in-house. As Lyn re-iterates '*you need to have a sponsor and someone who really believes in making it happen and making it work, from the organisation's perspective'*.

8.5.3   A plan for action: three-phase re-engagement programme composite

The following plan for action (Fig 8.1) is a snapshot of all the recommendations garnered from the analysis of managers' interviews (Chapter 7). It aims to highlight the areas managers identified to be in need of action or change to make SAHM re-engagement with professional employment more feasible.

It is composed of three phases for action. The first phase is for SAHM-like candidates to action and these points are summarised from 8.5.1. The second phase is a point summary of the pathways programme (at 8.5.2). The third step is the recommendation of a targeted marketing campaign (introduced at 8.4) promoting the merits of older workers as a desirable brand, to be carried out at a broader social/community level.

	STEPS (Managers' recommendations)	Possible Relationships & Stakeholders
PHASE I		
Re-entrant Preparation	Prepare for re-entry -identify the re-entry point -define what the point of difference -skill up & work the networks	-1st, 2nd and 3rd point referrals & contacts -Tertiary institutions
	Prepare to pitch -pitch at the right level -pick the right sector -get help	Independent career coaches
PHASE II		
Pathways Programme	1. Re-design current graduate intake programme format, to suit re-entering older professional women	In-house
	2. Incorporate rotations to identify best fit & alignment between corporate needs and re-entrants occupational interests	
	3. Allocate meaningful work to re-entrants	
	4. Incorporate fast tracking & aggressive progression stages, commensurate with re-entrants' capabilities	
	5. Appoint an in-house sponsor to both drive the programme and support re-entrant	
	6.Build in monitoring and accountability measures	-Report in-house -Report externally to affiliated agencies E.g. WGEA & DCA
PHASE III		
Marketing Campaign	Package and market older workers as a specific brand to raise public awareness & highlight their potential to employers	-Employer & Industry representative & peak bodies -Government agencies -Media

Figure 8.1: A three phase re-engagement plan composed from managers' input.

CHAPTER 9

Our theory is that practising our practice is theory.

Gail Chester (1979)

9.1 Introduction

The preludes to this final chapter are the discussions of the two Studies, at Chapter 6 (SAHMs) and Chapter 8 (managers). Chapter 9 synopsises the main findings against the research questions; considers some implications and recommendations for praxis; suggests directions for further research and reflects on the contribution to knowledge. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts.

9.2 Précis of research aims

This thesis addresses the significant gap in scholarship and literature on professional women who quit careers for home. Specifically, it investigates what influences women to exit successful careers, turn to at-home-mothering for two decades, what they do in that time, and what this may mean for professional re-engagement, as older women.

The idea of a *void* was introduced in Chapter 1 as a figurative term to illustrate that gap - that which is not known about SAHM-like women. In order to address the two core elements of the main research question - SAHM skill and organisational practices on re-engagement – broader research aims were devised to explore what exists and happens in that *void* from the standpoint of 20 SAHMs and of six managers. Thus the wider aims of this research were firstly, to find out who SAHMs are, what they do and why they do it, and secondly, to investigate SAHMs' potential for, and organisational receptivity to, workforce re-engagement.

Those broader aims were explored through ten research sub-questions. The first of which, examined how SAHMs' position themselves and the second their reasons for becoming SAHMs. Questions 3, 4 and 6 explored SAHMs' time use and issues of skill. The remaining questions focused on possibilities for the future. Question 5 investigated

SAHMs' aspirations for the future, whilst questions 7 through to 10 investigated managers' perspectives on, and organisational conditions for, SAHMs as potential professional workforce re-entrants.

A conceptual framework was developed (Fig 3.13) to guide the two studies. What my research finds in the *void* is represented in box 2 of that conceptual framework. In essence these are the characteristics ascribed to SAHMs and their practice. The characteristics (box 2, Fig 3.13) and influences (box 1, Fig 3.13) garnered from the research findings fall into a number of areas of significance for nascent knowledge and theory about SAHMs as long-term at home mothers, and for SAHM-hood as a specific type of mothering practice. Similarly, the findings from Study II (box 3, Fig 3.13) are significant for new knowledge on issues of skill recognition and employability of long-term career-exited older women.

The research aims précised above are addressed next, by synopsising the salient findings for each of the ten research sub-questions that were discussed in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 8. The main research question is then addressed.

9.3 The Research Sub-Questions

9.3.1 Research sub-question one.

The first sub-question investigated in Study I was: *How do SAHMs position themselves*? Two interrelated elements stand out as key findings:
- Role of mother is only one part of the self
- Length of time has been a major influence

Regarding the first, SAHMs position themselves as a composite of multiple layers and overwhelmingly describe themselves as an amalgam of numerous parts and roles. SAHMs are found to consider themselves as more than mothers and to separate the role of mother from the rest of their identities as whole women. This concurs with the literature that speaks to the distinction between who mothers are, in terms of overall identity, from what they do (see 6.2.1 showing Hughes (2002) and Ruddick (1994) from the motherhood literature, and from identity, Côté (2006), Leary (2004), Stets and Burke (2000), Brubaker and Cooper (2000) amongst others). The findings indicate that

SAHMs position themselves as independent egalitarian women who do not subscribe to the norms or practices of traditional, intensive models of motherhood (see 6.3.4.5) or to the dominant cultural norms of career-women who are mothers and soon return to employment. SAHMs are clearly not engulfed by motherhood and neither are they reliant on employment for identity and validation. SAHMs present as agentic women who claim to construct their sense of identity from both perceptions of self as well as the various activities they undertake in different settings.

A characteristic unique to SAHMs is the amount of time these off-ramped professional women have been practicing SAHM-hood. Here then is where it can be seen, the role that time has played (see 6.3.4.2). Evolving over two decades, SAHMs have developed their own version of mothering practice. It is a practice that encompasses all the activities they engage in whilst being at-home-women. In drawing on their perceptions of agency, of care and of work, SAHMs are found to have positioned themselves as having crafted a style of mothering practice that appears to mimic a protean career path (following Hall, 2004), where all that is done is part of the one gestalt (following Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006a). It is a practice that is responsive to four elements:

- The women's need for, and active pursuit of, a space for self (following Wearing, 1998 at 2.4.1);
- their ideological and practical stance on care for loved ones and their communities;
- their ability and opportunity to exercise professional skills in civic/NFP endeavours;
- Constraints imposed, or enablers provided, by the context of their familial positions.

The two salient reasons that the time factor has been identified as being so important in how SAHMs position themselves are that firstly, SAHMs have resolved or moved on from many of the issues and emotions they had faced or experienced in the early years of motherhood and career exits; and secondly, time has been instrumental in SAHMs creating a space (ibid) where they operate on their own terms and in self-directed activities.

9.3.2 Research sub-question two

Regarding the second research sub-question: *Why did the women drop out of their professional careers and become SAHMs (and why did they not follow the dominant trend to re-enter the workforce during their children's early years?),* the findings point to three elements as crucial parts to the answer.

- SAHM-hood not framed as choice;
- Practical response to dual career demands;
- Ideological position on care.

Choice vs accommodation - A finding that serves as background to SAHMs' decision making process is that the women do not frame their exits from the workforce and entry into SAHM-hood as choice. This is in contrast to much of the literature on mothers (E.g. Hakim, 2006 and her Preference Theory) and work that treats motherhood or mothering decisions under a choice rhetoric (see 2.2). None of the women in the cohort had anticipated being full time, at home mothers, prior to having children. The greater majority had firm plans to return to their careers post maternity leave and the rest envisaged a return to employment some time later. Rather than a matter of choice, SAHMs frame the decisions to exit careers, to become SAHMs, and the long term continuance in the role as responses to situated familial circumstances, or as processes of accommodation (E.g. Hughes, 2002; see 2.2.5).

