Inequalities and Privileges: Middle-class Mothers and Employment.

Thesis submitted to the University of Limerick in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Sociology and Women’s Studies

by

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Abstract

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Clare O’Hagan

This thesis explores the inequalities and privileges women experience by combining motherhood with paid employment. Examining the experiences of thirty ‘working mothers’ through an intersectional\(^1\) lens, this thesis reveals complex patterns of inequality and privilege, which arise at the intersection of motherhood with paid work because in contemporary Ireland the normative construction of an ideal worker is one without care responsibilities, and an ideal mother works full time in the home.

Applying a feminist, intersectional research methodology, a case study was conducted with thirty women in a middle class Irish suburb. During focus group discussions and interviews, women reveal they experience different relations of privilege and penalty, because the social relations of gender, motherhood and class intersect with the institutional domains of family, workplace and society and at these intersections, women experience privileges or inequalities which vary according to each woman’s individual circumstances.

Through the concepts of choice, care and time, this study reveals the power operating through the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism, individualism, feminism and motherhood, which encourage women to both devote significant effort to developing their children, while also to commit themselves to productive paid work. Women navigate the terrain between motherhood and paid work with little social support and each woman’s decision to combine motherhood with paid work is configured as her individual ‘choice’, thus the dilemmas which arise are her own responsibility. This intersectional approach reveals relationships between discourses which are interdependent and create new complex patterns of inequality for ‘working mothers’. By privileging some women sometimes, enduring inequalities are created for all.

Key Words: ‘Working mothers’, Inequality, Privilege, Intersectionality, Discourse.

\(^1\) Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to explain the ways black women workers experienced new and complex forms of inequality because they were invisible to race- or gender-only concepts of discrimination – hence ‘all the blacks are men and all the women are white’. Crenshaw demonstrated that systems of oppression converge to create new and complex forms of inequality which differ from any one form of oppression viewed in isolation.
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Thirty ‘working mothers’ self-selected to participate in this research project and during focus group discussions and one to one interviews, I have been privileged to have a glimpse into these women’s lives and their generosity is much appreciated. All women said they wanted to participate in this project because they perceive a dearth of information on ‘working mothers’ in Ireland, to which they could contribute.

I would like to thank my supervisors Prof. Pat O’Connor and Dr. Breda Gray who guided this research project. Their different views of many aspects of the work led to lively debate at times, but always forced me to think harder and deeper about the issues and the ways I would represent them. I would like to acknowledge their enthusiasm for this project, their constructive criticisms, their genuine interest in this under-researched topic and their encouragement to ‘keep going’.

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Declaration

This thesis is a presentation of my own original research and personal effort. I declare that this work is original and has not been taken from other sources except where such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text.
Introduction.
This thesis explores the experiences of women with children who engage in paid work outside the home in early 21st century Ireland.

In this research, I use the term ‘working mother’ to mean women with children who engage in paid work. The term ‘working mother’ is taken in common parlance to mean women with children who engage in paid work outside the home. I acknowledge that the term could be read to imply that women with children who work full time in the home do not work. Women who mother full time in the home work very hard indeed and also experience inequalities, however these are different from the inequalities experienced by women who combine motherhood with paid work. This research is only concerned with exploring the inequalities and privileges experienced by women who combine motherhood with paid work outside the home and I use the term ‘working mother’ in single quotation marks to highlight this problem of definition with the word ‘work’.

When women become mothers, they experience inequalities in families because of their gender, undertaking the greater proportion of housework, childcare and household labour. Where women participate in paid work, they experience inequalities in the workplace because of their gender, earning less and experiencing occupational segregation. Where women with children engage in paid work, these inequalities are not added together, they mutate into new and complex forms of inequality.

Irish society is in a state of flux, with traditional and new capitalist motherhood discourses circulating simultaneously with discourses of neo-liberalism, individualism and feminism. On the surface, these discourses appear to conflict and women are encouraged to both devote copious amounts of time and effort to developing their children, while also to commit themselves to productive paid work. These discourses emanate from, circulate in and shape the institutions of family, workplace and society, while women themselves are positioned differently by these discourses which is reflected in the ways women take up, refuse, contest or reproduce them in their daily lives as ‘mothers’, ‘workers’ and ‘working mothers’.

In this study I use the concept of patriarchy to describe the power which privileges men over women, and also men over other men. Patriarchal power is evident
in new social patterns and trends in Irish society, which are examined in relation to ‘working mothers’ and in relation to childcare and caring both in the public and private spheres in Chapter 1. Neo-liberal and individualism discourses operate in workplace and society, evident in social inequalities and the widespread adoption of liberal-individualist attitudes. Discourses of individualism and feminism have contributed to women’s changing roles and a liberalizing of attitudes towards traditional gender roles. Childcare is examined which reveals the state’s neo-liberal / individualist policy in this area, and conflicting ideologies of neo-liberalism and motherhood. The position of ‘working mothers’ in the private sphere is examined, which reveals women’s roles have changed little in the private sphere, despite their increased participation in the public sphere. Traditional and new capitalist motherhood discourses continue to promote women’s role as primary carers, and motherhood and caring are explored which reveal the persistence of gendered ideologies of motherhood and caring and a backlash against women’s move to a more public role.

One of the difficulties of researching women with children who engage in paid work outside the home is that the experiences of women vary significantly from each other, even while there are similarities among women because they are all mothers and all participate in paid work. No more than any other group of women occupying a similar social location, there are similarities deriving from their common positions, however, there are many differences depending on women’s employment, family status, occupation and class. A considerable challenge in approaching this research was identifying a theoretical framework which would reveal all the complexities of inequality and privilege that women experience at an individual level, identify the causes of these inequalities with reference to the structural social system and demonstrate the way these inequalities are created and maintained. I found the concept of intersectionality a useful analytical tool to examine and theorize the complexity of women’s experiences of being ‘working mothers’, which I discuss in Chapter 2.

Women with children who engage in paid work are an under-researched group, who are located at the intersection of the categories mother and worker. I apply McCall’s (2005) concept of intracategorical complexity to explore inequalities and privileges at the level of individual women at the neglected social location of ‘working mother’ to reveal
how the inequalities and privileges experienced at an individual level are created by the variations between women dependant on their occupation, marital status and class. This approach uncovers the differences and complexities of experience embodied in the social location of ‘working mother’ as well as revealing the range of diversity and difference within the group of women. However, identifying and revealing inequalities and privileges does not explain them, and I apply Walby’s (2007a) concept of complexity theory to demonstrate how these inequalities and privileges are anchored in social systems and the ways the social relations of gender, class, motherhood and employment intersect with the institutions of family, workplace and society. My aim in this research is to reveal the operation of power and its effects on women with children who engage in paid work outside the home. Ferree (2009) argues that discourse is the political process which promotes and maintains inequalities and I use Foucault’s (1977) concept of discursive power to demonstrate this. Women’s everyday practices are examined to explore the ways power operates through discourses and institutions to reproduce the norms of ‘ideal worker’ and ‘ideal mother’ as well as the ways women act discursively to position themselves as subjects of discourse. Patriarchy is seen as a hegemonic gender order imposed through individual, collective and institutional behaviours and discourse is the political process through which patriarchal power is exercised. Patriarchal power is structural, but also dynamic and unstable and exercised differently with regard to each subject, category and intersection.

A feminist, intersectional research methodology was employed in this research, which is outlined in Chapter 3. While there is no clear intersectional methodology, I employed a feminist standpoint which demonstrates that ‘working mothers’, as a marginalized group, have a particular viewpoint on Irish society. This standpoint provides a privileged, yet mediated view of gendered institutional and discursive power structures. The categories of mother, worker, and ‘working mother’, are not only of identification but are also hierarchically organized and in this research, the problem is not the existence of these categories but the values of hierarchy that fill them up. According to Cole (2009), translating the theoretical insights of intersectionality into empirical research does not require the adoption of a new set of methods, but rather, a reconceptualization of the meaning and consequences of social categories. I conducted a
case study which is compatible with the intracategorical complexity approach because one can start with an individual, group, event, or context, then work outward to unravel how categories are lived and experienced (McCall, 2005). The thirty women in this research were recruited through participating primary schools in a middle-class provincial suburb. There are particular middle class values evident in the narratives of women and the discourses women draw on to explain and justify their individual ways of combining motherhood with paid work. In focus groups, women were invited to discuss the practical issues which concerned them about being a ‘working mother’. Analysis of these discussions revealed that women drew on motherhood, feminism, neo-liberalism and individualism discourses and this provided the context for the individual interviews which were conducted a year later with individual women. Following Collins (2000), I linked ‘working mothers’’ standpoint with intersectionality to develop a contextual and specific analysis of the group of ‘working mothers’ in order to identify the various oppressions experienced at the intersection of class, gender and motherhood with family, workplace and society, and to theorize the hierarchies of inequality, because these oppressions are not equivalent. This intersectional analysis was developed and emerged from the complexities of women’s experiences as both individuals and as members of the group and the concepts of choice, care and time were used to frame the research findings.

Women’s choices in relation to the ways they combine motherhood with paid work are examined in Chapter 4. Women who have dependant children are obliged to make choices between conflicting dominant discourses which promote autonomy on the one hand and the prioritization of children’s needs on the other. I examine the extent of women’s freedom to make choices about combining motherhood with paid work, the factors women consider in making these choices and the consequences of these decisions for individual women. In this intersectional research the differences between women are revealed as well as women’s take-up or refusal of particular discourses. Women’s choices regarding combining motherhood with paid work reveal inequalities and privileges experienced by different women dependant on their marital status and occupation, however, all women experience inequalities because of persistent gendered obligations to care. Morality and choice are linked and in examining women’s choices, I explore the influence of moral reasoning on women’s rational decision making which
reveals gendered obligations on women to undertake caring work, the public scrutiny of mothers, and the resistance to women’s changing role in Irish society - all of which influence women’s choices. Patterns between intersectionality and discourse are explored in relation to women’s choices which demonstrate the power operating through dominant discourses which sets clear and defined limits on women’s freedom to make choices about the ways they can combine motherhood with paid work in Ireland.

Women’s care arrangements are examined in Chapter 5 because childcare is central to women’s ability to participate in paid work. Women’s ability to source and retain suitable childcare is explored in the context of the state’s neo-liberal approach to childcare provision. Their childcare arrangements set up differences between women, and reveals inequalities and privileges between participants consequent on their family situations, economic resources and their occupations. Women make childcare arrangements with little social support and the treatment of childcare workers by the state, and by some ‘working mothers’ and households reflects the low valuation placed on care in a neo-liberal society. The different valuations of care when undertaken by mothers and by paid care workers is explored which reveals the complexity of the relationship between mothers and care workers and reveals significant differences between participants, as well as differences between participants and the women they engage to care for their children. An intersectional approach reveals that professional and childminding women are produced hierarchically in relation to each other, and the relationship between ‘working mothers’ and care workers is hierarchically ordered, with women who provide childcare experiencing greater inequalities than the women whose children they mind. Care work is increasingly being commoditized, however, it is not possible to commodify all aspects of caring, which creates dilemmas and inequalities for women, childminders and children.

It is a commonsense observation that ‘working mothers’ are time poor and in Chapter 6, I examine the time pressure and time poverty experienced by ‘working mothers’ through the concept of the ‘caringscape’ (McKie, Gregory and Bowlby, 2004). Working time is examined which reveals that organizations, and some women themselves, promote rigid ‘work time’ cultures, even while women spend working time on caring activities and many women avail of time flexibility while at work. Caring time
is examined and reveals that time spent at home tends to be fluid, processual and responsive to the needs of others. Women spend caring time tending to housework, devoting time to their children and their partners. Different valuations of time are promoted in dominant discourses and these conflicting uses and valuations of time create inequalities for women who attempt to combine working with caring, consequently women are busy, experience time pressure and time poverty, which means women have no personal time. There are different degrees of time pressure and time poverty experienced by women, dependant on their economic and family situations and the number of hours spent in paid work, their employing organizations and their occupations. There are patterns between dominant discourses which compete, conflict and complement each other, demonstrating their interdependence and interpenetration, which create and sustain many of the temporal inequalities women experience.

In Chapter 7, I summarise the findings from the data chapters, which reveal the inequalities and privileges women experience by being ‘working mothers’. I demonstrate the way these inequalities and privileges are anchored in the social structural systems of family, workplace and society, which create regimes of inequality for women. The configurations or patterns of inequality which arise between intersectionality and discourse reveal the operation of patriarchal power in 21st century Ireland. I reflect on the research process and outline unexpected and thought provoking findings and I demonstrate the contribution this research makes to knowledge. I suggest institutional and individual recommendations which will improve the situation for women, mothers and carers in Irish society and I identify areas for future research which include the development of issues which arose in this research, as well as international, comparative and longitudinal studies with other groups of ‘working mothers’.
Chapter 1: Ireland: No Country for ‘Working Mothers’?

Although the proportion of all women in the Irish labour force remained fairly stable for sixty years, being 32 per cent in 1926 and 31 per cent in 1986, the proportion of married women and more specifically mothers, changed significantly from the 1970s onwards. In 1971 only 8 per cent of married women were in the labour force; in 1981 this had more than doubled to 17 per cent and by 1991 it was 27 per cent (Hilliard, 2007). It was 37 per cent in 1996, however, by 2008, 69 per cent of all married women aged between 25 and 64 were in the labour force (CSO, 2009a). This increase in the number of ‘working mothers’ is one of many dramatic social and cultural changes which occurred in recent decades in Irish society. This chapter explores the context within which women combine motherhood with paid work, and explores changing social patterns and trends both in the public and private spheres and their effects on women who combine motherhood with paid work.

Fairclough (2005:80) argues that changes in orders of discourse are a precondition for wider processes of social change, which originate from a change in discourse. Discourses include representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries, which are representations of how things might or should be. Possible articulations of activities, social subjects and social relations, can become real activities, subjects and social relations because discourses as imaginaries come to be inculcated as new ways of being (Gramsci, 1971). The process of ‘changing the subject’ (Fairclough, 2005:80) can be thought of in terms of the inculcation of new discourses, as people come to ‘own’ discourses, to position themselves inside them, to act and think and talk and see themselves in terms of new discourses.

Discourses which have been effective in wider processes of social change in Ireland, and in changing the subject of women in Irish society, are the discourses of neo-liberalism, individualism, feminism and motherhood. In this chapter social and cultural changes are examined in relation to these discourses because they emanate from, circulate in and shape the institutions of family, workplace and society, and women themselves are positioned differently by these discourses which influence the ways women combine motherhood with paid work.
‘Working Mothers’ in the Public Sphere.

In the thirty years between 1971 and 2001, the number of women in paid employment rose by 140 per cent, compared to a rise of 27 per cent in the number of men (CSO, 2006a). Between 1998 and 2007 the employment rate for women in Ireland rose by over 12 percentage points to 61 per cent compared with an increase of just over 6 percentage points for men (CSO, 2008a). The Stockholm Council in 2001 set an EU employment target of 57 per cent for women aged 15-64 by 2005. The EU did not quite reach this target, but Ireland did. The Lisbon Council, in 2000, set an EU target of 60 per cent by 2010 (CSO, 2010a). In 1999, the female employment rate in Ireland, at 51 per cent, was below the EU average of 53 per cent. However, since then the employment rate for women has increased more rapidly in Ireland than in the EU and in 2008 it was 61 per cent, which is above the EU average of 59 per cent (CSO, 2010a).