Practical response to career demands - The research finds that initially, the majority of SAHMs did in fact return to their previous careers post maternity leave (see 6.3.2). A smaller number of SAHMs re-entered the workforce when children were school-aged, this group however, did not return to previous roles as the post maternity leave returners had. At those two stages SAHMs were acting according to the prevalent cultural norm of educated career women returning to the workforce (see Baxter, 2008; Dex et al. 1998; Joesch, 1997; Glezer, 1988). Both groups of SAHMs however, found that their returns to the workforce were not sustainable in the context of their lives, resulting in all exiting during children's early years[36].

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[36] As noted in 6.3.31- Donna was the exception

In terms of practical considerations, what is evident in the findings is the degree to which both SAHMs' and their partners' work conditions, emerged as crucial contributors to the women's career exits. For the women re-entering from maternity leave, organisational conditions, practices and job structures encountered had significant impact on their subsequent exits (see 6.3.2.1). In particular, the inflexibility of work conditions which needed to be negotiated in tandem with the demands of (then) very young children and husbands' increasing work pressures. The women encountered long hours or the expectations of full time performance on part time schedules; unreasonable managerial practices and expectations of work pace to be as when the women were unencumbered; and the inflexible structure of professional roles particularly those involving travel. The smaller group of women who re-entered later all sought part time or flexible work conditions. What they found was a lack of meaningful flexible work, and incommensurability with their perceived capabilities.

Notwithstanding these conditions encountered by SAHMs in their own work, what emerged across the cohort is that the impact of husbands' careers on family life was the greater contributor (see 6.3.3). Not only to the women's decision to initially quit the workforce but also the continuance in a SAHM role. There are two dominant factors which SAHMs ascribe to the impact of their spouses' careers: earnings (6.3.3.1) and extreme work conditions (6.3.3.2).

At the onset of SAHM-hood, when these professional couples found themselves struggling to balance two demanding careers with a young family the men in the cohort were earning more than the women[37]. This financial consideration was the first substantial decider for the couples, resulting in the women exiting the workforce (concurring with the extant literature, for example Cha, 2010 and Charlesworth et al. 2002). Since then, husbands' ascending careers have impacted SAHMs and their families by the men being progressively less present in the home. The findings reveal that all the husbands in the cohort are employed in very senior roles and working under 'extreme jobs' conditions (see 3.5.5.2). These types of roles are recognized as significantly impactful on couple's parenting and family arrangements (Hewlett, 2007; Brett and Stroh, 2003) and on professional mothers quitting their careers (Cha, 2010).

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[37] Donna's husband was the one exception, please see (6.3.3.1)

My study finds that the result of these extreme work conditions has been that the men are predominately absent from the quotidian activities of their children, homes and wives. What this has meant for SAHMs in practical day-to-day terms is that they operate as sole parents and fathers are tangential to the childcare or familial processes.

Ideology of care - In addition to these practical considerations, two ideological positions based on an ethic of care emerged from the findings (see 6.3.4). Firstly, SAHMs prefer to care for their children themselves over outsourcing the caring. Secondly, they believe in and work towards, a purposeful and healthy family life for all family members. SAHMs are found to describe themselves as managers or the glue, in the context of the busyness of their families and the impact of husbands' careers on family life, in particular.

9.3.3   Research sub-question three

In addressing the question - *How do SAHMs use their time (what do they do with their time)?* – SAHMs cumulatively identify their time use as activities for the *self* and activities *for others*. The findings show that these activities are focused towards four distinct beneficiaries, where time is used in: Creating a space for self; Caring for adolescent children; Supporting partners; Volunteering in the community

Time use for the self - How SAHMs use time for themselves (see 6.4.1) presents as a conscious strategy for resisting being engulfed by mothering, and for taking control by carving out time and space for self (following Wearing's [1998] concept of space as resistance). The findings demonstrate that in caring for the self and in creating a space for achieving a level of independence from their mothering role, SAHMs engage in a combination of three types of activities. These have been entered into for personal development or for pleasure, and involve long term physical, artistic and/or educational undertakings.

Time use for the children - At time of interview the majority of the cohort's children were aged between late teen and early adult years (see Fig 5.4), and this is significant in contextualising how SAHMs use their time in caring for their children. Importantly, the

age grouping firmly establishes that this research is specific to mothers of adolescents and young adults, thus distinct from the bulk of previous studies on motherhood and their focus on mothering of neonates or young children (see for example Vejar et al., 2006 at my 2.2.5 and Lovejoy and Stone, 2012 at my 3.4.2.4).

One of the strongest messages from Study I is the view across the cohort, that SAHMs' presence in the home- or *being there* (a term also found in the work of Reid Boyd and Letherby, in O'Reilly, 2014; Polatnick, 2004 and Ribbens, 1994) - is vitally important to their teenage children, with positive flow on effects on the whole family. The findings demonstrate that SAHMs' care of their children is operationalised in three distinct ways, which I refer to as: mother as being there; mother as monitor and mother as pedagogue (see 6.4.2).

It is evident that the notion of *being there* permeates and impacts all that SAHMs undertake as mothering activity, with and for their children. Significantly, (and a point not detected in the literature) SAHMs are found to place far more importance on *being there* during the teenage years than it had been for them to be so, during the children's younger years. SAHMs refer to *being there* as both physical and emotional presence which enables spontaneous conversations and emotional support moments. SAHMs across the cohort report having close or good relationships with their teens, and importantly, the women credit this to them 'being there' or 'being around'.

The link between being there and SAHMs' practice of monitoring teenagers' behaviour is an explicit message garnered from the findings. This monitoring refers to children's activities in and beyond the home and is operationalised by SAHMs either overtly or subtly. In the home SAHMs do so by providing semi-structured daily de-briefing, emotional support and reinforcing expected behaviours. Outside the home, SAHMs are found to actively monitor their children's social networks, interactions, outings and friendships. The research finds that in essence, the women want to know what their children are doing, where they are and who they are with.

Mother as pedagogue refers to SAHMs' purposeful and active engagement in their children's education processes. The findings demonstrate SAHMs' long term and deep

involvement with the minutiae of their children's education on two fronts: academic work and extensive extra-curricular activities. SAHMs are found to operationalise their involvement in academic work mainly by setting and supervising at home study regimes; consciously engaging in discussion on topics being studied by the children; and monitoring educational institutions. In terms of extra-curricular activity, all the children of the cohort were found to be involved, with most being engaged at competitive, representative, performer or instructor levels. The findings demonstrate that SAHMs enable, support and/or supervise a range of sporting, cultural and/or creative activities. SAHMs' level of engagement and facilitation of their children's educational and developmental pursuits exhibit the hallmarks of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2002 and 2003) typical of middle class parents. This is a process that is noted in the literature as requiring hard work by mothers (Griffith and Smith, 2005 and 1987) and which creates 'enormous labour' for them (Lareau, 2002).

Time use for the partners - The findings highlight that SAHMs across the cohort use their time in support of their partners in two distinct ways: managing the family and household; and practical support of the men's careers (see 6.4.3). As noted earlier (9.3.2), the seniority and time-demands of husbands' careers have been found to make the men in the cohort generally tangential to day-to-day family life. SAHMs repeatedly cite that they take care of all child related activities, the home and family logistics and frame this as a way of supporting the men in fully focusing on their careers. The findings show a range of activities through which SAHMs further support their husbands in career-practical ways. All the women are found to actively network and entertain their partners' clients and colleagues and couch these as important contributions to the men's careers. Additionally most SAHMs are found to act as sounding boards and discuss work related matters with partners resulting in a good understanding of husbands' work environments. Many also provide support by writing, arranging travel and relocations, or managing work-related financial matters on the men's behalf.