These figures can lead one to argue that women’s employment, especially mothers’ employment, facilitated the economic boom, popularly known as the Celtic Tiger (O’Connor, 2008a). O’Donnell (2003) argues that the term ‘Celtic Tiger’ refers to remarkable growth during the 1990s and 2000s in economic output, employment and incomes. This economic growth occurred simultaneously with rapid social and cultural change.

Prior to 1987, Ireland was characterized by high inflation, unemployment, industrial unrest and adversarial industrial relations, which frequently resulted in disputes and strikes affecting bus, rail, and electricity and banking sectors. In the 1980s, wage restraint was necessary to curb inflation which was achieved through negotiated agreements between the government, employers and unions in a process known as social partnership. The state reduced income tax rates, generating employment and increasing the income tax take, the state also reduced corporation tax rates encouraging foreign direct investment and further employment; the trades unions guaranteed industrial peace.

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2 The term ‘Celtic Tiger’ first appeared in a Morgan Stanley article in 1994. The term Celtic Tiger is analogical to East Asian Tigers, a term applied to the economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and other countries in Eastern Asia during the period of their phenomenal economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s.

3 The Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) represents employers, The Irish Congress of Trades Unions (ICTU) represents employees, while senior officials from several government departments represent the state, who is also one of the largest employers in the country. Since 2000, the social partnership process has also included the Community and Voluntary Pillar.
in exchange for the increased take home pay of their members, while employers agreed to modest pay increases because the change in the tax rate increased employees’ take home pay. On the premise that the rising economic tide lifts all boats, all partners benefited from these negotiated agreements. O’Donnell (2000) and O’Riain (2000) argue that the State, in particular the social partnership process, played a crucial role in Ireland’s growth. The negotiation of centralized wage-bargaining agreements through social partnership from 1987 created a climate of stability and certainty that helped provide the context for increased overseas investment, industrial co-operation and job growth combined with low inflation (Teague, 1995; Roche, 1997; Hardiman, 2004). The social partnership agreements began essentially as trade-offs for wage restraint in a time of crisis (Nicholls, 2006). To encourage industrial stability, the partnership process facilitated the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 (Government of Ireland, 1990) which sought to limit the number of trades unions in the country, and imposed considerable restrictions on strikes and industrial actions and introduced measures to resolve disputes. The high and volatile pattern of industrial relations in the early 1990s gave way to a low, falling and relatively stable pattern. This was reflected in the drop in numbers of disputes. In 1993 there were 47 industrial disputes, while in 2008, this had reduced to 11 (CSO, 2009b).

O’Donnell (2003) claims the partnership process reflects the interdependence between the economic and the political, and the importance of a shared understanding of key economic and social mechanisms. Through the partnership process, the State effectively co-opted social groups to neo-liberalism. According to Treanor (2007) neo-liberalism is a philosophy which sees the world in terms of market metaphors. Referring to nations as companies is typically neo-liberal and ‘Ireland Inc.’ was traded in the global marketplace as a location for entrepreneurs because competition for inward investment is the core doctrine of neo-liberalism. According to the then Tánaiste (Harney, 2000:1) ‘Geographically we are closer to Berlin than Boston. Spiritually we are probably a lot closer to Boston than Berlin’, citing Ireland’s identification with ‘the American way…rugged individualism…an economic model that is heavily based on enterprise and incentive, on individual effort and with limited government intervention’ (Harney, 2000:1). In 2000, Ireland, with 1 per cent of Europe’s population succeeded in attracting
27 per cent of US greenfield investment in Europe, because of the State’s neo-liberal economic policies, which include ‘the incentive power of low taxation…economic liberalization, essential regulation, but not over-regulation’ (Harney, 2000:1). According to Schäfer (2009:115), Ireland today has the highest level of direct US investment per manufacturing worker of any country in Europe.

Neo-liberalism dedicates the state to championing private property rights, free markets and free trade, while deregulating business and privatizing collective assets. Harvey (2005) claims that neo-liberalism has become hegemonic worldwide as neo-liberalism has had the support of large debt restructuring organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank, which were encouraged to promote neo-liberalism in order to revitalize capital accumulation.

One of the differences between classical liberalism and neo-liberalism is that while the former called for reducing the role of the state to a minimum and replacing it by private capital, the latter seeks to expand the role of private capital through the state by tax cuts, decreases in social spending, deregulation, and privatization, making the state authoritarian and a dedicated facilitator of capitalist interests. Inglis (2008:28) claims the development of a global habitus is closely allied to the spread and development of the world capitalist system and the spiral of ever-increasing production and consumption. However, globalization and capitalism are linked in other ways. Harvey (2005) claims that neo-liberalism is a global capitalist class power restoration project while Martinez and Garcia (2000), Lenz (2007) and Walby (2007b) argue that in countries which have a more liberal political structure, the pressures of globalization lead to reductions in the welfare state, favouring the interests of capital over those of labour.

Discourses of neo-liberalism suggest all people of working age should participate in paid work to contribute to the economy; furthermore participation in employment is necessary to fit with dominant social values, to achieve the social and cultural capital to ensure economic self-sufficiency and an end to poverty and social exclusion. Harvey (2005) suggests that neo-liberals promote entrepreneurialism as the normative source of human happiness. The government’s adoption of neo-liberal policy caused considerable social and cultural change, which emanated from a change in the order of discourse.
Prior to 1980, dominant political-economic discourse in Ireland was described as ‘Catholic Corporatist’ (McLaughlin, 1993:305). This changed to neo-liberalism following Ireland’s joining the EU in 1973, and since the 1980s, Ireland has pursued neo-liberal economic policies and the partnership agreements are evidence of the state expanding the private capital of employers through the state. The state therefore facilitates capital accumulation and Prasad (2006) argues neo-liberalism became dominant where the national tax structure was progressive, where industrial policy was adversarial to business, and where welfare was associated with the poor. In Ireland, prior to the partnership process, industrial policy was adversarial to business and welfare was narrowly associated with transfer payments to the poor. The partnership process reformed the industrial relations legal and institutional framework and introduced a progressive tax structure favourable to private enterprise. Prasad's analysis also suggests that neo-liberalism has been a corrective to policies that favoured the working class over capitalist interests and it can be argued that the partnership process demonstrates that the State promotes and protects capitalist interests in Ireland, while limiting the power of the trades unions and consequently, the working class. Boucher and Collins (2003:305) claim the partnership processes in Ireland are operating primarily in the service of neo-liberalism, while Allen (2000: 13-15) argues that the partnership process achieved tax cuts, reduction in real wages, constriction of public spending and a ‘choking’ of union power.

The change to neo-liberal discourse, as evidenced by partnership processes resulted in considerable economic growth for Ireland, and this was evident in employment rates. The long-term unemployment rate for Irish men fell from 8 per cent in 1996 to 2 per cent in 2006. The corresponding decrease for women was from 6 per cent in 1996 to 1 per cent in 2006 (CSO, 2006b). The overall employment rate in Ireland rose from 56 per cent in 1997 to 68 per cent in 2008. Male employment rose from 74 per cent in 1999 to 76 per cent in 2008, while female employment rose from 51 per cent in 1999 to 61 per cent in 2008 (CSO, 2009c). In 2001, the Stockholm Council set a target of a 50 per cent employment rate in the 55-64 age group by 2010. This target applies to both men and women. In 2009, 67 per cent of Irish men in this age group were employed as against an EU average of 55 per cent; for women, the rate was 41 per cent in Ireland as
against an EU average of 37 per cent (CSO, 2010a). Overall unemployment rates dropped from 17 per cent in 1980 to 4 per cent in 2001, rising to 5 per cent in 2006 (CSO, 2009d) and 14 per cent in 2010 (CSO, 2010b).

It is clear the government’s neo-liberal economic policies encourage women’s employment and their economic contribution to the state. In Budget 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000a) the then Minister for Finance introduced tax individualization, which was achieved over the course of three budgets. The individualization of the tax system was regarded as the State’s adoption of neo-liberal economic policy by encouraging and supporting mothers’ employment. By 2002, when the individualization programme was completed, a two income married couple had double the tax allowances that a one income married couple receive. The single-income couple continues to pay the higher tax rate while the two income household can have double the same income before paying the higher rate of tax. The individualization proposals were seen as a reward to women in the workforce vis a vis women in the home (Kennedy, 2004; Mahon, 2004). At the Family Fora (2004) many people reported that the individualization of the tax system signified to them that the government values economic activity more highly than family-related forms of activity such as caring for children and other family members. Mahon (2004) argues that individualization of the tax system has been particularly divisive. Women ‘at home’ resent tax allowances for women at work, and those at work resent their taxes facilitating other women to stay at home full time.

Mahon (1998a; 2004) and O’Hagan (2006) argue that mothers are increasingly being commoditized by the state in terms of employment and welfare systems, and welfare and tax policy promotes alternative kinds of motherhood based on marital status. In welfare policy, women who are married to unemployed men are classified as ‘qualified adults’ and treated as dependants. If married women work full time in the home, their work is not recognized in welfare policy, or for pension purposes. In tax policy, women who are married and choose to work full time in the home are penalized because individualization of the tax system means only those working in the formal economy are entitled to any tax relief, while women who are lone parents are supported by the state, on

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4 A nationwide consultation process on ‘The future of the family’ was conducted in 2004, with public meetings taking place in several major centres. The findings of the ‘family fora’ reveal public attitudes to family life in Ireland and were published in 2004 (Daly, 2004).
condition that they do not cohabit, which effectively means the state replaces the male breadwinner. Since 2003, the government has been making concerted efforts to encourage lone parents to work full time. In launching the ‘Babies and Bosses’ report, the OECD Director stated ‘single parents on social welfare who reject job offers should be forced to work’ (Treoir, 2003), and, while the then Minister for Social and Family Affairs, rejected this call for coercion, she supported the government working with lone parents to get them off social welfare and into work. In 2008, and again in 2010, the government proposed welfare reform withdrawing welfare support for lone parents, and replacing the lone parent allowance with job seekers benefit, in a clear move to force lone parents, mainly women, to enter the labour market.

In the years from 1971 to 1996, 90 per cent of the increase in employment was due to increases in women’s employment (CSO, 2006c). Women workers have been central to Ireland’s recent economic success; however, the labour force remains largely ‘unfeminized’, despite the changes in its composition. In 2008, the education and health sectors employed 31 per cent of women employees in Ireland and 28 per cent of women in the EU. The construction sector employed the lowest proportion of women, with men representing 95 per cent of employees in the Irish Construction sector in 2008 (CSO, 2010a). Daly and Rake (2003) and Turner and D’Art (2005) concluded that lower level skill occupations, particularly in the services sector contributed significantly to the expansion of the labour force and accounted for the greater proportion of the employment growth in the private sector in that period, while O’Connell (1999:217) noted that official talk of the Celtic Tiger ‘had misconstrued the gender of the animal’.

While there is no universal and generalizable female experience of the workforce, motherhood clearly has a negative effect on women’s employment. This is evident in the participation rates of childless women relative to mothers, with 87 per cent of women without children in employment compared to 55 per cent of women whose youngest child is aged 0-3 years, 54 per cent of women whose youngest child is aged 4 – 5 years and 64 per cent of women whose youngest child is aged 6 or over (CSO, 2009b). Fatherhood does not have the same effect on male employment, 84 per cent of childless men are employed, 82 per cent of fathers whose youngest child is aged 0-3 years, 85 per cent of fathers whose youngest child is aged 4 – 5 years and 81 per cent of fathers whose
youngest child is aged 6 or over (CSO, 2009c). This is not unique to Ireland, but the impact of having children is greater in Ireland than in almost any OECD country. The National Women’s Council reported that the average maternal employment rate across OECD countries is 95 per cent of that for all women; in Ireland, the figure is 83 per cent. In France, mothers’ employment is 97 per cent of the rate for all women, and in Sweden, maternal employment rates are actually higher than those for all women (NWCI, 2009a). Despite the significant increases in women’s employment, having children clearly has a negative effect on mothers’ employment, which is surprising in a state which encourages women’s and mothers’ participation in the labour market.

Daly (2004) found the role of mothers is far from settled in Irish society. The division among women regarding mothers’ employment can lead to guilt among employed mothers and heightens ambivalence about taking up a job among others who are not employed (Daly, 2004:129). It was pointed out (at the Family Forums) that the current thrust of government policy, to encourage if not push mothers into employment, can create a lot of difficulties for mothers. These are not just material or logistical in nature especially in the sense of managing childcare; they are also emotional. Ambivalence, it seems, is the lot of many mothers. Many women feel torn between children and work (Daly, 2004:34).

Women traditionally were providers of care and the ‘love labour’ (Lynch 1989; Lynch and McLaughlin, 1995; Lynch, 2008) that supported and nurtured relationships in family and community. When women engage in paid work in pursuit of independence and autonomy they experience conflict, time pressure and the ‘double burden’. McGinnity et al. (2005:215) found that high workloads (of paid and unpaid work) are also linked to lower life satisfaction; however, they argue that these do not cancel out the positive impact of employment on well-being. In reality, combining motherhood with paid work is very difficult. There are some stress points; a significant proportion of the population reports feeling rushed and stressed, particularly those with high volumes of paid and unpaid work, who are predominantly ‘working mothers’ (McGinnity, Russell and Smyth, 2005). Women in different class positions are more or less able to deal with difficulties associated with women’s participation in the labour force (Barry, 2008). Those with the resources have access to a far greater range of support options; for
example they may subcontract some of their domestic responsibilities by using formal childcare, or employing a housekeeper, nanny or au-pair, they may also buy in domestic supports.

Entering paid employment did not relieve women of their maternal responsibilities, however, and many feminist writers (Bateson, 1989; Boh, 1989; Hochschild, 1990; Bjornberg, 1992; O’Connor, 1998; Murphy-Lawless, 2000; Drew, 2003; Mahon, 2004; Coakley, 2005; Barry, 2008) found that women entered the paid labour force only at the expense of taking on a second shift, because they still retained responsibility for childcare and domestic duties. Consequently, Lynch and Lyons (2008:174) found that 40 per cent of Irish women are prevented from achieving a desired balance between employment and care responsibilities. The European Community Household Panel (2001) found even women who were in full time employment felt constrained by their care responsibilities in a way men did not. Women who had completed formal education and who worked full time were over three times more likely than men working full time to feel that their caring responsibilities did not allow them to do the kind of paid work they wished to do (Lynch and Lyons, 2008:174).

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the interface between family and work is the fact that the values and rationalities of each are diametrically opposed. While not overlooking issues of power and differentiated access to resources in domestic settings, family is ideally characterized by nurturing, kindness, communication, trust and altruism. The world of work operates on quite different priorities. Jones, Tepperman and Wilson (1995:110) argue that ‘the assumption underlying all highly paid careers is that work will take priority over everything else’. The push for productivity at almost any cost is clearly at odds with the affective priorities of family life (Hagerstrand, 1978). Commitment in the workplace is often judged by the number of hours employees are available to work, and sometimes by the availability of workers for out-of-work socializing. However, caring time is more fluid and responsive (Nowotny, 1975; Davies, 1990; Knights and Odih, 1995; Lareau, 2002; McKie, Gregory and Bowlby, 2002) and there are very different gendered valances attached to productive/work time and caring/process time (Davies, 1990; Knights and Odih, 1995; Land, 1999). Given the realities of limited time, it is difficult to see how family and career commitments cannot
come into conflict for women who continue to carry the major responsibility for family functioning (Hewitt, 1993; Hilliard, 2007).

**Individualism**

Neo-liberalism promotes the market and the belief that humans exist to participate in the market and those who do not have failed in some way (Treanor, 2007). Therefore, closely linked to discourses of neo-liberalism, is the concept of individualism, with people managing their own relationships with the labour market. Discourses of individualism suggest that people are free to choose their identities and lifestyles and indeed, must do so in order to demonstrate their success as people. The central principle of individualism is that people can and should, may and must, actively steer their own lives by exercising autonomous choice. Adults exercise free will and voluntarily choose to engage in paid work because employment is the route to economic self sufficiency and promotes self esteem (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000; Rose, 1992). The rise of individualism is linked to global capitalism, in which individuals are positioned entirely as producers and consumers. The cry of the liberal is that the more opportunity individuals have to make their own rational choices within open markets, the better for them, the better for their society, and the better for the common global good (Inglis, 2008). The growth of globalization is intrinsically tied into the growth of individualism. The penetration of the market into everyday life has created a new individualism revolving around personal identities and lifestyles (Inglis, 2008). The process of ‘changing the subject’ (Fairclough, 2005:80) can be thought of in terms of the inculcation of new discourses, as people come to ‘own’ discourses, to position themselves inside them, to act and think and talk and see themselves in terms of new discourses. When individualism discourses are widely adopted by individuals in neo-liberal democracies, individualization of that society occurs.

O’Connor (2008b) claims individualization is one of the most fundamental long term processes transforming Irish society while Inglis (2008) regards the increasing individualization of Irish society as a crucially important process in the second half of the twentieth century to which he attributes the decline of Catholicism and the rise of globalization. In Ireland, the traditional social relationships, bonds and belief systems
that used to determine Irish people’s lives in the narrowest detail have been losing some of their meaning. New space and options have opened up as well as new regulations emanating from the institutions of the labour market, welfare state and education system (Inglis, 2008). Inglis (2003) claims that a cultural change happened from the 1960s onwards, in which ‘a new philosophy of liberal individualism and self indulgence’ began to emerge with ‘a new ethic of self realisation’ (ibid: 137). This demonstrates a change in the order of discourse from traditional catholic conservatism to liberal individualism in what Inglis (2003) called the transformation from ‘a Catholic culture of self-denial to a consumer culture of self indulgence’ (2003:138). McCarthy (2006) claims that Ireland has high productivity, increased individual prosperity, inward migration and has moved to a more liberal, individualized society with more egalitarian values, a more outward-looking, sophisticated, information-laden society, with a critical and busy population, displaying significant skepticism about authority in all its forms, religious, traditional or political, in the first decade of the twenty-first century (2006:74/75).

Bauman (2000), Beck (1992) and Giddens (1992) claim that people constantly invent and re-invent themselves in the pursuit of independence, autonomy and self-sufficiency. Inglis (2008:160) argues there seems to be ‘increasing universal agreement that, whatever else happens, individuals in Ireland as elsewhere, have to be free to choose who they are, what they do, how they live their lives’. Beck (1992) and Bauman (2000) talk of reflexive individualism, of the individual biographical project whereby individuals are charged with reflexivity constructing their own biographies and there is an expectation that women, like men, are fundamentally autonomous beings. However, women with dependant children find autonomy difficult to achieve and in Ireland, women are still charged with caring as a personal and social duty in the Irish Constitution (Government of Ireland, 1937) 5.

When women choose to combine motherhood with paid work, they are perceived to be rejecting motherhood and embracing individualism. In individualism discourses, the worker is an individual in search of meaning, achievement and self-actualization.

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5 The Irish Constitution (Article 41.2) states
1 The state recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state the support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2 The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties within the home.
Work is not simply a source of income, but also a source of personal growth and fulfillment, thus the individual is not to be emancipated from work, perceived as merely a job or economic necessity, but the individual is to be fulfilled in work which provides meaning, identity and personal satisfaction (Rose, 1989; 1999b). The emphasis on individual autonomy and agency raises important issues for ‘working mothers’. The past twenty-five years have witnessed an increased interest in the concept of personal autonomy. Within the recognized categories of autonomy as a personal ideal, attempts have been made to come to terms with the distinct ideas of autonomous agents, autonomous lives and autonomous action. This, in turn, raises questions about the various qualities necessary for personal autonomy, qualities such as rationality, responsibility and self-control as well as the skills required for living an autonomous life. Autonomous beings are self-governing, having the freedom and discretion to make decisions about the way they live their lives, following their own individual guiding principles. An autonomous person is an agent, one who directs or determines the course of her own life and who is positioned to assume the costs and the benefits of her choices. Autonomy thus establishes the descriptive standard for what is assumed distinctive of human beings. But autonomy serves as a prescriptive standard as well - one who is able to decide the direction of her life is to be respected for this ability (Hadfield, 1995). Consequently, women who have dependent children and cannot exercise autonomy struggle with individualism discourses, because, as Di Quinzio (1999) notes, motherhood and individualism are incompatible.

The myriad of choices that confront us in modern society lead to the self becoming a ‘reflexive product’ (Giddens, 1991:32), with individuals choosing and planning their lifestyles and biographies. In this perspective the individual becomes responsible for the creation of the self. However, Lash (1994:120) insists on the need to be conscious of how structures may constrain the choices available to individuals, while Anthias (1999) and Adkins (2002) highlight the significance of social or structural divisions such as class, race and gender. Irish women are constituted by the promise of ‘freedom’ to invent themselves, but as Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000:75) argue, ‘it is the requirement of the exercise of the will which is the decisive means by which the global citizen is established’, and it is important to examine the ways in which
globalization and individualism ‘identify “choice” as its origin and produce new regulatory effects’ (Gray, 2004:158).

In many respects modern society is characterized by greater choice and opportunities for agency on the part of women than were earlier times (Hilliard, 2007) and much of the focus of debate around care and women’s employment has drawn on ideas of individualism, autonomy and ‘choice’. Hakim (2000) argues

[A]ffluent and liberal modern societies provide opportunities for diverse lifestyle preferences to be fully realized [so that] women [have] genuine choices as to what to do with their lives (ibid: 273).

This is because ‘there are no major constraints limiting choice or forcing choice in particular directions’ (ibid: 18). In this way women’s heterogeneous employment patterns are explained by heterogeneity in their lifestyle preferences. Hakim (2000) calls this ‘preference theory’ and explains that women have three dominant preferences to be ‘home centred’, with very little attachment to the labour market; ‘adaptive’ whereby women’s participation in the labour market is ‘irregular’ based on their home commitments; or ‘work centred’ whereby women have high levels of career commitment.

Hakim (2000) argues that policy research and predictions of women’s choices will be more successful in future if they adopt the preference theory perspective and first establish the woman’s distribution of preferences between family, work and employment. Although Hakim admits that the social and economic context can have some influence, lifestyle preferences are, in her view, the principle determinant of women’s employment choices (Hakim, 2003). In this way preference theory neatly operationalizes the individualization view of late modern society for women’s choice of employment behaviour. Giddens supports Hakim’s claim that ‘modern women [have] real choices between a life centred on family work and/or on paid work’ as a demonstration that ‘we can no longer learn from history’, because ‘individualization has been the main driving force for change in late modern society’ (Giddens, 2000: vii).

However, as McRae (2003) points out, any contextual constraints are in practice ignored by preference theory. Women’s lives are bound by cultural and social expectations of gender roles, particularly when women are mothers. While individualism suggests a high degree of personal choice, people still live out their lives dependent on institutions. An over-emphasis on choice underestimates the extent to which most
women, and especially mothers, live out their lives within very real constraints. This lopsided emphasis on choice is evident in Hakim’s so-called ‘preference theory’ (Hilliard, 2007). Crompton (2006) has also criticized theories that have emphasized the contemporary and overwhelming significance of choice particularly for women. Beck (1992) described people as being freed from historically inscribed roles; however, Hughes (2002) and Crompton (2006) argue that the extent to which historically inscribed roles have in fact been transcended has been exaggerated, particularly in respect of mothers. The reality of intimate relationships is that entering into them successfully entails time, negotiation, trust, vulnerability, altruism and the relinquishment of a degree of individual freedom. This clearly suggests a certain tension between an individual’s autonomy, their commitment to others in a family grouping, and the demands of work (Hilliard, 2007:99). Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argues that processes of individualization generate an obligation to achieve a life of one’s own, and a longing for ties, closeness and community. Where the dynamic of individualism imposes itself, more effort than before must be expended to keep the various individual biographies within the ordinary compass of the family (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This effort falls to women, particularly mothers. In the domain of primary relationships, individualism puts increasing pressure on traditional role patterns and on work relationships between men and women.

In contemporary societies, individualism is maintained by women and men’s ‘realistic expectations’ of the choices available to them. As Williams (2000:5) asks ‘Why change a system in which women often describe economic marginalization as their own choice?’ It does not matter if the free choice is more illusory than real, if people are trampled on in the marketplace, or if the consequences of unrestricted freedom of choice are socially and personally disastrous (Inglis, 2008:160). However, individualism is also maintained by individual or group attempts to achieve social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), which effectively perpetuates a structure where different groups are rewarded unequally and leads to intimidation, oppression and exclusion of other individuals and groups.

Hilliard (2007) argues that an excessive belief in individual autonomy can have dangerous social and personal consequences: individuals whose biographies are seen to be out of line with the priorities of ‘success’ in their society, such as remaining poor in a
rich world, will be blamed not only for their individual ‘failure’, but for woes afflicting the wider society, as single mothers were in Britain in the last few decades of the twentieth century (Skeggs, 2004; Hilliard, 2007). The structural problems of a society can then be explained by the shortcomings of individuals or groups. Indeed, Payne and McCashin (2005:15-16) found several liberal-individualist patterns had taken ‘root in Irish public attitudes’ with 70 per cent of people agreeing that hard work is the difference between being poor and well-off (Schäfer, 2009). Similarly Hardiman, McCashin and Payne (2004) found support for liberal-individualist views across all social classes in a study for the Combat Poverty Agency which explored Irish Attitudes to Poverty and Wealth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent Agreeing</th>
<th>Individualist &amp; Social Statements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Some people just don’t make the effort to help themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>People with talent or ability will always make money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Everybody in Ireland is much better off than 5 years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Hard work is what makes the difference between making a lot of money and making very little.</td>
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The trend towards liberal-individualist attitudes in Ireland is evident in 66 per cent of people agreeing with the statement that talented and able people will have opportunities in an open market to make money, and 69 per cent agreeing that hard work results in increased wealth. However, the weak support expressed for redistributive social policies demonstrates the widespread take up of liberal-individualist discourses by Irish society generally. Only 34 per cent agreed that the Government does not give enough to people on social welfare, while 77 per cent of people blame an individual’s poverty on their refusal to help themselves. According to Kirby (2002a:159) ‘Values such as individualism, materialism, intolerance of dissent, lack of concern for the environment and a failure to value caring are identified as characterizing life under the Celtic Tiger’.

The choice and autonomy which is assumed in discourses of individualism (Becker, 1991), raises conflicts for feminists between the drive to overcome the historical
subjugation that has deprived women of autonomy and choice in public life on the one hand, and the conviction, on the other, that the institutions of the workplace and society offer predominantly impoverished and ultimately degrading opportunities for choice by women trapped in patriarchy (Hadfield, 1995). McKinnon (2005) claims women today are the bearers of a new self, a neo-liberal subjectivity, one based on individualism and self-invention from the perspective of individualization theory, which has led to the popular feminism of ‘having it all’. A consequence of individualism in contemporary Ireland is that women are charged with active steering of their own lives, however, women are also charged with devoting their lives to family and community. The result of combining motherhood with paid work, while retaining responsibility for home and family has negative consequences for women’s self-esteem and wellbeing, and as Oakley (2002:121) argues, there is a risk that these will become progressively more pronounced as society goes further in the direction of greedy individualism.

Social Inequality
Social change happens on a number of levels, and the economic boom of the 1990s and 2000s occurred in tandem with many social changes, some of which are complex and contradictory. However, a modernization theme can be detected underlying the rapid social and economic change as categories that had been stable for decades such as religion, nation and class lost some of their significance. Ireland experienced more rapid and profound change than elsewhere, partly due to the unusual shift from a pre-industrial to post-industrial economy with a ‘leapfrogging’ of the industrial stage of modernity into late or post modernity (Peillon and Slater, 1998; Corcoran and Peillon, 2002). This change has been described as so dramatic; it resulted in Ireland’s ‘re-invention’ (O’Donnell, 2000; Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 2002).

Employment growth occurred in tandem with increased individual prosperity. This prosperity led to the development of a consumer culture, where people are seen as producers and consumers (Inglis, 2008). According to Inglis (2008) the primary way Ireland became rich was by allowing the market and transnational companies free rein. With less interference from trade unions, Irish people learned to work harder, produce more and earn more. With less interference from the state Irish people have been able to spend more on what they like. Productivity of the Irish workforce, measured by GDP in
Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) per person employed, was 40 per cent higher than the EU 27 average in 2007 (CSO, 2009b). This is the way of the world capitalist system, there is much greater freedom and wealth, but less security, much less trust, and generally, much more risk (Beck, 1992; Inglis, 2008).

In the ten year period between 1997 and 2007, Ireland had 12 per cent per annum growth in per capita wealth and Irish people’s net wealth had grown by 350 per cent since 1997 (CSO, 2008b). In 2007, Ireland ranked second wealthiest behind Japan of eight OECD nations (Sunday Tribune, 2007). In 2007, the premium car market and domestic and overseas property markets peaked. The average value of a new housing loan in Ireland rose from £62,000 in 1997 to €229,200 in 2006, an increase of 269 per cent while mortgage interest rates declined over this period from 7 to 4 per cent encouraging property purchases. Consequently, the number of loans taken out for housing increased by 92 per cent, from 57,901 in 1997 to 111,253 in 2007 (CSO, 2008b).

However, this prosperity was largely fuelled by cheap credit and an inflated property market. When global recession occurred in 2008, the extent of Ireland’s indebtedness became apparent. There was €3 billion indebtedness on 2 million credit cards owned by Irish people in December 2008 (CSO, 2009b). The devaluing of the property market led to a banking crisis as banks were overextended by property loans and the Irish government underwrote the banking system in order to avoid its collapse in 2008, further evidence of the state using its resources to protect the interests of private capital.