Time use for the community - A fourth area of time-use for SAHMs is that spent on volunteering (see 6.4.4). Across the cohort volunteering work is operationalized in two areas: the children's schools, and community groups. The findings indicate two main

messages here: firstly, the work carried out differs between the two areas, and secondly, different reasons motivate SAHMs' involvement in each.

SAHMs' volunteering in schools is characterised by activities revolving around assisting teachers in-class, committee membership for various causes, or organising and running fundraising events. Mothers are found to be motivated towards this type of involvement by a need to monitor the institutions children attend; and secondly, by a wish to further demonstrate to the children an active interest in their education. The motivation towards these activities presents as being closely connected to the 'mother as monitor' and 'mother as pedagogue' elements noted previously.

SAHMs' time-use on volunteering in the community however, is where the bulk of the cohort's work is carried out, and it is markedly different from the school roles by the breath of scope and depth of engagement. The findings demonstrate that this type of work has been a long term enterprise for the majority of SAHMs, particularly over the last decade. This is clearly demonstrated in SAHMs' sustained commitment to one or a number of specific projects or particular NFP organisations for prolonged periods. Unlike their work in schools, SAHMs were motivated to engage in community volunteer work by either a desire to develop interests outside the home or by a sense of civic duty.

A significant finding is that a motivator that has kept SAHMs involved in community work has been that it has provided the women with a platform where they can exercise, and/or further develop their previously acquired professional skills. When speaking of their community work SAHMs position themselves as actively engaging in professional type work and as deploying a broad range of professional skills. As I discuss in Chapter 6, in carrying out their volunteer roles SAHMs appear to be operating as protean careerists. They engage in a self-selected volunteer space to appease their professional selves in personally meaningful endeavours, and they retain control of time use and time allocation by treating all the activities within the scope of their SAHM-hood as the one 'gestalt' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006).

9.3.4   Research sub-question four.

SAHMs speak of their skills as a subject in two parts: pre and during motherhood, and are unanimous that former professional skills have not been lost. In addressing the question of: *How do SAHMs perceive their skill development if any over the last 20 years?* - with its emphasis on 'development'*,* the overarching answer is that SAHMs perceive that pre-motherhood skills have been strengthened and an array of new ones has been learnt (see 6.5.1).

SAHMs encapsulate the skills they have developed as being either professional or interpersonal. Both types of skills are found to have been either newly learnt or further enhanced through volunteer work and structured learning/education. Additionally, interpersonal skills have been acquired or further developed through active support of partners' careers and the various children's or home-front networks and activities SAHMs engage with.

Professional skills specifically identified as having been developed by SAHMs fall under the umbrella terms of *organising* (people and events) and *managing* (people and resources). They include project management, recruitment, task and resource allocation, marketing, public speaking and research skills. The most notable interpersonal skills developed were identified as *diplomacy* and *good communication*. Skills SAHMs specifically note as having been honed in the home-sphere include problem solving, multi-tasking, time management, forward planning, and tenacity. The *maturity* and *strong work ethic* resulting from life experiences at mid-life were also flagged as valuable skills that have been developed by SAHMs.

9.3.5   Research sub-question five

Regarding the fifth question - *What are SAHMs' time-use aspirations into the future?* - three possible work directions were identified in the narratives: paid, volunteer/pro bono and independent work.

Potentially all the women in the cohort would re-engage with the paid workforce. SAHMs however, are very clear on the work conditions that they aspire to (6.5.2),

whether the role is paid or not. The most prevalent of these is that none of the women wish to work full time. What they do wish for is firstly, to work flexibly and secondly, in meaningful roles. Whether those roles are paid or not is of little importance to all but two SAHMs[38]. What is clear is that SAHMs are not prepared to embark on any role that compromises their need for flexibility or does not engage their perceived skills, professionalism and experience.

SAHMs are all too aware that their desired for time conditions are at odds with paid professional work. As a result, a minority of SAHMs are also found to be contemplating the idea of contract, freelancing or consultancy work mode options, or working in co-operative or cartel type arrangements.

9.3.6 Research sub-question six

In relation to the next question - *What do SAHMs consider a fit or misfit between their skills and experience and (their understanding of) current employment practices?* – all SAHMs concur that misfits or barriers exist (see 6.5.3). As shown in question 4, SAHMs overwhelmingly position themselves as well skilled but they also overwhelmingly agree that their self-positioning will not be shared by employers. The women perceive two types of misfits related to the notions of skill and employment practices: perceptual and structural.

The first is a perceptual divide based on the difference between the women's belief in the strength of their skills, experience and potential and what they foresee will be negative attitudes and perceptions from employers. SAHMs predict negative employer perceptions will be based on

- SAHMs' length of time away from paid employment and therefore an assumption of lack of general workplace expertise and current skills
- Non-recognition of skills and experiences acquired through NFP and care work
- SAHMs' age

The second type of misfit refers to work structures that SAHMs believe do not fit with re-engagement at older stages of life. The most noted of these are a lack of entry points

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[38] As discussed in Chapter 6 only two SAHMs now have a financial need to find paid employment (see Fig 6.1)

for older professionals and a paucity of part time/flexible roles that cater for professionally skilled and experienced older workers.

Even though SAHMs believe there is potential for a fit between their skills and professional capacity and what they could contribute and accomplish in a for-profit employment setting, there remains a cohort wide concern. This is an issue of transference, that is, how to communicate or transfer SAHMs' self-belief of their skilled capacities across to employers. This is a problem that links directly to the need for entry points.

9.3.7   Research sub-question seven

This is the first question addressed through Study II and it asks: *What is the attitude of managers towards professional women who have been out of the paid workforce for 20 years?* Managers' responses are couched as strengths of and problems for the women but both of these lead to a view that SAHMs are not employable as professionals.

In principle, managers presented a positive attitude towards the perceived strengths of SAHM-like women and noted the general benefits to organisations in employing older workers. They referred to those strengths as personal skills and professional skills. Personal skills identified by managers generally concur with what SAHMs referred to as their inter-personal skills and include amongst others: strong work ethic, wisdom, engagement, reliability, maturity and greater productivity (see 8.2.1.1). Professional skills are referred to as those that are work-place specific. Managers concurred that, in general, the professional skills and past professional education and experiences of the SAHM cohort were strengths. The women's career breaks were not seen by managers as having detracted from SAHMs' ability to operate as professionals, in a professional setting. Additionally, some skills were acknowledged as having been retained by SAHMs, the most noted being: reasoning, critical thinking, the ability to research, and the ability to read and extract principles.

Although the managers' attitudes are found to be positive overall towards the idea of SAHM re-engagement with professional work, a number of in-practice problems were

also identified. The first and most problematic is the length of time SAHMs have been career exited. This is viewed by all managers as total professional disconnection. The second is a perceived lack of the right type of skills. Managers are of the opinion that SAHMs would not be up to date with technical, profession specific skills and knowledge, or with current business trends. The third major problem identified as problematic for SAHMs is the recruitment process itself. In particular the processes that operate in the visible recruitment sector of that market (e.g. agency recruiters, on-line processes).