The recent recession notwithstanding, orthodox accounts of social and cultural change provide a generalized correlation between economic success and a climate of national self confidence and creativity. McSharry and White (2000:12) describe the Celtic Tiger as ‘a remarkable economic transformation’ and a ‘virtuous circle’. They credit the government’s liberal economic policies and international economic integration, in particular the globalization facilitated by foreign direct investment in Ireland. At an earlier state in its development, Laffan and O’Donnell (1998) see the dramatic economic,

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6The premium car market includes top-of-the-range vehicles like Lexus, Mercedes, BMW and Range Rovers. In 2006, David McWilliams referred to the phenomenal increase in the interest in and purchase of owner-occupier and investment properties, both at home and abroad as ‘property porn’ (McWilliams, 2006).
social and cultural change as marking a break with the past and the coming of age of an enlightened, tolerant and liberal Ireland, and claim that Ireland’s modernization had benefited the nation and done away with the lack of self-confidence that had characterized it in the past. Irish culture in early 21st century has embraced neo-liberalism and prioritizes individualism, entrepreneurship, mobility, flexibility, innovation and competitiveness both as personal attributes, and dominant social values (McCarthy, 2006: 75) This is the hegemonic reading of modern Irish society, which uncritically associates prosperity with social success. The pervading notion is that ‘modern’ Ireland has shed the baggage of a turbulent history dominated by religion, land and nationalism, and has now reached the El Dorado of prosperity and liberalism (Boss and Maher, 2003).

However, Ireland’s adoption of neo-liberal policies, combined with the rise of individualism has resulted in Ireland being among the developed world’s most unequal societies (TASC, 2009). Ireland is first in the EU-15 in terms of income inequality (TASC, 2009:2), with 1 per cent of the population enjoying 20 per cent of the nation’s wealth (Bank of Ireland, 2007). Critical accounts of Irish society argue that economic success has benefited a small elite while leaving the majority relatively worse off. Allen (2000:20) argues that although the Irish economy in the 1990s was a ‘capitalist success story’, by other criteria such as equality and social justice, it was an ‘abysmal failure’. CORI (2004a) claims that side by side with the new Ireland of the Celtic Tiger is another Ireland characterized by a widening gap between rich and poor. Turner and Haynes (2006) note that while absolute government expenditure on welfare, health and education has increased, as a proportion of GDP it has declined which resulted in a decline in absolute poverty but with an increase in absolute inequality. Inglis (2008) claims there are still major gaps between the rich and the poor, particularly between a new cosmopolitan elite that is globally oriented and a local underclass that is dependant on welfare. In 2007, 7 per cent of children were in consistent poverty, with 20 per cent of children at risk of poverty (EU, 2007). CORI (2005) argues that the increased prosperity of only some sections of society has led to greater inequality. There are waiting lists for medical care and public housing, Ireland has a two-tier education system as well as the highest level of adult illiteracy among all European Union countries. ‘There is little evidence of the Irish economic “miracle” in many of the deprived sectors of the Irish
economy’ (Healy and Reynolds, 2005:115). Kirby (2002a; 2002b; 2006), Healy and Reynolds (2005), Jacobsen and Kirby (2006), and O’Donoghue and McDonough (2006) are critical of the state’s role in the distributional failures of the Irish neo-liberal capitalist model. At the height of the economic boom in 2006, 7 per cent of persons in Ireland were in consistent poverty and 23 per cent of unemployed persons were in consistent poverty (CSO, 2010a). Cantillon et al. (2001:304) argue the state has ‘consistently prioritized the needs of the economy over social objectives’, while, Kirby (2002a:5) claims the state has favoured market forces to the detriment of social well being arguing that ‘economic success correlates with social failure’. Murray (1998:5) bemoans the cultural change that accompanied the economic boom and claims Irish society has embraced the modern soul of Europe in which ‘only that which is profitable is good, what is legal is moral, what is bigger is better’.

Government employment policy is straightforward; its aim is to increase overall participation in the labour market. However, this is not unproblematic. Increased participation is premised on the understanding that increased employment is desirable, that it reduces poverty, provides economic and social citizenship and is a public good. The increase in women’s employment has been stimulated by an increase in the services sector, with flexible forms of employment that are low paid and allow organizations to access skills without the costs of providing secure employment. This type of employment is not necessarily going to benefit the economy and, as Wickham (2004:36) warns, ‘there is no inherent link between employment level and reduction of poverty’. The Council for Religious in Ireland (2004b), The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (2003) and The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2005) argue that Ireland has a significant number of working poor. The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA, 2008) reported that 19 per cent of the population in Ireland live ‘at risk of poverty’, 46 per cent of this group are the working poor, therefore 9 per cent of the population are working poor7. In 2008, 6 per cent of employed women were at risk of poverty (CSO, 2009b) and the OECD (2009) reported that in Ireland, 23 per cent of women have incomes that put them at risk of poverty8.

7 \((18.5/100)*45.7\) = 8.45 per cent (Rock, 2008 for the Combat Poverty Agency).

8 In national data, compiled by the Central Statistics Office, the at-risk-of-poverty rate shows the percentage of persons in the total population having an equivalised disposable income that is below the
Women tend to have more precarious forms of employment, providing flexible forms of employment as the market dictates. Those in precarious forms of employment, outside regular tax and social security networks have been called ‘the precariat’ (TASC, 2009:2), which is dominated by women, who tend to have little or no job security, access to sick pay or pension entitlements and receive lower rates of pay than the regular workforce. Many of these women are employed in the service sector and private households as reproductive or caring workers.

Increasing the labour force participation of mothers concerned the state during the economic boom. However, as NWCI (2009b) observes, ‘women entered this recession on an unequal economic footing, and are in a less advantageous position to weather the crisis’. It is now apparent that women are being adversely affected by the recession, since 2009 the rate of female unemployment has increased by 15 per cent while male unemployment has increased by 9 per cent (CSO, 2010c:2).

**Changing Gender Roles**

The transformation that has occurred in Irish society has been to a large extent stimulated by the fundamental changes that have occurred in women’s lives. Inglis (2003:140) noted that it was Irish women particularly who were struggling: ‘to find a new language and way of thinking, writing and talking about themselves’. For Inglis, self development and women’s education were ‘part of a feminist struggle to reconstitute the way Irish women knew and understood their world’ and hence were crucially important in the process of individualization in Ireland.

Feminism is an intellectual, philosophical and political movement which demonstrates the many ways the world is gendered and the implications for women’s lives. Liberal feminism advocates equality for women in the public and private spheres; campaigns for women's rights and interests and aims to achieve equal rights and legal

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national ‘at-risk-of-poverty threshold’ which is set at 60 per cent of the national median equivalised disposable income.

The OECD at-risk-of-poverty rate is calculated by establishing the equivalised disposable income for each person, calculated as the household total net income divided by the equivalised household size. The OECD scale assigns a weight of 1.0 to the first adult, 0.5 to the other persons aged over 14 or over who are living in the household and 0.3 to each child aged less than 14. The purpose of the equivalence scale is to account for the size and composition of different income units and thus allows a more accurate comparison between households.
protection for women. Liberal feminists suggest women should be economically independent, exercise their right to work outside the home and engage in public life. The focus of much liberal feminist thought and action has been on women’s access to the public sphere as a means of individual and collective liberation.

Feminist activism and scholarship has significantly positively affected women’s lives. Drawing on individualist principles, liberal feminists have made some progress in advancing the ‘equality agenda’ in relation to women’s participation in public life and in the workforce, including the introduction of a raft of equal opportunities legislation (Appendix A) and in the last fifty years, women’s lives have changed dramatically as a result of feminist activism and scholarship. In the 1960s a woman could expect to retire from work on marriage and devote herself thereafter to caring for her husband and the four or more children which would follow. In 2009, a woman can expect to continue in employment beyond marriage, to postpone or delay having children until she is 30, to cohabit before marriage, if indeed she marries at all and she is likely to have one or two children (CSO, 2010a).

In Ireland today the legacy of radical feminists is evident in relation to women’s reproductive rights including the legalisation of contraception and the establishment of state-sponsored family planning clinics and non-directive crisis pregnancy services. Nevertheless abortion is still illegal in Ireland and women’s right to abortion information and to travel was hard won after five bitter referenda\(^9\) and the shameful treatment by the State of two pregnant teenagers\(^10\).

However, the leverage offered by the EU was also significant in reducing the State’s opposition to women’s equality. The EU forced Ireland to introduce equal pay

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\(^9\): 8\(^{th}\) Amendment 1983:  *The right to life of the unborn.* (Government of Ireland, 1983); 12\(^{th}\) Amendment 1992:  *The right to life.* (Government of Ireland, 1992a); 13\(^{th}\) Amendment 1992:  *The right to travel.* (Government of Ireland, 1992b); 14\(^{th}\) Amendment 1992:  *The right to Information.* (Government of Ireland, 1992c); 25\(^{th}\) Amendment 2002:  *Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy.* (Government of Ireland, 2002)

\(^10\) The X Case: In 1992, a 14 year old girl, pregnant as a result of rape was taken to England by her parents to procure an abortion. The Attorney General obtained an injunction to prevent the girl from travelling, which was overturned on appeal, on the grounds that the girl was suicidal and the pregnancy life threatening. The C Case: In 1997, a 13 year old girl, pregnant as a result of rape received approval in the district court (through the Health Board) to travel to England for an abortion. The girl’s parents appealed the decision to the High Court to prevent her procuring the abortion, but the decision was upheld on the grounds that the girl was suicidal and the pregnancy life threatening.
(Government of Ireland, 1974a) and since then several EU led measures have been introduced to facilitate women’s participation in employment including maternity, adoptive, parental, carers and force majeure leave as well as outlawing discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status and family responsibilities. These measures aimed to provide women with equal legal rights to those of men in the employment arena.

In 1973, the ban on married women working in the civil service, local authorities and health boards was removed as a pre-condition to Ireland’s membership of the EEC (Government of Ireland, 1973). In 1974, the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act established the right of men and women to equal pay if they are employed in like work by the same or an associated employer (Government of Ireland, 1974a). The provision of allowances for deserted wives, unmarried mothers and prisoners’ wives was implemented in the Social Welfare Act 1974 (Government of Ireland, 1974b). Other progress included the elimination of discrimination against single women in relation to social welfare payments, the establishment of the State’s duty to provide free legal aid in family law cases, and the removal of the differential treatment of ‘illegitimate children’ in Irish law and protection for the rights of children born outside marriage. These were significant developments for women with children living in non-marital circumstances in Irish social policy (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005). Women represented 89 per cent of lone parents with children aged under 20 in 1999 compared with 91 per cent in 2009 (CSO, 2010a). The number of women living as lone parents increased by 60 per cent from 80,900 to 129,000 over the period 1999 – 2009, while the number of men living as lone parents increased by 19 per cent from 10,400 to 12,400 over the same period. However, the age of the youngest child was under 5 for 38 per cent of women living as lone parents whereas for 38 per cent of men, the age of the youngest child was between 15 and 19 years of age. Almost 98 per cent of the 87,840 persons in receipt of one-parent family payments in 2008 were women (CSO, 2010a). The increase in women living in non-marital circumstances demonstrates a liberalizing of attitudes towards marriage, marital breakdown and single parenthood.

Feminist activism and scholarship emanated from a change in the order of discourse. Feminist discourses replaced traditional, conservative Catholic discourse,
particularly in relation to gender roles. However, the Irish State has been reluctant to facilitate role change for women.

A Constitution which recognises ‘that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved’… and equates the right to life of the mother with the right to life of the unborn child sets defined limits on the role of women in that society (Robinson, 1993:100).

Gender equality in Ireland started from a lower base than other countries, because of the powerful political influence of the Catholic Church on social policy and Irish feminist campaigns met with considerable opposition and strategic feminist campaigns to compel the state to honour the conditions of EEC membership were essential to ensure key legislative and political changes were introduced. In addition to compelling the state to improve the legal situation of women, the women’s movement also encouraged Irish women to embrace these new structural improvements in women’s lives by reducing their childbearing by using contraception, to participate in the professions in greater numbers and to assert their economic independence in marriage (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005: 90).

Some of the successes of Irish feminism to date have had a general, but at the same time, uneven impact on all women across class cleavages. Concrete gains since the 1970s reflect general societal acceptance of the more moderate demands of liberal feminism, mainly in the areas of paid employment and property rights. Furthermore, it is argued that the form taken by equality legislation may have benefited middle-class women far more than their working-class sisters (Mayo and Weir, 1993). From a gender equality perspective, the dramatic influx of women into the labour market has had less of an impact on the quality of women’s employment than might have been anticipated. In 1997, women’s hourly earnings were 81 per cent of men’s gross hourly earnings in Ireland compared to 84 per cent in the EU 27 as a whole. By 2006 women’s earnings in Ireland had increased to 91 per cent of men’s, however persons working 15 hours or less are excluded from this indicator and these persons are more likely to be female and on lower incomes (CSO, 2008a). When these figures are adjusted to take account of the average hours per week spent in paid employment by men and women in 2007, women’s average hourly income was around 87 per cent of men’s (CSO, 2010a). The difference
between male and female incomes for persons aged 15-64 increased with age. The average income of women aged 15-24 was 83 per cent of that of men in the same age group in 2007, while for the 55-64 age group women’s average income was 55 per cent of men’s (CSO, 2010a).

Women are not well represented in decision making in Ireland. In 2009, only 14 per cent of TDs in Dáil Éireann were women, while they accounted for 34 per cent of members of State Boards, 17 per cent of members of local authorities and just 12 per cent of members of regional authorities. The average representation in national parliaments for EU 27 countries was nearly 24 per cent in 2009, which places Ireland at 23rd in terms of women’s participation in decision making structures (CSO, 2010a). In 2008, 65 per cent of Irish civil servants in general service were women; 77 per cent of clerical officers were female and 79 per cent of staff officers were female. In contrast, just over 16 per cent of those at Secretary General level were female while just under 13 per cent of Deputy and Assistant Secretaries were women (CSO, 2010a).

Women experience occupational segregation. In 2009, 21 per cent of women were employed in clerical and secretarial occupations, compared with only 6 per cent of men. Craft and related occupations were the least gender-balanced with men representing 96 per cent of workers in this category (CSO, 2010a). Professional occupations were the most gender-balanced with women representing 50 per cent of persons employed (CSO, 2010a). The education and health sectors employed the highest proportion of women. In the health sector, 80 per cent of employees are women. In primary education, 84 per cent are women and in second-level education 62 per cent are women but women are not well represented at senior level positions: only 33 per cent of medical and dental consultants and only 52 per cent of primary school managers and 39 per cent of second level school managers are women (CSO, 2010a). However, women have higher education levels, with 51 per cent of women aged 25-34 having a third-level qualification compared with 39 per cent of men in this age group (CSO, 2010a).

Despite these inequalities and although gender equality has not nearly been fully realized, the number of female professionals in sectors such as medicine, teaching, law, the universities and politics has evidently increased since the 1980s (O’Connor, 1999). Nevertheless, women continue to have lower average pay levels than men, have less
access to employer training than men and are strongly clustered in traditionally female occupational niches (O’Connor, 2000). Bacik (2004) claims many of the legal changes brought about have not been really effective. The forms of inequality may have changed, and some individual women may have achieved positions of power, but the substantive inequalities remain. Legislation alone is insufficient to tackle the many inequalities that persist. Traditional gender roles remain strong and underpin the gendered division of labour. Irish women currently do it all, and still do not have the same access to power, money and prestige as their male counterparts (O’Sullivan, 2007:281). ‘Real equality for women remains an aspiration; the feminist struggle is far from over’ (Bacik, 2004:97). Although access to the public sphere has indeed increased for many women, Gray (2004) argues it has brought with it new practices of gender/sexual regulation and subordination often in and through discourses of women’s liberation.

There has, however, been a liberalizing of attitudes towards motherhood, ‘working mothers’ and gender roles in the last three decades as evidenced in data from the International Social Survey Programme.

Table 2. Attitudes to Statements regarding Gender Roles, 1988 – 2002 (ISSP, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>per cent agreeing 1988</th>
<th>per cent agreeing 1994</th>
<th>per cent agreeing 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People who want children ought to get married</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man’s job is to earn money: a woman’s job is to look after home and family</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners should contribute to household income</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women should stay at home when a child is under school age</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who have never had children lead empty lives</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attitudes to gender roles in Ireland have changed very significantly. The decline in support for the first two statements indicates a liberalizing of attitudes in relation to
gender roles and to marriage. Just 15 per cent agreed with the statement that childless people lead empty lives, which might suggest the influence of discourses of individualism on people’s attitudes towards children and family life, however, Irish attitudes towards parenting continue to be generally positive, as 81 per cent agreed in 2002 that watching children grow up was life’s greatest joy. The support for the statement regarding women staying home with pre-school children suggests the power of dominant motherhood discourses, and may also indicate an awareness of the difficulty in reality of combining paid employment with childrearing, especially for women. This is further suggested by the small drop in support for both partners contributing to household income and by the drop in support for the idea that one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together; in 1994, 47 per cent agreed with this position, but agreement dropped slightly to 44 per cent in 2002.

Inglis (2008:19) claims the emergence of the Celtic Tiger economy created major changes in Irish social and cultural life and a large new middle class has emerged whose standard of living has increased dramatically. In Ireland, this large new middle class embraced the rise of consumer culture which led to the triumph of the idea that couples ‘need’ two incomes to service their mortgage and other consumption (O'Sullivan, 2007). In this analysis, the dual income family is economically rational and the economic rationality of the dual income family obscures the gender inequalities associated with it (Ryan, 2003). McGinnity, Russell and Smyth (2005) acknowledge the past 15 years have seen significant changes in the labour market behaviour of women and men in Ireland, changes which have been particularly dramatic for women, with rapidly growing labour force participation and employment rates. Such changes have raised living standards and increased financial independence for many women. They have also transformed the way in which employment is distributed across households. Dual-earner arrangements are now the predominant model for working–age couples, even those with dependant children. However, as O’Connor (2006) argues, the social and cultural implications of changing female labour force participation have not yet been addressed by Irish society.

Feminist and individualist discourses have contributed to women’s changing role in Irish society, however, there is resistance to women’s changing role and this is evident in an anti-feminist backlash. In a society that has experienced such recent and radical
change in both family life and in the institutional framework governing women’s lives, such resistance is not surprising. Neither is it surprising that the now established feminist challenge to traditional male authority and power in family life is perceived as a threat by some sections of society. A key myth promoted by organized advocates of traditional values is that ‘feminists’ in Ireland prioritized the promotion of women in the workforce to the complete neglect of women’s rights in the home. This myth has been effective and in consequence women in the workforce are pitted against women working in the home, for which both groups blame feminism. Furthermore many women believe their participation in paid work, without relinquishing their responsibilities in the home, has created a double bind for which feminism is also responsible (O’Hagan, 2010).

In fact, Irish feminists right across the radical and liberal ideological spectrum of the women’s movement united on the question of women’s employment rights (Maher, 1971; Kennedy, 1979; Levine, 1982; McCafferty, 1985; Barry, 1986; Fennell and Arnold, 1987; Daly, 1989; 2001; Mahon, 1991; 1998a; 1998b, Drew, 1992) and challenged traditional stereotypes regarding the male breadwinning father / homemaking mother. Those on the left and in the trade unions, in particular, aimed to develop the conditions in which a majority of women in Ireland could at least choose to combine motherhood and employment, regardless of their social class and marital status (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005:90).

Legal developments regarding child custody and single parenting have also created controversy in public debate, not least from some organized groups of single and separated fathers. The incidence of marital breakdown and single parenthood has increased substantially in recent decades. Feminists have become the enemy of some men’s rights campaigners, some of whom believe it is feminism that caused their partners to have both the right and inclination to separate from them. In this hypothesis, it is sometimes also assumed that the law has been infiltrated by feminists who are trying to separate men from their children (Connolly and O’Toole, 2005; O’Hagan, 2007). The fact that more women are generally granted custody of their children than men in the family law courts is considered symptomatic of this conspiracy, but in fact it points to the persistent gendered assumption that women are responsible for all caring work.
As DiQuinzio (1999) notes, it is very difficult to challenge motherhood on individualist terms, and it is on the grounds of their maternity that women experience most resistance to their changing role. Kaplan (1992) argues the backlash against women’s changing role is evident in a plethora of contradictory discourses of motherhood which all have anxiety in common because childbirth and childcare are no longer viewed as automatically natural parts of the woman’s lifecycle. Gray (2004:59) notes in popular culture in the 1990s, a younger, single, more sexualized, maternal body was invoked as embodying Irish motherhood. These representations of motherhood reflected conservative, traditional and anti-feminist anxieties of who is/is not fit to be a mother (Skeggs, 1997), as a result of women’s changing lifestyle and in particular women’s ability to choose or reject motherhood.

The new focus on the child, together with a backlash against women’s participation in spheres that have traditionally been regarded as male preserves, has led to a change in the order of motherhood discourses, with the emergence of ‘pro-family’ and ‘intensive mothering’ discourses which contribute to the pressures ‘working mothers’ experience (Hays, 1996; O’Reilly, 2004; Gattrell, 2005; Miller, 2005). Contemporary feminist writers (Hays, 1996; Maushart, 1997; DiQuinzio, 1999; Williams, 2000; Crittenden, 2001; Hattery, 2001; Douglas and Michaels, 2004; O’Reilly, 2004; Warner, 2006; Bennetts, 2007) have taken issue with pro-family and intensive mothering discourses, claiming they represent a backlash against feminism’s progress. These discourses blame feminism and ‘working mothers’ for all manner of social ills from childhood diabetes to underage sex and juvenile crime in an attempt to appeal to women to reduce their participation in public life and return them to private roles in the patriarchal, nuclear family, for the sake of their children.

There has also been little response in the world of paid work to the dual roles that most women now occupy of carer-earner. Irish women have had to adapt to the world of paid work, a world which developed based on patriarchal assumptions that care needs were taken care of elsewhere, by women, in the unpaid private world of families, households and communities. Although the world of paid employment has taken on women workers in huge numbers, it has hardly changed its shape or organization (Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997; Cockburn, 2002) and hegemonic power relations
persist in traditionally ‘masculine’ organization cultures (Garavan, 1994; Barker and Monks, 1994; O’Connor, 1998; 2000; 2001). The world of work in Ireland ‘continues to make little to no allowance for care needs and care provision’ (Barry, 2008:2). The Irish situation, therefore, can be characterized as a ‘stalled revolution’ Hochschild (1989:11), which effectively means that despite liberal beliefs about equality, women continue to perform the majority of ‘family work’.

Whether in boom or bust situations, the government has taken a laissez faire policy approach to infrastructure to support mothers’ employment, arguing the market will self-regulate. A neo-liberal fixation on low state intervention partially explains those policy choices. However, policy inaction is not just about ideology or cost avoidance. Policy paralysis is also due to politicians’ fear of introducing reforms in the absence of policy consensus. It has been politically difficult in Ireland to mediate between political coalitions advocating conflicting policy options. Policy is limited by the strong veto power of employers who resist parental leave policies (Fine Davis, 2002) as well as a deeply rooted ideological ambivalence about mothers’ labour market participation in a conservative, patriarchal, political culture (McLaughlin, 2001; Mahon, 2004; O’Connor, 2008b). Whether in paid work or not, women still specialize in family work while men still specialize in market work. Market work continues to be framed around the neo-liberal capitalist assumption that ideal workers are unencumbered by care responsibilities (Bordo, 1993; Williams, 2000). Women’s increased participation in paid work has not guaranteed pay parity with men, and motherhood negatively impacts women’s employment while fatherhood has little effect on men’s. O’Sullivan (2007) claims the economy’s need for the extra capacity offered by women workers, including mothers, is the macro-level driver behind recent changes rather than any restructuring of gender roles. ‘It remains a workforce designed for a worker with no family responsibilities and good behind-the-scenes support (a male worker in short)’ (2007:271).

According to Gray (2004:51), women became the focus of struggles between neo-traditional and neo-liberal discourses of citizenship but in ways that identify ‘the problem’ as the choices that individual women make. The resultant difficulties and tensions are defined as individual problems at both the micro and macro level. Despite feminist campaigns and legislative changes, many difficulties remain for Irish women in
the workforce, including low pay, unequal pay, horizontal segregation, vertical segregation and discrimination on the grounds of gender. In Ireland, women are limited in their ability to be self-sufficient rational actors because women are charged with most caring work.

**Childcare**

For the Irish feminist movement, the achievement of equal opportunities has long been linked to improvement in childcare provision (McKenna, 1988). However, what has become apparent with the economic boom of the 1990s and 2000s is that the issue of childcare has not actually prevented women from entering the workplace in great numbers. Reflecting neo-liberalism and individualization in its policy position, the Irish government is not directly involved in childcare provision. The Government’s approach has been to stimulate the provision of childcare places, through the provision of grants for the childcare sector. This is being done through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-2006 and the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010. These places are provided either through community based/not for profit childcare groups or by private providers (Langford, 2007). These programmes provide capital grants to crèche providers, ensuring that less advantaged parents have increased access to childcare places in community providers, while high costs, inaccessibility and lack of provision mean middle-class families struggle to source and retain suitable childcare. Collins and Wickham (2001) and Mahon (2004) suggest that the government’s position encourages the increasing marketization of childcare on the American model, whereby parents with good financial resources will buy childcare on the formal market, and selected ‘excluded’ communities will be the recipients of government largesse for subsidized childcare. They further suggest that this is what the more farsighted members of government actually want, influenced by industry interests, because this maintains childcare as a private issue, reduces the welfare spend and facilitates capital accumulation for private sector providers.

The Government’s neo-liberal approach to childcare reflects an ideological contradiction. On one hand the government is reluctant to upset the Catholic conservative lobby who wish to protect the patriarchal nuclear family, with mothers not being forced to work outside the home, and on the other hand the government is also reluctant to upset
the employer’s lobby who are encouraging women’s employment. The Government has attempted to achieve a neutral position by providing Child Benefit\textsuperscript{11} and the Early Childcare Supplement\textsuperscript{12} to all children.

Child benefit is attractive to Irish policy makers because it benefits all children and is neutral as regards the employment status of the mother (which is a very sensitive matter in Ireland) (Daly and Clavero, 2002:54).

In Budget 2006, the government introduced an Early Childcare Supplement, which was a grant of €1,000 per year for each child up to and including age five. This grant was available to all children in the state regardless of the employment status of the mother, but it was designed to assist with childcare costs for employed mothers. Also in Budget 2006, a new Child-minding Relief was introduced (Government of Ireland, 2006), whereby a Child-minder who minds up to three children in their (her) own home can earn €10,000 tax free, provided their total income from childminding does not exceed €15,000 in a year. This indicates the low value placed on care and on those who do the caring.

However, the Early Childcare Supplement was removed in a supplementary budget in 2009 which suggests that in times of rising unemployment, there is no further need to facilitate women’s or mothers’ employment and women’s work is less important than the male breadwinner. Furthermore, rather than means-testing child benefit, which might ensure those who most need it receive it, the government introduced a straightforward cut to the rate in 2010 which ensured it remained neutral regarding the employment status, if not the economic status, of the mother. The National Women’s Council lobbied against implementing this change, and other proposed changes arising from the McCarthy (2009) Report, arguing that the proposed changes were gendered (NWCI, 2009c).

In an EU study of child care in 2004, Ireland ranked lowest in terms of child care supports and maternity leave (EC, 2004). Ireland was ranked the worst of the original 15 member states in terms of public child care provision and Denmark was the best (EC,

\textsuperscript{11} Child Benefit has been increased in successive budgets and in Budget 2007, it was increased to €160 per month for the first two children; and to €190 per month for the third and subsequent children. However, in a supplementary budget in 2009, the Government announced that from from 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2010 Child Benefit would be reduced to €150 per month for the first two children and €187 per month for the third and subsequent children and child benefit would cease for all children on their 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday.

\textsuperscript{12} The Early Childcare Supplement of €1,000 per annum was introduced for all children up to and including age 5 and became effective in April 2006 and was withdrawn on 01 January 2010.
The lack of public child care support services has a direct bearing on women’s employment rates. As Lynch and Lyons (2008:173) argue, the reason at least one member of a household with children is forced to leave employment is because child care is privatized and costly. Furthermore it tends to be women who leave employment given the strong moral imperative on women to be primary carers (O’Brien, 2007). Despite extensive debate and an array of promises from within the political system, public provision and support for childcare services is abysmal (Barry, 2008:2).

The lack of state support and childcare provision in Ireland (Murphy-Lawless, 2000; Kennedy, 2001; Tovey and Share, 2003) has created a situation whereby childcare has been positioned as a private issue for families to resolve themselves. This is what the OECD (1990) has termed a ‘maximum private responsibility’ model of childcare, also found in the UK and US, ‘in which the joint problems of childcare, family life and labour force participation are entirely private concerns which are left to the individual to solve’ (Coveney, Murphy-Lawless and Sheridan, 1998:11). In practice, ‘the individual referred to here is usually the mother’ (O’Sullivan, 2007:279).

In the 1990s, the European Union funded a number of pilot schemes in Ireland to maximize women’s potential to enter employment, deriving from the EU’s neo-liberal philosophy. The New Opportunities for Women and the Pilot Childcare Initiative for socially and economically disadvantaged communities included childcare as a component within schemes to retrain women. There was pressure from the National Women's Council of Ireland to take these initiatives forward, leading to the formation of the Expert Working Group on childcare in 1998. Murphy-Lawless (2000) claims many social critics, feminist theorists and activist groups argued that the outcome to the expert group’s deliberations should be a ‘maximum public responsibility’ model. To this end the expert group proposed capital grants for providers; tax relief for working parents; extra allowances to pay for child care for women living below the poverty line to help them into employment; tax allowances for childminders; support for providers and childcare personnel; and a national and local coordination network to develop childcare at all levels.

However, the Government announced a supplementary budget in December, 1998, before the report of the EWG was available, in which the state only offered capital
tax allowances to businesses who invested in workplace child care facilities. The government referred the EWG report (PPF, 2000) to an interdepartmental committee for further consideration and the recommendations have not yet, in 2010, been implemented. The National Women’s Council charged that the government had given in to pressure from backbenchers to reassert traditional values about women’s place in Irish society, namely the importance of women taking care of their own children in the home (Murphy-Lawless, 2000). As Lynch and Lyons (2008) argue, in the present social construction of what is masculine and feminine in Ireland, women do not choose, they have a moral obligation to care that is constructed and reinforced by church, education, media and family institutions.