Both sets of skills managers identified as SAHM strengths fall under the broader umbrella of soft skills in the employability skills construct (see 3.5.4.2). Even though the literature indicates that soft skills are becoming increasingly important for employability in all industries (E.g. Hurrell et al, 2012; Schultz [B], 2008; Gibb, 2014; Marks and Scholarios, 2008; Grugulis et al, 2004; Dickerson and Green, 2004), the studied managers do not recognise the skills they perceive in SAHMs as sufficient for employability (see 8.2.1.2). The significance of the identified problems is that as above, what the managers are really saying is that they do not consider SAHMs to be employable in professional roles. Although managers recognise SAHMs would be skilled in generic interpersonal and professional competencies, they do not believe the women are skilled in the right areas. The other strong message from all managers is that SAHMs' professional disconnect is too great. Managers' expectations of work related time use appear to require some form of continuity (see 8.2.2.1).

9.3.8 Research sub-question eight

This next question highlights the major misfit in perceptions of skill development and its relationship to time use, as identified in the two studies: *How do the women's skill development and time use differ from or concur with organisational or managers' notions of skill development and time use?* -

The concepts of skill development and time use are interrelated, for both SAHMs and managers.

For the women, how they have used their time has led to skill development. SAHMs believe they have developed professional and interpersonal skills through their time used in volunteer work and structured learning/education; and further interpersonal skills through time directed at partners', children's and home-front networks and activities. For the managers, the length of time SAHMs have been disconnected from employment equates to no work-relevant skill having been developed. In essence, managers do not understand what it is SAHMs have done.

The crux of this misfit is that SAHMs essentially see themselves as having been working in an alternative work site. Managers do not recognise the spaces SAHMs have operated in over the last 20 years as sufficiently employment relevant work sites or as skilling sites. Managers see SAHMs as disconnected from work and as was noted in the previous question, work-relevant time use for managers appears to require some type of continuity in employment.

9.3.9   Research sub-question nine

Concerning the question: *What position do managers present regarding recruitment and attraction practices of re-integrating professional women, particularly mothers, to their organisations?* – the findings show that there is no targeted process of recruitment of re-integrating women at any of the researched organisations. However, the study does find that half the managers have employed women who have been exited from the workforce.

In Org 5 there is an established record of regularly employing re-entering mothers. The roles however, are all on short term contracts, not permanent and most are not professional. In Org 3, one re-entering woman has been employed through an in-house contact, and not targeted recruitment. Org 6, the smallest of the participant organisations and a company that does not have active diversity or flexible work practices is the one that has employed a re-entrant that most mirrors a SAHM-like profile. This re-entrant is reported to have been exited for approximately 20 years and returned to work as a lawyer.

The findings also indicate that overall there are very few practices in place at the organisations studied that specifically target or address needs or particularities of female employees and none that are aimed at attracting re-entering professional candidates.

9.3.10 Research sub-question ten

Regarding the final research sub-question is: *To what extent if any, are managers addressing the issue of an ageing workforce in practice?*- The findings from Study II show that only one out of the six organisations researched has some practices in place to deal with or manage for an ageing workforce (see 8.4). At Org 2 ageing is treated as part of the company's overall diversity agenda. Managers there are reported as very pro-actively aiming for a balanced and broad range of ages and cultural mix in the employee numbers.

The prevalent position from managers in the other five organisations however, is one of inaction. Two organisations (Orgs 3 and 6) anticipate change is coming but have no ageing strategies in place and appear to be taking a wait and see approach. Org 4's manager does not believe ageing is of concern to her organisation and Org 5's interim response is to automate as many processes as possible to minimise recruitment needs. The inaction over implementing ageing workforce practices appears to mirror those organisations' stances on diversity practices in general, with the exception of Org 1 where their gender related diversity practices are well developed and part of all business operations.

9.3.11 The research main question

The answers to the previous sub-questions are a synthesis of their more detailed discussion through Chapters 6 and 8. These are now considered as context to the main research question.

> *To what extent do SAHMs consider themselves as skilled and how do current organisational practices hinder or support their re-engagement with the professional workforce?*

The findings from Study I demonstrate that SAHMs consider themselves as professionally and interpersonally skilled. All SAHMs unanimously believe that skills connected to former careers have been retained and some enhanced. There is also an accompanying acknowledgement that some technical or profession specific updating would be required should the women re-engage as practitioners in former professions. Additionally, during the twenty years (approximately) the women have been practicing as SAHMs, they consider that they either learned or further enhanced both professional and interpersonal skills. This has been achieved mainly through professional volunteering work and structured education. Interpersonal skills have also been honed through time directed at partners', children's and home-front networks and activities.

The findings from Study II highlight two elements that hinder SAHMs' re-engagement, one is perceptual the other is organisational practice. The perceptual hindrance refers to managers' views. Although the managers' attitudes are found to be positive overall towards the idea of SAHM re-engagement with professional work, a number of problems were also identified. The first and most problematic for managers is the length of time SAHMs have been career exited. This is viewed by all managers as total professional disconnection. The second is a perceived lack of the right type of skills. Managers are of the opinion that SAHMs would not be up to date with technical, profession specific skills and knowledge, or with current business trends. Overall managers do not recognise the skills they perceive SAHMs to have, as sufficient for employability in professional work. Regarding the second element of hindrance the findings from Study II establish that there are no current organisational practices to support SAHMs' re-engagement with the professional workforce. These include a lack of: genuine flexible work options, re-entry pathways and age/re-entrant friendly recruitment processes.

9.4   Implications and Recommendations for praxis

9.4.1   For SAHMs

At interview, SAHMs were found to be considering re-engagement with the paid professional workforce as one of their options. It is clear from the studies that if SAHMs do engage in job seeking in the paid labour market, that this may not be a

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fruitful endeavour due to extant recruitment processes as well as SAHMs' requirements. Findings from both studies highlight issues SAHMs may face or need to anticipate on approaching the job market and these have implications for how the job seeking process is both prepared for and subsequently entered into.

i-Preparing

Anticipate perceptions: One of the strongest messages garnered from both studies is the perceptual divide that exists between SAHMs and managers over issues of skills, disconnectedness, employability and what is considered work or a work site. In preparing to approach the job seeking process SAHMs will need to anticipate those types of perceptions and formulate some possible strategies to counter unfavourable or ill-informed perceptions.

Identify transference: A very strong implication stemming from that perceptual divide is that there is an issue of transference at play here (see 6.5.3). The problems associated with communicating work relevant skills and experiences to would-be employers, was a major concern for all SAHMs and is well illustrated by Alex on behalf of all, when she said '*I don't think I'm unskilled, I just don't know how to prove it to a prospective employer*' . This is a concern that appears well founded based on the managers' demonstrated lack of understanding of SAHMs' activities and skill acumen. Given that there are as yet no mechanisms available to demonstrate the transferability of skills from the home sphere to the paid work sphere, SAHMs will need to improvise.

A number of SAHMs noted that unpaid short periods of work experience would be helpful in getting up to speed on recent developments in various fields. This concept could be expanded for all SAHMs as a way of creating their own 'entry point' or 'pathway'. Rather than applying for specific roles, SAHMs could change the focus of the search and pro-actively seek and approach organisations asking for unpaid ramp-up experience opportunities instead. Once there, demonstrate.

A second way of assisting the communicating of transference would be in paying close attention to how skills, qualifications, development and unpaid work experiences are framed and documented, particularly in Curricula Vitae. The inclusion of quantifiable

measures (e.g. staff numbers, budget size, stakeholder position levels, etc.) would also contribute to better transference and clearer understanding by recruiting parties.