The Barcelona Council agreed a target of childcare provision for at least 90 per cent of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school-going age (six years of age in Ireland) by 2010 and a target of childcare for at least 33 per cent of children under 3 years of age by 2010. ‘Progress towards these targets cannot be measured at present due to lack of Irish data’ (CSO, 2010a:21). However, data from the Quarterly National Household Survey (CSO, 2009a) gives an indication of the effect that having young children in the family has on female employment rates.

Therefore, what has become apparent is that the issue of childcare has not actually prevented women from entering the workplace in great numbers. In Irish society, the mother retains primary responsibility for children and their needs, irrespective of whether or not she is working outside the home. As is evident from women’s participation rates, women’s and mothers’ employment has dramatically increased, yet state infrastructure, such as roads, transport, housing and child care facilities, have not kept pace with such increased women’s and mother’s employment. Almost uniquely in Europe, Ireland has virtually no state provision of pre-school childcare and no tax credits for childcare expenses. The government is not directly involved in childcare provision, and is a facilitator of community and private childcare through provision of indirect financial support (Daly and Clavero, 2002). Consequently childcare is uncoordinated, variable in quality and the highest cost as a proportion of average earnings in the EU (PPF, 2000;

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13 See figures on Page 7.
The Government offers tax relief, tax allowances and capital grants to encourage the private sector to increase childcare provision, but the demand side has been problematic for the Irish Government, which attempts to provide for those who wish to purchase childcare while not undermining the privileged position of the nuclear family with its male breadwinner.

While Kirby (2002a; 2002b; 2006) claims Ireland is a competition state, Murphy (2006:86) argues that the competition state is gendered and prioritizes economic competitiveness over social cohesion and welfare. Women’s participation in paid employment in Ireland has occurred without the state providing the necessary child and eldercare infrastructure to really support women with children who engage in paid work outside the home. Employment policy is aimed towards increasing participation rates for all women, yet health/welfare policy is predicated on there being one unpaid, almost universally female, adult in the home who undertakes all caring work (NWCI, 2003; Cullen, Delaney and Duff, 2004).

The Irish Government’s policy on childcare draws on individualization theory to maintain childcare as women’s private problem. The state’s position reflects a clear ideological contradiction, on the one hand its strategies have consistently reinforced the role of women as primary carers by not giving sufficient support for affordable childcare outside the home and Irish social security remains based on a strong male-breadwinner regime (Lewis, 1992) with structural barriers to women registering as unemployed or accessing labour market supports. Participation in paid employment and education are based on a predominately ‘adult worker model’ where social exclusion is defined as exclusion from the labour market. Work is clearly implied to mean waged work and the issue of unpaid work and its interrelationship with the waged economy is excluded from social policy. On the other hand, the state has committed to increasing women’s participation in the labour market. The Government regards increased employment as a particular public good. Increasing the number of employees generates tax revenue and reduces the welfare spend, and the wealth generated by the economic boom enabled the government to fund measures to encourage further employment.

This labour market approach is reinforced by the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion assertion that ‘every person of working age should have an opportunity to
balance work and family commitments consistent with business needs’ (Government of Ireland, 2007:40). This way of defining workers is evidence of the state’s neo-liberal agenda, business needs come first, and is also evidence of the persistent gendered order of caring. It is much more difficult for those with caring responsibilities to balance work and family commitments. ‘Working mothers’ are not supported, neither are those who do the childminding for others. Childminders who mind up to three children in their own home can earn up to €15,000\textsuperscript{14} tax free, providing their total annual income for three children does not exceed €15,000. This reflects the low valuation placed on care, minding three children is worth €15,000 p.a., while the average industrial wage in 2008 was €32,000 (CSO, 2009b). It can be argued that the government’s introduction of this tax free allowance was a measure to draw childminders out of the black economy, rather than to support them because it is estimated that 37,900 private childminders care for 75,800 children in Ireland (OECD, 2002).

Ireland still has one of the worst records in Europe for the facilitation of working parents in terms of availability of childcare facilities and provision for parental leave. Devine, NicGhiolla Phádraig and Deegan (2004) report that Irish day-care arrangements are becoming increasingly formalized and childcare is overwhelmingly viewed as an entirely private pursuit to be undertaken or organized by mothers, while at the same time, a powerful work and consumption ethic pertains that can make motherhood and employment incompatible (Coakley, 2005; O’Hagan, 2005; Barry, 2008).

Increased women’s labour market participation impacts on the capacity of families to provide care and results in greater reliance on market-based provision of both child and elder care. Reliance on market-led responses to childcare means childcare subsidies, maternity leave and paid parental leave are underdeveloped relative to other countries (Government of Ireland, 2000b) while eldercare responses are limited to tax incentives to providers of private nursing homes. Failure to introduce child and eldercare supports is paradoxical in a competition state aiming to increase the labour-force participation of mothers.

\textsuperscript{14} The tax free income was increased from €10,000 to €15,000 in subsequent budgets, however the limit to overall earnings remains the same at €15,000.
In 2008, as part of its commitment to social partnership, the Government announced plans to launch a National Carers Strategy. A working group was established in January 2008 with submissions invited from interested parties to be received by 18th April 2008. Following an extensive consultation process and the preparation of a draft strategy, in March 2009, the government announced it would not be proceeding with a National Carers Strategy ‘due to the economic situation’ (Hanafin, 2009). Clearly when the State was encouraging women’s employment, a Carers Strategy was necessary, however following the impact of the banking crisis which precipitated the recession in 2008, the Carers Strategy was considered a luxury the State could not afford, and the issue of caring was removed from the public agenda in line with neo-liberal policy, which favours the market over social interests. However, the Carers Strategy was necessary for many women and men who combine caring with paid work. The largest number of women in receipt of caring-related social welfare payments in 2008 were in the 25-49 age group. Many of these attempt to combine caring with paid work and many of these carers are engaged in caring professions. Cullen, Delaney and Duff (2004) found that increasingly carers are combining caring and employment, or would like to.

Children must be cared for by others if mothers are to engage in paid work and in the vast majority of cases; arranging care is the gendered responsibility of mothers (Williams, 2000; Mahon, 1998b). Women are charged with making childcare arrangements, transporting children to schools, childminders and doctor’s appointments and arranging replacement care when either the childminder or the child is sick (Hattery, 2001; Jackson and Scott, 2002). Mahon (1991) found women incurred replacement costs for childcare which increased with the number of children. When taxation and childcare costs were subtracted from their earnings, many women found it was not economically rational for them to remain at work. However, women are not just exploited in relation to gendered obligations to care for their own children, and to engage and pay for childcare, the majority of paid care workers are also women, who frequently operate in the informal economy with little social protection, and are low paid.

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15 The state provides a carer’s allowance to those who are caring for someone who needs constant care. The allowance is means tested and the maximum allowance is €214.00 per week. Carer’s benefit is provided under the Carer’s Leave Act to people who leave employment for a limited period to provide full time care to an incapacitated relative.
The childcare debate (O’Connor and Murphy, 2008) reflects a lack of political and societal consensus about where mothers should be on the employability continuum. And, whether or not they engage in paid work, women are still regarded as responsible for the practical and emotional labour required to care for family members (NWCI, 2003; 2005; 2009a; Kiely, 2004). One result of this is that women are deferring childbirth to a later stage, are having fewer children and frequently turning to low paid immigrant workers to provide care services as a way to bypass the prohibitive cost of mainstream market services (Barry, 2008:2).

The significant increases in the labour-market participation of women happened without substantial social-security restructuring to enable such participation or to respond to emerging social-care needs (Murphy, 2006: 93). Thus considerable pressure has been put on individuals, families and communities in their attempts to reconcile paid work with family responsibilities although there is evidence that domestic labour and child care is still overwhelmingly being undertaken by women (McGinnity, Russell and Smyth, 2005).

‘Working Mothers’ in the Private Sphere
Change in women’s roles outside the family has clearly been significant, as the figures for labour force participation have shown. Within the family, however, there is not a corresponding change in gender behaviour. It has been argued that women, men and families still persist as communities of interdependence and need rather than simply as expressions of individual ‘choices’ giving rise to ‘elective relationships’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). However, these families exert pressure on mothers to meet the needs of other family members thereby significantly reducing the amount of choice available to women, because as Oakley (2002) argues

[f]amilies have, for a long time, meant different things to men and women. Men have the luxury of seeing them as havens, even when the tie of economic responsibility is broken; women know families as places of unpaid labour, caring and altruism – a moral code which is out of step with that of the wider society, and therefore largely undervalued by it (ibid:121).
In practice, despite popular belief to the contrary, actual gender roles within marriage have changed very little (Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Sayer, Cohen and Casper, 2004; Hilliard, 2007). Gelles (1995) pointed out that as a relationship progresses from courtship to cohabitation to marriage to parenting, gender roles in the home become increasingly traditional. Thompson and Walker (1995) and Riggs (1997) found being a ‘good wife’ was still synonymous with doing an ‘acceptable’ amount of housework. Hilliard (2007) reported that almost one third of women in Ireland felt that they ‘did much more than their fair share’ of housework, while 62 per cent felt they did more than their fair share of household labour. Coltrane (2000) found that women have slightly reduced the numbers of hours they spend in housework, while men have slightly increased their contribution. Sullivan (2000) and Delphy and Leonard (1992) also identify a trend towards greater participation of men in domestic work. However, Coltrane (2000) concluded that on average, women do three times as much housework as men. Women do more housework when they marry and become mothers, while men do less when they marry and become fathers, with ‘married men creating about as much demand for household labour as they perform’ (2000:1226). McGinnity and Russell (2008:4) found that women with children spend the equivalent of one month more per year on committed work than their male partners while ISSP Data (2002) indicates that while working parents rarely go to work too tired to function well because of household tasks, a significant majority came home from work ‘too tired to do chores’, with women more likely than men to report this tiredness (Hilliard, 2006:38).

Motherhood in Ireland has changed dramatically, in tandem with social, economic and cultural changes and currently various versions of intensive mothering discourses abound in contemporary Ireland, reflecting resistance to women’s changing role. There has been a significant change in the order of motherhood discourses, with traditional and new capitalist motherhood discourses circulating concurrently in contemporary Irish society. Traditional discourses position the Irish mother as a permanent feature in the home, living vicariously through her high-achieving children, and as Gray (2004) notes, she was the emblematic figure of communality and respectability, located at the heart of Irish ‘controlled modernity’. Discourses of traditional motherhood complement that of the family which is regarded as the basic unit of social organization, fulfilling the social
and economic needs of its members and society in a hierarchical structure of which the man is the head. McIntyre (1976) states that married couples with children are regarded as constituting the ‘proper, natural and complete family’, while Gaffney (1996) claims in Ireland the ‘benchmark family’ involves a relationship between a man and woman that is legal, permanent, sexually exclusive and reproductive. The woman is a full time mother and homemaker and the man is a life-long good provider and father. This regards the family as the primary social unit and positions women as being central and critical to its maintenance.

Even though household and living arrangements have changed dramatically in recent decades, selfless discourses of mothering persist and override material conditions (Garcia Coll, Surrey and Weingarten, 1998; O’Hagan, 2006). Hattery (2001) and Miller (2005) argue that traditional motherhood discourse no longer reflects dominant practice and the persistence of the discourse and its continuous promotion in the media is an attempt to encourage mothers to return home by making them feel guilty and unfit for employment while their children are young. Though the traditional nuclear family has loosened its hold on social life, it retains a vice-like grip on popular aspirations and most postmodern families retain the mother-caregiver, father-breadwinner structure even if the parents are no longer married, or never were, and whether or not women work outside the home (Williams, 2000:8). Ribbens (1994) argues that women continue to hold idealized images of what motherhood and childhood ‘should’ be like while, as Letherby (2002:285) notes, motherhood is valued rhetorically even though it has little material and social status. Scott (1999) argues the motherhood role has become institutionalized and that mothers are likely to be allocated the role of principal child-carer, by, for example school and health services whether or not they work, and might be heavily criticized for trying to combine motherhood with career. Similarly, Letherby (1999:366) argues that mothers, particularly those who work outside the home, often feel judged not to be doing their job well enough, and not meeting societal expectations of them.

Discourses of motherhood suggest that mothers are solely responsible for their children’s social, educational, physical, and psychological development and to mother successfully women need to invest significant time and effort in caring for their children. This is a major area where contemporary notions of gender are still rooted naturally...
(Conner, 1974; Walby, 1990; Letherby, 1999), because motherhood provides a degree of cultural capital to women for conforming to feminine and motherhood roles. Motherhood discourses are key mechanisms in the promotion of asymmetrical power relations between women and men and conceal the ‘relations of domination’ (Thompson, 1990) they promote and sustain.

Following discourses of neo-liberalism and individualism, motherhood has also become the focus of acute anxieties about (re)productivity in the context of advanced global capitalism, which has changed the order of motherhood discourses and, according to Pitt (2002), the ‘new capitalist mother’ symbolizes new discourses of maternal control and achievement, efforts geared, ultimately, towards the production of new generations of workers trained to master the complex informational flows of global capitalist economies and cultures.

The tasks of birthing and raising future workers and consumers are increasingly presented to women as a curious and urgent mixture of career (with its own regimes of training, information and on-the-job surveillance) and sacrificial moral vocation (Quiney, 2007:20).

As Williams (2000) and Warner (2006) argue, the increasingly visible imposition of absolute responsibility for infantile sufferings and faults on the mother is symptomatic of the privatization and individualization that accompanied the market-driven welfare reforms of neo-liberal economic policies. These have increased the burden on primarily female carers within families conceptualized as ideal private economic units in which to contain and conceal ‘unprofitable’ relationships of nurture and dependency (Quiney, 2007:34). However, underlying this ‘new capitalist’ motherhood discourse are class aspirations acknowledged today only in accepted codes; parents want their children to be successful and productive, reflecting liberal-individualist attitudes.

Professional middle-class parents… assume that their children are destined to do work like theirs – work that calls for innovation, initiative, flexibility, creativity, sensitivity to others, and a well-developed set of interpersonal skills (Rubin, 1994: 70).

Ehrenreich (1990) also recognized the link between gender roles and class formation. Much of what mothers do is designed to preserve and pass on what has been called the family’s social capital (Bourdieu, 1984), their style of life and social position,
and many mothers stay home to develop these skills in their children (Williams, 2000: 35/36). Feminist writers (Coward, 1992; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Warner, 2006) have highlighted that the contradictory economic pressures of the global economy, the creeping privatization of political and social responsibilities for the rearing and, increasingly substantial portions of the education of children, contribute to an increasingly pressurized and traumatized motherhood.

This pressure and anxiety is evident in the development of a large consumer market for writers in the new literary genre of maternal confessional writers (Figes, 1998; 2002; Abrams, 2001; Cusk, 2001; Wolf, 2001; Enright, 2004; Looney, 2005). These writers highlight the paradoxical synthesis that fuses discourses of selfless motherhood with neo-liberal capitalist discourses of individual achievement and productivity. The inescapable conclusion urged on the contemporary mother is that she is the shaper of the psyche and personality of the baby and its future quality as a person/product will be her achievement, or conversely, her fault (Quiney, 2007). These writers expose the dissonant pressures heaped upon the ‘new capitalist mother’ (Pitt, 2002) by incompatible discourses of selfless mothering, feminist discourses of independence, capitalist discourses of productivity and individualist discourses of self sufficiency and autonomy.