Point of difference: The need for each SAHM to identify and define her point of difference was noted by most managers. This is best understood if we consider that managers' recruitment styles present as being influenced by either a 'supply and demand' factor or a 'no need for re-entrants whilst younger more up to date staff are available' mentality. The message from managers clearly is - why would they hire a re-entering SAHM over someone who has been active in the paid workforce and is perceived as having up to date skills? Thus the importance in SAHMs being able to say to any prospective employer: 'this is why I am different/unique/a better choice and this is why/how you would benefit from hiring me.'

Get help: One of the recommendations from Study II was that SAHMs engage the services of a career coach (see 8.5.1). This could prove a valuable form of assistance for SAHMs both with identifying their point of difference and with preparing to communicate their skills and expertise to the recruitment market. Obviously this type of service would deliver additional benefits such as impartial advice or act as a sounding board.

ii -Deciding

Work conditions: The most prominent condition SAHMs are found to aspire to in any future role is flexibility. This is clearly the make or break decider for SAHMs. All SAHMs want short hours, reduced working days, and time-use flexibility. What SAHMs mean by flexibility however, is having the freedom to self-manage their work's time allocation and use. Such a preference can be better understood when we consider that SAHMs have been self-directing and self-managing their time use and time allocation for two decades. This point also serves to highlight that there is a substantial misfit between what SAHMs and managers mean by flexibility.

It is also a very different concept to that which is being offered not only by the organisations in Study II (with the exception possibly of Org 1) but by the majority of

Australian organisations (see 3.5.5.1 and in particular: Professionals Australia, 2015; DCA, 2012a; WGEA, 2013; AIM, 2012). Given the women's position on the subject and their unwillingness to compromise on their need for flexibility, the clear implication is that the paid roles which may be available to them will be very limited. And this the women universally acknowledge, they are aware that these desired for time conditions are at odds with the structure of paid professional work. This is in part why they are also contemplating alternative forms of engagement.

Work sector: The major part of the decision process SAHMs presented as grappling with at interview was which sector to engage with. Approaching the paid workforce was being considered in apprehension of and in tandem with perceived barriers. Considerations of remaining in the NFP sector appeared to be influenced in a small way by concerns over those expected barriers in the paid workforce. Additionally as a result of SAHMs' salient requirement – flexibility – the women are also found to be considering independent/solo work modes.

Thus the three work engagement options for SAHMs' futures stand as: paid professional, unpaid not for profit/pro bono, and self-employed/independent.

Regarding paid professional work, this is an avenue SAHMs have not actually engaged in since the early years of SAHM-hood, thus it is actually a substantial unknown. All that is known are the women's perceptions of what may happen and the managers' views at interview which are based on limited understanding. Based on these two factors the women are not employable. This however is a composite of perceptions, not necessarily reality. It may well be that when SAHMs actually engage in job seeking they find a very different outcome.

Regarding unpaid volunteer work, most SAHMs are already involved in long term, committed professional work in this sector. It caters for the women's needs for meaningfulness and for self-managed flexibility which are the two top requirements identified by SAHMs. Re-engagement with paid professional work may be a wish for SAHMs. Clearly given the findings, a revised focus on the NFP/volunteer sector emerges as the more probable avenue for these women's future time-use.

There is a third work option mentioned by a small number of SAHMs and this is working independent of an organisation through contract, freelancing or consultancy type arrangements. This option was not explored further at interview but it does present as a positive and workable alternative for SAHMs. These types of arrangements have the potential to meet SAHMs' two top criteria, flexibility and meaningfulness, plus the added bonus of generating an income.

9.4.2   For Policy and Agencies - Change the language

Alternatives to homogenous, one-size-fits all male-modelled employment practices are urgently needed if we are to stem the skills waste and harness the strengths of career exited women. We need to more vigorously define, create and assert female models of career including those that incorporate activities undertaken during mothering years as meaningful, skilled and valued work. There is need for a multi-pronged approach to changing attitudes towards care-work and perceptions of women who mother, within organisations. The following changes would contribute not only to cultural change but to business sustainability in an ageing future

i – Change the language of work and acknowledge transferability: Make mothers, mothering skills and civic activities undertaken during mothering time, part of the conversation at strategic and policy levels in government and organisations. This should include pro-actively recognising homes and communities as alternative work sites; treating care work as skilled and skilling work; and developing mechanisms to recognise and quantify care work to assist skill transferability between unpaid and paid work sites (see 9.6.1 for proposed audit).

ii – Make all mothers part of the Diversity discourse: The dialogue needs to move beyond parental leave returners' re-engagement with paid work. It needs to incorporate the diversity of women who mother including longer term career-exited women.

Agencies or entities such as The Diversity Council of Australia, for example, could play a pivotal role in effecting change, for it currently sets standards, researches and provides

guidelines for diversity and inclusion practices in Australian businesses. The council already has categories for gender and older women but these could be expanded to more explicitly address non-maternity leave mothers, under the diversity banner. All types of re-entering mothers need to be represented – this is a substantial component that is missing from the diversity narrative and business discourses in Australia.

iii – Active championing and advocacy from peak bodies: Peak or representative bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, Chief Executive Women (CEW) and Male Champions for Change (MCC) are well placed to play an important part in changing work cultures and masculinist career models as the default structure and measure of all women's careers. Furthermore they can advocate for recognition of women's models of career that include mothering time.

For example a recent MCC report (2015) outlines their 'shadow' blue print for more inclusive work places. They stipulate one of their goals is to dismantle barriers for carers by '*creating an expansive return to work*' programme (p 8). Their proposed action stops with re-integration of post parental leave returners. This proposal should be expanded to incorporate all returning mothers including SAHM-like re-entrants.

9.4.3   For Organisations - Change work praxes

For care/mothering work to be more readily recognised as skilled and as transferable to employer sites we need to move beyond language and conversation. Practical processes or mechanisms are also urgently required at enterprise operational levels to help stem the skills waste.

Current recruitment practices and the lack of re-entry pathways were identified in both my studies as major blocks to the re-engagement of long term at-home-mothers as well as of older workers. Additionally, Study II clearly highlights that diversity, genuine flexibility and ageing strategies are not yet the operational norms, and that this contributes to the blockage.

The implications of these findings are clear, managers are treating re-entry as a concept structured the same way as the standard work/worker paradigm (see 3.5.2 and Moen et al. 2013; Palladino Schultheiss, 2009; Taylor, 2003), but what older re-entrants want is

not what they would have wanted in earlier times. What is needed is a new model of work for re-entering workers and change is required on four fronts:

i- Pathways: Specific re-entry programmes or pathways are urgently needed in organisations to attract and facilitate women re-engaging with the workforce. These programmes need to be developed so that they acknowledge women's achievements and skill development during their mothering years, take account of their past occupations and qualifications and accelerate their re-connection within organisations. Such programmes have the potential to also suit older re-entering workers in general.

ii- Diversity and ageing: Five of the six organisations researched have no strategies or practices in place to deal with or manage for an ageing workforce. The prevalent position from the organisations studied is one of wait and see. According to Tom[39] (Org 2), this lack of response to the ramifications of an ageing workforce, is prevalent in Australia. Clearly diversity and ageing workforce strategies need to be more expansive and part of general business practice. More vigorous incorporation of diversity and ageing praxes would have flow on effects on two fronts - organisational cultures more accepting of re-entering women or older workers, and more re-entrant friendly recruitment practices.

iii – Flexibility: There is much recent policy and peak organisation literature which patently shows that the most significant work condition sought by women over 45, as well as older workers in general, is flexible work time (Professionals Australia, 2015; ACCI, 2012; National Seniors Australia, 2012; DCA, 2012; ACCI, 2012; Gilfillan and Andrews, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2008; Holmes, 2007; Hurrell et al., 2007). This was also a very clear and very loud message from all SAHMs in Study I.

From Study II we see that all six organisations offer flexible work – in theory - but only one has operationalised flexibility in the spirit of the program. Flex conditions work in Org 1 because they have been embraced by all levels of staff and by both men and women. Importantly, in Org 1 flexibility is being practiced by professional staff thus demonstrating that professional roles can be successfully carried out under flexible time arrangements.

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[39] views based on Tom's observations of his vast corporate client base

The implication here is that implementing genuine flexibility across hierarchy and gender borders is crucial to changing entrenched cultures and structures of professional roles. This is a much needed pivotal component if we are to a) successfully create new models of professional work for re-entering older workers, and b) stop marginalising workers and job-types for being part time. As with diversity, genuine flexible work options need to be part of entrenched, day to day operations and cultures. Flexibility offered as an entitlement or a legal requirement such as Orgs 3 and 6 do not work beyond the superficial.

iv- Recruitment: A very clear message from the managers' interviews is that current recruitment practices are not structured or suited to either attract or cater to re-entering SAHM-like women or older professionals. Three stand-out problems identified with current recruitment processes were: negative attitudes, agency recruiters and on-line recruitment drives.

Clearly the introduction of tailored re-entry pathways (i) more diversity/age friendly (ii) and flexible (iii) business cultures and operations would contribute greatly to changing how recruitment of older workers is carried out. These however, would benefit by being accompanied by some form of promotional and educational campaign in-house. The first would need to advocate and promote the merits of expanding recruitment to better cater for an older demographic, so as to gain cultural buy-in from managers. The second would need to target the recruitment process itself, for example ensuring that the language and format of advertisements are re-entrant friendly. In short, both the merits and the manner in which recruitment is to be done to capture older re-entrants needs to be sold to those doing the recruiting – both in-house and in recruitment agencies.

9.5   Considerations for further research

9.5.1   Conduit for skill recognition

My research relies on SAHMs' and managers' personal perceptions of skills. This is a very subjective and highly context dependent platform from which to assess what is already defined as a 'slippery concept' (Green, 2011:21).

Furthermore we do not have a cultural association between the skills practiced in care work and what is generally recognised as skilled work in employment settings. New approaches or tools for identifying and acknowledging the skills deployed and developed in mothering and care work activities and their transferability to employment settings are urgently needed.

A detailed study or audit similar to Cox and Leonard's (1991) research project would be very significant and timely. This could provide what Attewell (1990:424) describes as a 'common yardstick' with which to measure or assess skills that are specific to women's mothering activities and care work. Such an audit has the potential to translate the activities of the home sphere into a language that is better understood by the paid work sphere.

9.5.2   Graduate programmes assessment

The need for organisational re-entry points was also identified in both Studies in this thesis. Chapter 8 collates managers' suggestions and presents a skeletal framework for a plausible pathway format for re-entering professional women. The core component identified in the managers' interviews is that such a programme be modelled on existing organisational graduate entry programmes, but in an accelerated format.

A study and assessment of current graduate entry programmes across different industries would inform the design of a re-entry pathways programme template. The study could potentially make further recommendations on tailoring for the needs of specific business groups, industries or professions. The findings of such a study would be invaluable in informing the customisation of re-entry pathways for professional women, within organisations (as noted in 9.4.2). This type of pathway could also be applicable to older or retired professionals wishing to re-engage with paid employment.

9.5.3   Follow the SAHM cohort

An area of future research that would be most intriguing would be to revisit the SAHM cohort, x years into the future.

In Study I the participants were found to be at the cusp of a major life stage transition, preparing to enter '*career number three*' (Trixie). In Chapter 6 (Fig 6.1) we see where the women are located in the decision making spectrum at time of interview – have to work, would like to work, it is not realistic to go back to work.

It would be of comparative value to revisit the cohort and find out what paths the SAHMs did follow, what worked for them and what did not. Whether SAHMs do, or do not re-engage with employment, and their experiences in the process of approaching the labour market have the potential to inform organisational re-engagement practices for both re-entering women and older workers. This could prove an informative contribution to the relatively new literature on off-ramping professional women.

9.5.4   Development of *Mothering Capital*

To extend our understanding of mothering as contemporary care-practice and as a skilled component of many women's career paths we need other lenses or frameworks through which to explore the skills and work outputs of women who mother. An additional lens (to the conduit suggested at 9.5.2) can be that of capital.

Both the literature (Chapter 3) and the managers' interviews (Chapter 8) highlight difficulties associated with defining, identifying or recognising skills. Additionally, the skills emanating from what Wajcman (1998) has called the 'training ground' of home are clearly still not deemed valid or readily transferable to paid work spheres.

Economic theories of capital have traditionally treated women's unpaid care work as being outside of labour production and assign no measurable value to the contribution this type of work contributes to the economy or to society. Such treatment ignores the fact that raising children and domestic labour are necessary to the production of human capital, thus making '*traditional women's work in maintaining the workforce []invisible because it is not compensated*' (Longino in Ferber and Nelson, 1993:161). Much of the feminist literature on capital, on the other hand, concurs with the stance that '*traditional female activities and dispositions contribute to the economy, society*

and polity [and that] *childrearing, household work and volunteer work contribute to the wealth of nations*' (England, 1993:39).

There are many feminist theorists who have found Bourdieu's typology of different forms of capital useful (material, social, cultural and symbolic). They use Bourdieu's work as a starting point from which to develop other subtypes of capitals. Huppatz (2009) for example explores feminine and female forms of capital. She also notes others who expand on Bourdieu's work for theorizing: Reay (2004) for emotional capital; McCall (1992) for gender capital; Shilling (1991) for physical body capital; and Skeggs (2004) for feminine capital. Capital as conceptualised by Bourdieu has been found useful by feminists because he argued that behaviour within economic systems relates strategically with behaviour within the social and cultural systems; and further, that it encompasses monetary and non-monetary wealth.

In combining this feminist Bourdieusian position with Schultz's [T] (1961) notion that 'skills are a form of capital' I propose a new form of capital as an area for further research and discourse development: the concept of *Mothering Capital*, as inherent in, and a specific product of, mothering practice activities.

9.6   Contribution to knowledge

This research extends what is currently known about mothers, mothering, off-ramped career women and organisational re-entry. The findings that have contributed to new knowledge are reflected on next under the areas of: an extended discourse; SAHMs and their practice; the cohorts' position as re-entrants and organisational receptivity to re-engagement

9.6.1   SAHMs and SAHM-hood as new discourse

The findings on SAHMs' characteristics and their mothering practice have moved feminist discourse and theory on mothers and mothering forward. They have extended the idea of motherhood and what constitutes mothering practice for SAHM-like women, by moving beyond essentialism debates and 'intensive' or 'individualism' mothering ideologies and discourses.

My research finds that *length of time*; focussed creation of a *space for self*; and purposeful *care for self, kin and community*, are major components of SAHM-hood as an alternative and unique discourse of motherhood and mothering.

9.6.2   A profile of SAHMS and their mothering practice

The findings from Study contribute to our understanding of who SAHMs are, the contexts that led the women to off-ramp careers, become SAHMs and how they have used their time as such. The SAHM profile from the women's standpoint is thus:

SAHMs are middle aged mothers of late-teen/early-adult children. They are also highly educated and experienced managers who have worked as professionals in both for profit and NFP organisations. All regard themselves as well skilled.   SAHMs present as independent, active women with a strong sense of identity; and as driven by an ideology of care which permeates the various pursuits they engage in for themselves and others.