Such maternal writing pursues the tensions, conflicts and contradictions of mothering and exposes the dilemmas of maternal ambivalence, and of cultural ambivalence about maternity. There is a backlash against even stating this ambivalence, and the significant opprobrium poured on mothers who have dared to write, let alone complain, about mothering is a firm reassertion of old ‘truths’ about motherhood: that maternal experiences are emphatically not subjects for theorizing or debate, that their public airing is indecent and may even indicate pathology on the part of the woman concerned (Knight, 2001; Macleod, 2001; Herbert, 2001; Quiney, 2007). In Ireland, the strength of motherhood discourse is evident in a complete absence of criticism of the works of Enright (2004) and Looney (2005) in popular press, reflecting the sacredness of motherhood in Ireland. Nevertheless, Enright precludes any negative reaction from her readers by commencing Making Babies with an apology for what is to follow ‘Mothers should probably remain silent…sorry to everyone in advance. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry’ (2004:1).
Letherby (2002) argues feminism has provided a space within which women can acknowledge the positive and negative aspects of being a mother (see Letherby, 1999). However, while feminists have challenged dominant discourses of motherhood and the family, nevertheless the notion persists that good mothering is premised on ideas of being with children and fulfilling the demands of intensive nurturing. Crompton and Harris (1999) and Letherby (2002) argue it is a powerful normative assumption that women should take the major responsibility for care and nurturing, particularly of children.

In Ireland, versions of motherhood discourses abound, reflecting both traditional and neo-liberal values in what Keohane and Kuhling (2004) call a ‘collision culture’. Women are expected to prioritize motherhood, but not relinquish their obligations to engage in paid work and contribute economically to the family. The pressure heaped on contemporary mothers is immense (Benn, 1998). Berlant (1997) argues that to become a mother, for the successful late-capitalist woman, is to be suddenly charged with the production of the cultural and national future and Quiney (2007:31) claims that there is an expectation that women will happily succumb to this pressure.

[O]ne’s own productive future, not only one’s career, but also the right to signify as an individual or real person, politically and socially, will gracefully adapt or make way for it.

Traditional and ‘new capitalist’ concepts of motherhood confirm the continuing inscription of the mother as the epitome of private, sacrificial femininity, oppositional to the cleanly bounded, productive post-enlightenment subject. Motherhood discourses negatively affect women who try to combine motherhood with paid work, because these discourses charge women with full responsibility for their child’s physical, emotional, educational development, and promote standards of achievement that are difficult for any woman to achieve, whether or not she works outside the home. Warner (2006) suggests women who work outside the home resent the constrictions of an increasingly conservative maternal role within a globalized economy in which their labour may be worth less than their childcare costs, and their children appear to face an insecure economic future unless intensively trained to be exemplary capitalist ‘winners’.

Dominant motherhood discourses make combining motherhood with paid work difficult. Buxton (1998:1) argues this has resulted in ‘the mother war’, which is a war
between those who believe that mothers should work and those who insist they should not. ‘It is a war between the politically correct Superwoman and the maternally correct Earthmother’ (Buxton, 1998:1) the most public manifestations of which are media debates engaged in by journalists and fuelled by politicians, academics and ordinary citizens eager to share their ideas. These debates about the desirability and effectiveness of ‘working mothers’ heighten the expectation of maternal perfection through selflessness: if a mother is doing a paid job, whether or not she actually has the choice to do so, she can be judged to be failing in her primary childrearing duties (Quiney, 2007).

However, caring does not take place in a vacuum; it takes place in a nested set of power, class and gender relations and the moral imperative to undertake care work in all forms is much stronger for women than for men (Bubeck, 1995; O’Brien, 2005). The division of care labour is gendered and classed locally and globally (Tronto, 2002; Barry, 2008) and women continue to bear disproportionate responsibility for care work, in the informal world of the family and in the formal world of the care economy (Daly, 2001; Folbre, 2004; Reay, 2005; Barry, 2008). According to Lynch (2007), in general, men are more likely to be ‘care commanders’ and women ‘care’s foot soldiers’. Lister (1997) Sevenhuijsen (1998) and Duncan (2003) found that even where gender and power are identified in care arrangements, there is limited discussion of the gendered obligations to care.

McKay (1998:50) asserts that ‘present political and social systems and value structures obscure the central importance of care; and the means by which certain powerful groups and actors benefit from, whilst simultaneously, devaluing care’. There are deep gender inequalities in the doing of care and love work that operate to the advantage of men. It is women’s unwaged care and related domestic labour that frees men up to exercise control in the public sphere of politics, the economy and culture. Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the salience of care and love as public goods and exposed the limitations of conceptualizations of citizenship devoid of a concept of care, and highlighted the importance of caring as work, work that needs to be rewarded and distributed equally between women and men (Finch and Groves, 1983; Hochschild, 1989; Glucksmann, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Hobson, 2000; Ungerson, 2000; O’Brien, 2005; NWCI, 2009a). Furthermore, the complex way in which power relations and
exploitation are embedded in all manner of care relations is the subject of a large body of feminist research, which demonstrates the ways care workers are open to exploitation as informal family ‘carers’ and as paid care workers (Tronto, 1993; Folbre, 1994; Bubeck, 1995; Lynch and McLaughlin, 1995; Nussbaum, 1995a; 1995b; 2000; Fraser and Gordon, 1997; Leonard, 1997; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Kittay, 1999; Meagher, 2002; Mahon, 2004; Barry, 2008; Lynch and Lyons, 2008).

Irish feminists have called for a valuation of the caring work done by women and have drawn attention to the way affective domains of life are discrete spheres of social action, albeit deeply interwoven with the economic, political and cultural spheres (Baker et al., 2004). Lynch and Lyons (2008) argue that relations of care, love and solidarity matter because the development of care, love and solidarity relations involves effort, time and energy. They argue that care work, and in particular the emotional work involved in care, is a field of social action within and through which inequalities and exploitations can occur, just as they can occur in the economic, political or cultural sphere (Baker et al., 2004). High status for both men and women is inversely related to the doing of love, care and solidarity work, as idealized workers are ‘zero loaded’ workers: these are without care, be it by being detached from dependency relations or by ignoring them, delegating dependency work to others (paying others to do it) or by commanding others to do their dependency work (Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Those aspects of relationships that boost confidence, inspire strength and encouragement, give people a sense of belonging, and a sense of being wanted and needed and of being free (e.g. what mothers want for their children), cannot be commoditized as they can only exist in a context where there is some choice or decision to care and commit oneself for the sake of the relationship (to the child) and not for payment. This is not to deny the reality of the ‘compulsory altruism’ which has been a feature of so many Irish women’s lives (Lynch and Lyons, 2008).

Miller (2005) argues that motherhood is lived out in a ‘moral minefield’, while Duncan and Edwards (1999) claim gendered moral rationalities shape social negotiations around mothering and paid work. The taken-for-granted nature of mothering and care work presents problems for women who try to combine motherhood with paid work in Ireland. Women’s political, cultural and economic designation as carers is constructed as
‘free choice’, yet there is a moral imperative on women to do care work that does not apply equally to men; a highly gendered moral code impels women to do the greater part of primary caring, with most believing they have no choice in the matter (Baker et al., 2004).

As most care labour is unpaid, especially love labouring given its intimate and inalienable quality, those who perform it incur a material net burden due to loss of earnings (Mahon, 2004; Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Simultaneously women enable others, mostly men, to pursue more materially beneficial activities, notably paid work and leisure (McGinnity et al., 2005). The way women are exploited in relation to care work is particularly acute for mothers, because of the way it is morally inscribed in Ireland (Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Of those not in the labour force in 2009, 62 per cent of women were looking after home or family, compared with only 1 per cent of men (CSO, 2010a).

The impact of care work on women’s employment is reflected in the fact that women work on average fewer hours than men, and in lower grade occupations. Part-time work is a clearly delineated coping strategy to enable women to deal with home and child care duties in addition to formal employment (Drew, 1992; McCashin, 1996; Beechley and Perkins, 1997; Coveney, Murphy-Lawless and Sheridan, 1998; Murphy-Lawless, 2000). In 2008, 80 per cent of those working for less than 30 hours a week were women (NWCI, 2009a). In 2009, 26 per cent of married women worked for 20-29 hours per week compared with 5 per cent of married men. Nearly 41 per cent of married men worked in paid employment for 40 hours or more per week compared with 11 per cent of married women (CSO, 2010a). ‘The position of women … who combine the role of worker and carer are not adequately recognized in social provision’ (Coakley, 1997:185) and there is no valuing, or acknowledgement that care remains primarily women’s responsibility and is maintained as each woman’s private issue. Moran (2006) notes that many carers do not have the time to engage in the labour market and suffer material deprivation as a consequence while Adam (1990; 1995) and Davies (1990) have also noted that caring time is gendered.

While women’s right to participate in the workforce is key to feminism, there have also been vibrant debates concerning the protection of women who choose to stay at home (NWCI 2003; 2005) and greater economic recognition of the work women carry
out in the home, in the case of both stay-at-home and ‘working mothers’ has been the subject of several Irish feminist campaigns, such as Wages for Housework in the 1970s and the National Women’s Council’s (NWCI, 2005) childcare campaign, which incorporated childcare services for stay at home mothers. However, despite these vibrant debates and energetic campaigns, none of the suggestions were adopted by the State. In Ireland, as elsewhere, in the popular imagination, feminism is linked with the glorification of paid work and the devaluation of family work. The progress liberal feminism made was more obvious in the public/employment arena, which alienated many women who chose to stay at home and rear their children from feminism.

This leaves many women confused once they have children. When they feel the lure and importance of family work, they are left with the sense that feminism has abandoned them (Williams, 2000: 41).

However, feminists have also pointed to women’s unequal position in the family. Oakley (1974) exposed the reality of the ‘homemaker’ role and the nature of housework, while Bernard (1973) spoke of the ‘wife’s marriage’ and the ‘husband’s marriage’ identifying the very different experience that people in a family may have of their relationship. Hartmann (1981) identified the potential for conflict that arises from the fact that the family is not so much a unit as a group within which individuals have differential access to resources (Hilliard, 2007).

The reluctance to recognize unpaid caring as a form of work arises from the widespread global allegiance to the feminine, as opposed to feminist, ethic of care which defines care as a moral obligation for women, governed by the rules of selflessness and self-sacrifice (Richardson, 1993; Gilligan, 1995; Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Women have formed an ever larger majority of paid care workers (Daly and Rake, 2003), however when women work as care workers, their work is not valued as productive work and is characterized by low pay and poor terms and conditions. Thus women’s unpaid work in the home frees men up to exercise control in public life, while some women’s care work in the formal and informal economy also frees up other women to engage in public life.

Murphy-Lawless (2000:93) argues an ongoing issue for feminist activism and scholarship in Ireland is to successfully challenge the entrenched and deeply gendered
patterns of unpaid, caring work while securing government resources to enhance and encourage more flexible and inclusive working patterns for both women and men.

**Conclusion**
In the past twenty years Ireland has changed dramatically: socially, economically and culturally. In the context of a society that values both achievement and independence for the individual and submission and altruism in the family, women combine motherhood with paid work.

Women are participating in the workforce in greater numbers, may choose how many, if any, children to have, may or may not marry and can achieve high levels of education and compete for opportunities in the public world of work. Women who mother and engage in paid work experience difficulties combining the two. Women’s lives are structured by the tensions between the promise of participation in the labour force on equal terms, their actual experience of the workplace, and their continual positioning as the guardians of family life (Gray, 2004). ‘Working mothers’ in Ireland craft their working and mothering lives in the context of a society in flux.

Discourses of liberal feminism encourage women to exercise independence both in- and out-side the home and liberal feminists in Ireland, as elsewhere, have had some success in supporting women participate in the public sphere. However, this progress was not achieved by feminist activism alone, Ireland’s membership of the EU was necessary to ensure Irish women’s limited progress. Nevertheless, gender inequalities remain - the largest proportion of low paid workers are women, and there are ongoing problems with occupational gender segregation. After nearly thirty years of equal pay legislation a gender pay differential remains; proper childcare remains unaffordable for most, and abortion unavailable. Feminism advocates gender equality both in- and outside the home, however, the anti-feminist backlash of new pro-family and intensive mothering discourses make it difficult for women who attempt to combine motherhood with paid work in Ireland. As DiQuinzio (1999) notes, it is very difficult for feminists to challenge motherhood on individualist terms, which assume all people possess autonomy, freedom and are rational economic actors. Traditional gendered cultural values clash with feminist narratives of choice on the fault line of motherhood. Women are expected to engage in paid work and to have families deriving from the popular feminism of ‘having it all’,
which conceals the structural and social conditions which make combining motherhood with paid work in Ireland very difficult.

Women are positioned by discourses of neo-liberalism to be economically self-sufficient, contribute to the formal economy and paid work is seen as a public good. However, neo-liberal economic policies also enable the state to reduce its role in providing care, health and welfare supports. This means women who attempt to combine motherhood with paid employment experience difficulties because of the lack of state support for child- and elder care.

Individualism discourses suggest women, like men, are responsible for reflexively creating their own biographies and are free to make choices about their lifestyles and identities in order to maximize their success and happiness. Individualism requires autonomy, however mothers’ autonomy is limited by having dependant children and gendered structural constraints in family and society which limit the choices available to them. One of the limits to women’s choices is the availability of accessible, affordable childcare.

Women are positioned by discourses of motherhood to be responsible for the physical, emotional, psychological and educational well-being of their children. There are considerable anxieties surrounding motherhood in contemporary Irish society reflected in dominant motherhood discourses. Traditional appeals to a unified notion of the ‘Irish mother’ via the category ‘women in the home’, point to the continued valorization of this figure in the reproduction of Irish femininities, while new capitalist motherhood discourses have become the focus of acute anxieties about (re)productivity in the context of advanced global capitalism. The socio-economic contradictions between the demands and rewards of the labour market and the needs and rewards of the personal and familial are projected onto women (Gray, 2004:52). Mothers are responsible for their children’s care and development, but not supported with child or elder care, whether or not they engage in paid work outside the home.

Women are addressed as ‘free’ to construct themselves through paid work, work in the home, consumption, or activism so that these become equivalent ‘lifestyle’ options. Yet they have different public valences and are appropriated in a variety of ways to advance conservative agendas through gendered notions of motherhood and the family
(Gray, 2004). Even though gender discourses have changed, in reality, both in the public and private spheres, the structural changes necessary to support these changes in the order of discourse, and women’s changing role, have not materialized. As long as caring is maintained as the gendered responsibility of women only, Ireland is no country for women and no country for ‘working mothers’.