SAHMs became stay at home mothers predominately in response to two scenarios that conflicted with their new statuses as mothers, within a dual career household. The first: untenable employment conditions and practices upon their returns from maternity leave. The second: extreme work conditions inherent in their spouses' senior and well remunerated careers and the ensuing fallout on family life.   This second scenario, where the men's ascending careers have made them progressively tangential to quotidian living combined with the removal of financial necessity, has been pivotal in SAHMs remaining at home for twenty years (approximately).

SAHMs refer to all they do whilst being at-home-women as work and as constitutive of their mothering practice. Their time use is directed at four beneficiaries: themselves, children, partners and community. SAHMs dedicate time for themselves as a form of resistance against being engulfed by the role of mother. They create a space for self by consciously pursuing educational, artistic and fitness activities. Time spent on children is overwhelmingly defined as *being there*. This is operationalised by very close involvement in, and monitoring of, the minutiae of children's educational, extra-curricular and social activities. Time spent in fully managing the family and home-front is treated by SAHMs as support of their partners in helping the men give full focus to

their careers. SAHMS also spend considerable time in work related projects and matters on behalf of their spouses. Time use for community work is a regular and long term enterprise for SAHMs. Volunteering has been deployed in educational institutions and NFP organisations: the first, as part of *being there* for the children; the second as a way of both exercising and developing professional expertise and skills.

SAHMs are now at the cusp of change and planning for the next life stage as children progressively leave homes. SAHMs aspire to flexible and meaningful roles where they can engage their skills, professionalism and experience. The imminent work related decision SAHMs anticipate is whether to re-engage with the paid professional workforce or to re-focus on the unpaid NFP sector.

9.6.3   SAHMs as plausible re-entrants to the professional workforce

Little is known about SAHM-like women and the findings of the first study help shape a picture that portrays them as more than mothers and positions them as a plausible group of re-entrants.

Professionally all the women had successful former careers and were in managerial roles, they are all highly qualified, and still committed to on-going education and development.   SAHMs are also volunteers and pro bono workers, operating as professionals. It is this alternative work site where SAHMs have further deployed and developed many professional and interpersonal skills. Through this type of work SAHMs have also developed "*extraordinary system of networks"* (Louise) and have worked with the socio-economically challenged through to State and industry leaders, both nationally and internationally. It is also where they have worked to standards and processes associated with professional employment, including the management of strategy, staff, resources and budgets. It is these experiences together with their skills and formal qualifications that SAHMs now count on as strengths for re-entering the professional workforce.   Furthermore, SAHMs are progressively becoming unencumbered by the constraints that initially kept them at home, and are freer to focus on "*career number three*" (Trixie).

Extant literature tells us that in the context of an ageing Australian workforce, older people are encouraged to increase their workforce participation (IGR, 2015; House of Representatives, 2000); and that women represent a major reserve of potential labour particularly amongst those wishing to return to work (EOWA, 2008); and non-employed women (DCA, 2014; Austin and Giles, 2003). In this national context, together with the women's backgrounds and accomplishments, SAHMs present as being positioned as significant contenders for re-entry. What are missing are the pathways and organisational practices that will enable such re-entry.

9.6.4 Organisational receptivity to SAHM re-engagement

A number of findings from Study II support previous work on the reported lag and limited response from the business sector in implementing programmes to engage and/or retain older workers (AIM, 2013; ACCI, 2012). This is particularly so, in relation to the business practices in play at the participant organisations; principally the absence of ageing workforce strategies and flexible work options and recruitment processes tailored towards older workers.

It is from this position where ageing and older workers are not part of the organisational psyche, that managers considered SAHMs' potential for re-entry. The findings that are unique to this study are their views of the SAHM cohort as potential re-entrants.

Regarding skill, although there is acknowledgement of various general skills and professionalism, SAHMs are not deemed to be skilled in the right way. The managers' overall focus was on what was missing in the women, and what was considered as too much of a 'disconnect' from the workforce. In terms of time use, there was no real understanding of how SAHMs have used their time or how this may have developed skills. Managers could not relate to volunteer work as professional work. In terms of re-entry, managers considered SAHMs as re-entrants through the lens of their firms' current recruitment practices, which as noted earlier are not suited to re-entering older workers.

Although managers concur that SAHM-like women are skilled in many ways the overall message is that they are not readily employable.

9.7   Some Final Thoughts …

She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments…

Michael Ondaatje (1992:13)

When I began working towards this thesis, some questioned why I was doing research on mothers in the management department of a business school. Well-meaning advisors actively tried to persuade me on the merits of undertaking my research in a social sciences department where, it was suggested, I could be better supported by gender specialists.

This however, was illustrative of a problem I saw – a continuing divide between mothering and business. From my experiences as a corporate professional, mother and scholar I had formed the opinion that ongoing gendered work structures and the non-recognition of mothering work as skilled were closely related to us not speaking or acting meaningfully about mothering time activities and care work, within business settings. This is why I felt very strongly that the issues of professional women who mother, and the case of the SAHMs I was researching in particular, needed to be addressed in conjunction with a business platform.

Thus, the title of this thesis - *Mothering the Organisation* - is purposeful and links to that aspired for discursive platform. My intention was to augur the concept of mothering and a relationship with organisations from the beginning. Feminist scholars (E.g. Höpfl, Kristeva and Poggio) have long explored concepts, links and disconnects around the maternal and the organisational and a recurring theme from their theoretical perspectives is that '*the very essence of being a mother is problematic in modern organizations*' (Tietze, in Höpfl, 2008:357). Influenced by this genre and its theorising on organisation studies it was important for me that the word *mothering* take centre stage in my work from the outset, for a number of reasons. In contemporary Australia,

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mothering is one of those words that firstly, appears to have waned from policy and managerial discourses under the guise of equality and morphed into the more general 'parenting' adage. Secondly, for too long, professional women have been relegating matters to do with 'mother' to the silent, private spheres of their lives. Thirdly, and as my Study II demonstrates, mothering work and practice are not widely understood, or recognised as skilled work in career and organisational settings. They are subsequently ignored by recruiters and current recruitment practices and become difficult to manoeuvre black holes in professional women's Curricula Vitae.

It is a generally undisputed fact that contemporary Australian women have gained much in terms of legislative, education and employment equality and opportunity (see chapter 3). These gains however have been and continue to be generally based on an assumptive position that firstly, the way to equality lies through paid employment for all. Secondly, that the successful careers of professional women are built by adherence or acquiescence to one or any of three paradigms: playing in 'the tournament' full time (O'Neill and O'Reilly, 2004; Sullivan, 1999; Lyness and Judiesch, 1999; Lyness and Thompson, 2000; Itzin and Newman, 1995); being unencumbered (Moen et al., 2013); Crittenden, 2010; Williams, [J.], 2000; Acker, 1990); or by women behaving as 'honorary' or 'quasi-men' (Höpfl, 2008:352; also earlier in Wajcman, 1998:143 'workers as men'; and in Cockburn, 1985:250 'women present as men').

Yes, we have made advances towards statutory equality but as feminists we have also gone backwards or stalled by allowing the uniquely female to be subsumed under gender neutral labels or by continuing to emulate masculine work practices and patterns. Motherhood is generally treated under the umbrella term of parenthood; women's liberation has progressively ebbed and we now speak of feminism and gender equality instead. As women, we are assimilating rather than asserting our difference. Where has the liberate part gone? Mothers are especially hard hit by an equal rights approach and as Rothman asks, 'how can [their] uniqueness be made to fit into an equality model?' (1994:153).

Furthermore, the politics of care and women's careers continue to be stuck in a heavily gendered space, where family is still treated as the source of strain on women's careers. We are still not treating women's career structures themselves as unique and stand-alone frameworks or entities of analysis (see Chapter 3). Stressors from the work/family clash

continue to be relegated to the private domain (Moen et al., 2013; England, 2010) thus continuing to exclude the issues of care and family formation as realities and key components of many women's career patterns.

Thus care work maintains its position at the spectrum opposite of market work in a world increasingly reduced to esteeming only the commercially valuable or financially viable (Pocock, 2006). As Höpfl states '*Not only is the imagery of maternity alien to the character of organizations but mothers themselves*' (2008:357). Full-time-mothers in particular, have been left behind in the gains achieved by women and as Crittenden so clearly puts it '*changing the status of mothers, by gaining real recognition for their work, is the great unfinished business of the women's movement*' (2010:7).

Within a discourse of professional women's careers, we will not be able to enact meaningful change by continuing to submerge care work, the practice of mothering and its repercussions on the career continua of professional women under 'private', 'choice' or 'equality' agendas. *Mothering practice*, the vast outputs it generates, the losses and high price paid by professional women mothering and the ramifications for the professional female pipeline feeding our country's economic future – these need to be upfront and targeted points of discussion and action in career discourses, business practices and government policy.

As a theoretical endeavour, contemporary *mothering practice* is a topic also in dire need of greater and deeper attention by researchers given the paucity of material in more current literature. A point that has been made repeatedly since EEO was legislated in the 1980s with feminists such as England, Folbre, Friedan, Crittenden and Greer calling for motherhood to be treated as a feminist priority and for a '*better way*' of constructing a '*future beyond joining the masculinist elite on its own terms*' (Greer, 1999:398).

What Friedan told us back in the 1980s - that we needed to take back 'the power of our difference' (Friedan, 1982, Chp 3) - sadly still holds true. We must more vigorously define, create, assert and implement women's models of career including those that incorporate care and mothering activities as meaningful, skilled and valued work. We must focus on changing organisational practices and work models, not the women. To not do so is not only retrograde, but socially unjust and economically negligent.

Conclusion

The findings from Study I and Study II demonstrate that SAHMs are highly educated and experienced women; that their strengths, skills and employability potential are not understood within organisations; and that there are no pathways for them to re-enter the professional workforce.

The overall conclusion is stark: this cohort of women who off-ramped from élite careers is not deemed to be employable in professional work.

This research is located within the field of organisation studies as my personal contribution to effecting change, for as I have argued and as this thesis demonstrates, it is our current work structures and practices that are in need of change.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - SAHM participant, information sheet

Appendix 2 – SAHM, participation agreement

Appendix 3 – Manager participant, letter of invitation

Appendix 4 – Manager, participation agreement

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Adriana McCaskie and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Technology Sydney.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

I am collecting women's stories about their involvement in mothering and careers. Specifically, this part of my research explores the experiences and views of women who suspended their careers to become long term, stay-at-home-mothers and who may be considering career/professional level re-entry in business organisations.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

We would meet for a semi-structured interview lasting for about an hour (or longer if you wish). I would ask you to talk about your experiences in the paid labourforce, your experiences as a stay-at-home-mother and your thoughts and expectations about career re-entry and employing organisations.

The interview will be recorded with your permission, transcribed and de-identified. You may choose to pause or terminate the interview at any time.

I will use the themes, ideas and some quotes that emerge during interview in the writing of my doctoral thesis and other academic papers. The information you provide will be treated confidentially and the data will be stored securely.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been asked because you have been a stay-at-home-mother for over 10 years and because you have a professional past as a career woman

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DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

No, you do not have to say yes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing will happen. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you do not have to explain why.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research please email me at adriana.mccaskie@student.uts.edu.au or phone me on 0414 919430. Alternatively, you may wish to contact my academic supervisor, Professor Jenny Onyx at Jenny.onyx@uts.edu.au or on 02 95143633. If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number (UTS HREC Approval Number 2011-042A)

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

I, _____ *(participant's name or*
pseudonym) agree to participate in the research being conducted by Adriana McCaskie.
(Doctoral candidate, University of Technology, Sydney. PO Box 123, Broadway NSW
2007. Telephone: 0414 919430, email: adriana.mccaskie@student.uts.edu.au).

I understand that the purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between a
particular group of women and professional work. I understand that the study explores
issues associated with professional women's career transitions, particularly the
suspension of careers for motherhood and issues associated with the resumption of
professional roles.

I understand that my participation in the research will involve a semi-structured
interview of approximately 1 hour and that I will be asked to talk about my experiences
of being a career woman, a long-term stay at home mother, and my expectations of
professional re-entry. I understand that Adriana will contact me later by telephone or
email to arrange for me to review the interview transcript.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this study at any
time, without consequences, and without giving a reason. I agree that Adriana has
answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this interview may be published in a form
that does not identify me, my family or the organisations I have been involved with.
.

_____ ____/____/____

Signature (participant name or pseudonym)

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Office (ph: 02 - 9514 9772, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome. (UTS HREC Approval Number 2011-042A)

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

Doctoral Research into professional women's career transitions

Dear ………..

My name is Adriana McCaskie and I am doctoral candidate at the University of Technology, Sydney.

I am researching the relationship between a particular group of women and professional work. My study specifically investigates issues associated with professional women's career transitions, suspension and resumption within the context of an ageing workforce.

Factors such as an ageing population and an increase in women's participation in the workforce are changing the composition and work patterns of Australians. These changes combined with highly competitive labour markets nationally and internationally require specific management strategies to attract, integrate and retain potential employees.

As a senior manager, your views and opinions on business employment practices and strategies for managing an ageing workforce will make a valuable contribution to this research.

You are invited to contribute to this project by taking part in a short interview (approx 1 hr) over the next few months. Please be assured that all discussion and interview material will be treated confidentially and only used with your approval, in academic papers and thesis.

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I will be contacting you shortly to ascertain your participation and arrange an interview. In the interim if you have any questions I can be contacted via email at adriana.mccaskie@student.uts.edu.au or on mobile 0414 919430. Alternatively, you may wish to contact my Principal Supervisor, Professor Jenny Onyx on 02 9514 3633 or at Jenny.Onyx@uts.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Adriana McCaskie

Date

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Office (ph: 02 – 9514 9772 , Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome. (UTS HREC Approval Number 2011-042A)

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

I _____ (M*anager's name*) agree to participate in this research being conducted at _____(*name of organisation*) by Adriana McCaskie a doctoral candidate at the School of Management, University of Technology, Sydney. (Mobile 0414 919430 or email adriana.mccaskie@student.uts.edu.au. (UTS HREC Approval Number 2011-042A).

I understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between a particular group of women and professional work, specifically issues associated with professional women's career transitions, suspension and resumption within the context of an ageing workforce.

I understand that my participation in the research will involve a semi-structured interview of approximately 1 hour and that I will be asked about my views and experiences as a manager.

I am aware that I can contact Adriana McCaskie or her supervisors Professor Jenny Onyx (Jennifer.onyx@uts.edu.au, Ph: 95143633) or Dr Jenny Green (Jenny.green@uts.edu, Ph: 95145440), if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish and without giving a reason.

I agree that Adriana McCaskie has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me, this Organisation or its employees in any way.

_____ ____/____/____

Signature (Manager)

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Office (ph: 02 – 9514 9772 , Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome. (UTS HREC Approval Number 2011-042A)