In this thesis, I examine the ways individual women navigate between these seemingly conflicted discourses to construct themselves as ‘working mothers’ in Irish society. I ask what are the consequences in terms of inequality or privilege for women of combining motherhood with paid work? In what ways do women accept, contest or reproduce the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism, individualism, feminism and motherhood at an individual level? How are these discourses promoted and sustained in workplace, family and society and are there patterns between these discourses which combine to create inequalities or privileges for ‘working mothers’?
Chapter 2: Theorizing Inequality

As evident in Chapter 1, the structural changes necessary to support mothers’ participation in paid work have not materialized. This research aims to examine the impact of women’s move to a more public form of gender regime by their participation in paid work, in terms of privileges or inequalities for women who are mothers. In this chapter, I outline the framework being employed to theorize the relationship between the intersecting inequalities experienced by ‘working mothers’ in this study, developing a concept of intersectionality, which draws on McCall’s (2005) intracategorical complexity, Walby’s (2007a) complexity theory and Ferree’s (2009) interactive intersectionality. Ferree (2009) argues that discourse is the political process which promotes and maintains inequalities and I draw on the work of Foucault (1972; 1977; 1984) to demonstrate the operation of discourse and power. Following McCall (2005) and Ferree (2009), this theoretical framework also reveals the configurations, or patterns between discourses, which maintain intersecting inequalities and privileges. I also outline the concepts of care and waged work included in the composite category ‘working mother’, and my treatment of the concepts of inequality, class and patriarchy in this empirical research.

(In)Equality

Equality is a contested concept. According to Lorber (1999), feminists have stressed that gender inequality is not an individual matter, but is deeply ingrained in the structure of societies. Liberal feminists argued that women and men are equal, and should be entitled to equal treatment. The measure of equal as ‘the same’ takes men’s lives as the normative standard and liberal feminism has had some success in breaking down many barriers to women’s entry into the labour force, particularly formerly male-dominated jobs and professions. However, liberal feminism could not overcome the prevailing belief that women and men are intrinsically different.

Radical and cultural feminists claim that women are ‘equal but different’ from men, regard heterosexual sexuality as coercive, valorize motherhood and promote separate and distinctive woman’s culture rooted in female bodies and life experiences. Radical feminists sought to valorize women’s difference, particularly motherhood, and
sought to have an equal value placed on women’s difference and had some success in drawing attention to women’s reproductive ability as a site of their oppression, but were criticized for essentialism.

Multi-ethnic, post-modern feminism and queer theorists attack the dominant social order through questioning the clarity of the categories that comprise its hierarchies. These feminists argue women are ‘equal and different’ and deconstruct the interlocking structures of power and privilege that make one group of men dominant, and range everyone else in a complex ladder of increasing disadvantage (Lorber, 1999). According to Lorber (1999), social critics have argued that no one aspect of inequality is more important than any other. Ethnicity, religion, social class and gender comprise a complex hierarchical stratification system in which upper-class, heterosexual, white men and women oppress lower-class women and men of disadvantaged ethnicities and religions. In teasing out the multiple strands of oppression and exploitation, multi-ethnic feminism has shown that gender, ethnicity, religion and social class are structurally intertwined relationships. While multi-ethnic feminism focuses on the effects of location in a system of advantage and disadvantage, social construction feminism looks at the structure of the gendered social order as a whole. It sees gender as a society-wide institution that is built into all the major social organizations of society. As a social institution, gender determines the distribution of power, privileges, and economic resources. In social construction feminist theory, inequality is the core of gender itself: women and men are socially differentiated in order to justify treating them unequally.

According to Lorber (1999), multi-ethnic feminism takes the standpoint perspective a step further. It is not enough to dissect a social institution or area of social thought from a woman’s point of view; the viewpoint has to include the experiences of women of different ethnic groups and religions and must also take into consideration social class and economic conditions.

Values, identity and consciousness of self are rooted in all the major social statuses. Ethnicity, religion, social class and gender are the walls and windows of our lives – they structure what we experience, do, feel, see, and ultimately believe about ourselves and others (Lorber, 1999: 25/26).

The important point made by Lorber is that the subordinate group is not marked just by gender or by ethnicity or religion, but is in a social location in multiple systems of
domination. Men are as oppressed as women, but men and women of disadvantaged groups are often oppressed in different ways. A recognition of multiple categories disturbs that neat polarity of familiar opposites and undercuts the assumption that one category is dominant and one subordinate, one normal and one deviant, one valued and one ‘other’. As Collins (1997:248) points out

\[
\text{[i]t is the common location within hierarchical power relations that creates groups…race, gender, social class, ethnicity, age and sexuality are not descriptive categories of identity applied to individuals. Instead these elements of social structure emerge as fundamental devices that foster inequality resulting in groups.}
\]

McCall (2001) contends that no single form of inequality can represent the rest, but that some forms of inequality seem to arise from the same conditions that might reduce other forms, including, potentially, a conflict between reducing gender inequality and reducing inequality among women. Allowing women into positions of power in the world of work potentially reduces inequality between women and men, however, as not all women have equal access to positions of power in the work world, this has the potential to create inequalities between women who can and cannot access these positions. This thesis aims to demonstrate the ways the same conditions – paid employment and motherhood - privilege and regulate women at the same time, and to identify the social locations and institutional domains in which women are regulated and privileged.

**Theorizing Inequality and Intersectionality**

According to Walby (2007a), intersectionality is a relatively new term to describe an old question in the theorization of the relationship between different forms of social inequality. Intersectionality has become a key concept in feminist discourse, travelling readily around the world to highlight the fact that gender relations are intertwined in complex ways with other forms of social inequality (Ferree, 2009). McCall (2005) argues that the introduction of intersectionality theory was vital to sociology, claiming that before its development, there was little research in existence that addressed specifically the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of
subordination within society. Knapp (2005) claims the terminology of intersectionality is a promising attempt at dealing with differences or complexities in theory production, while maintaining the political impetus of feminism (2005:254). Collins (2000) notes intersectional research produces important epistemological insights, and new paradigms of research which encompass interpretive frameworks that uniquely explain social phenomena related to oppression. Intersectionality also complicates our understanding of social relations in a way that is more reflective of socio-political realities.

The specific concept of intersectionality is attributed to critical race theorists, who, rejecting the notion of race, gender, ethnicity, class as separate and essentialist categories, developed the term ‘intersectionality’ to describe the interconnections and interdependence of race with other categories. Crenshaw (1989) argued that black women’s experience of discrimination was rendered invisible to legal concepts of discrimination that saw ‘race’ or ‘gender’ as discrete categories and she developed the term ‘axes of oppression’ to identify the social locations that intersected to create inequalities for black women workers. Crenshaw’s formulation of intersectionality opened up a conceptual space which demonstrated the way a combination of various oppressions work together to produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination viewed in isolation. Collins (2000) argued that cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity in a ‘matrix of domination’ (ibid:42). Similarly Brah and Phoenix (2004) regard the concept of intersectionality as ‘signifying the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential - intersect in historically specific contexts’ (ibid:76), emphasizing that different dimensions of social life cannot be separately extracted and presented as discrete and pure strands.

As Walby (2007a) notes, this is not a new issue in social theory (Jacobsen, 1998), since it lay at the heart of the debates on the intersection of gender and class (Crompton and Mann, 1986; Beechley and Perkins, 1997; Crompton and Harris, 1998; Mahon, 1998b; Crompton, 1999; Crompton and Harris, 1999; Cockburn, 2002; Hartmann, 2002; Jackson and Scott, 2002) as well as other analyses of gender, ethnicity,
and class (Westwood, 1984; Phizacklea, 1990; Mohanty, 1998). And Connell (1987), though not expressly using the term ‘intersectionality’, identified the intersection of gender, class, capitalism and patriarchy as creating systemic inequalities for women. He argues the sexual division of labour can no longer be seen as a structure in its own right, it must be seen as a larger pattern, a gender-structured system of production, consumption and distribution ‘gender divisions are not an ideological addendum to a class-structured mode of production, they are a deep seated feature of production itself” (Connell, 1987:103).

Intersectional scholarship highlights in many different ways that race; gender and sexuality are not simple binaries, separate and additive dimensions of inequality or reducible to immutable personality traits or seemingly permanent individual characteristics. Inequalities are social constructions that often give us power and options in some arenas while restricting our power and options in others. It is important to consider different degrees and forms of penalty and privilege, because, as Collins (1990) notes, an analysis of interlocking oppressions reveals that there are few pure victims or oppressors, for each ‘individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone’s lives’ (1990: 229). When attention is paid to how an individual is ‘both a member of multiple dominant groups and a member of multiple subordinate groups’ a conceptual space is opened up to reveal ‘that different systems of oppression may rely in varying degrees on systemic versus interpersonal mechanisms of domination’ (ibid: 230).

Intersectionality means that privilege and oppression… are not in fact singular. No one has a gender but not a race, a nationality but not a gender, an education but not an age. The location of people and groups within relations of production, reproduction and representation (relations that are organized worldwide in terms of gender inequality) is inherently multiple. These multiple social locations are often – not, as is often assumed, atypically – contradictory. Organizations as well as individuals hold multiple positions in regard to social relations of power and injustice, and typically enjoy privilege on some dimensions even while they struggle with oppression on another (Ferree, 2006:10).

Recognizing multiple oppressions forces us to consider that most individuals occupy both dominant and subordinate positions at the same time. Women’s relationship
to the labour market, the family and society demonstrates the ways inequalities privilege and regulate women depending on their class, occupation, and marital status and all of these relationships are dynamic and changing, and interact to mutually promote and sustain inequalities.

Ferree (2009) claims intersectionality is not a concept added onto an analysis formed on some other theoretical ground, but is part of the basic explanation of the social order as such and she contends that only an intersectional analysis can do justice to the actual complexity of political power and social inequality. However, intersectionality is a contested term and there is disagreement among feminist scholars about methodology, theorization and analysis.

What is at the heart of the debate is conflation or separation of the different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located, rather than just a debate on the relationship of the divisions themselves (Yuval-Davis, 2006:195).

Yuval-Davis (2006:198) argues social divisions take on organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms. Organizational divisions are expressed in specific institutions and organizations, such as the state and state agencies, the family, and trade unions. Intersubjective divisions affect the relationships between actual people, including their roles as agents of specific social institutions. Experiential divisions exist because of the different manifestations of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage. And social divisions exist at the level of representation, whereby images, symbols and texts generate and are determined by specific intersections. These divisions affect the ways in which we theorize the connections between different levels of analysis.

The issue for me, in developing a concept of intersectionality to apply to the empirical issue of ‘working mothers’ is to ensure analysis both at the level of the individual and at the social structural level.

The Composite Category ‘Working Mother’.

As evident in Chapter 1, both care and waged work are issues combined in the composite category ‘working mother’ and as demonstrated, caring and waged work are governed by
quite different values. As Nussbaum (1995a; 1995b), Kittay (1999), Tronto (2002) and Lynch (2007; 2008), have pointed out, ‘caring’ has a dual meaning, caring is active and passive, incorporating both ‘caring for’ in the physical sense as well as ‘caring about’ (Lynch and Baker, 2008). Caring, therefore conflates labour and love. Lynch (1989) developed the term ‘love labour’ to describe all the work that is involved in caring. According to Lynch (1989; 2008), ‘love labour’ involves emotional and other work orientated towards the enrichment and enablement of others. It involves both emotional work which includes thinking, and planning for others, attentiveness, listening, managing relations and conflict, as well as material tasks which involve cleaning, cooking, washing, lifting, and attending. The ‘love labour’ women do in caring for their children is often experienced both as a burden and a pleasure. It has also been argued (Lynch and McLaughlin, 1995; Nussbaum, 2000; Lynch, 2008; Lynch and Baker, 2008) that these unique and particular emotional aspects of caring work mean it is impossible to commodify them in any usually economically understood sense of the term (Crompton, 2006:191).

In neo-liberal capitalist and individualism discourses, the worker is an individual in search of meaning, responsibility, a sense of personal achievement, a maximized ‘quality of life’, and hence of work. Thus the individual is not to be emancipated from work, perceived as merely a task or a means to an end, but to be fulfilled in work, now construed as an activity through which we produce, discover and experience ourselves (Rose, 1989:103). Participation in paid work is necessary to fit with dominant social values, and in contemporary Ireland the single middle-class woman is encouraged to enter higher education and competitive occupations that promise status and power.

These different valuations of caring and working are evident in public narratives of what it means to be a ‘worker’ and a ‘mother’ evident in workplaces, families and society and ‘working mothers’ attempt to reconcile and accommodate these valuations when combining motherhood with paid work.

**Intersectionality and the Composite Category ‘Working Mother’**

According to McCall (2005:1772), attempts to study intersecting inequalities have introduced new methodological problems and have limited the range of approaches used to study intersectionality. She contends that these developments can be traced to the
complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple
dimensions of social life and categories of analysis. McCall (2005) outlines three
approaches to the study of intersectionality, based both on the demand to manage
complexity and their stance toward categories. These three perspectives are defined
primarily by the way they ‘use analytical categories to explore the complexity of
intersectionality in social life’ (2005:1773). The three approaches are anticategorical
complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity, and they serve
to represent the broad spectrum of current approaches that are used to better understand
and apply intersectionality theory.

The anti-categorical approach is based on the deconstruction of categorical
divisions. It argues that social categories are an arbitrary construction of history and
language and that they contribute little to understanding the ways in which people
experience society and reproduce dominant norms. Researchers’ questions about how to
constitute groups of a given social category have inevitably resulted in questions about
whether to categorize at all. Fixed categories are ‘social fictions that produce inequalities
in the process of producing differences’ (McCall, 2005:1773). Furthermore inequalities
are rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class, sexuality, and gender therefore
the only way to eliminate oppression in society is to eliminate the categories used to
section people into differing groups. In this approach, a focus on difference was preferred
to that on identity. Braidotti (1997:39) argues that ‘sexual difference is neither an
unproblematic nor an autonomous category; it is the name we give to a process by which
diverse differences intersect’. She argues that central to understanding theories of sexual
difference is the contradiction of subjectivity ‘sexual difference brings into representation
the play of multiple differences that structure the subject’ (1997:27). This destabilizes the
category ‘woman’ and Briadotti (1994) used the metaphor ‘nomad’ to focus on individual
differences between women rather than women’s common gender, and Butler (1990)
developed the notion of performativity to highlight the way gender is socially constructed
and enacted differently by different women in different social locations. The anti-
categorical approach argues that individuals and groups are too complex to be reduced to
finite categories and has been effective in challenging the singularity, separateness and
wholeness of a wide range of social categories. However, this radical destabilization of
categories makes substantive analysis, which requires distinctions between categories, difficult to achieve (Felksi, 1997).

The intracategorical approach attempts to account for lived experience of a single social group at neglected points of intersection. Complexity is managed by analyzing a social location at the intersection of single dimensions of multiple categories. The intracategorical approach begins with a unified intersectional core - a single social group, event, or concept – and works its way outward to analytically unravel the influences of gender, race, class and other social relations. This research is typically associated with qualitative studies. According to McCall (2005), recent work with this approach has been used to identify a new or invisible group – at the intersection of multiple categories – and proceed to uncover the differences and complexities of experience embodied in that location. Traditional categories are used initially to name previously unstudied groups at various points of intersection, but the researcher is equally interested in revealing – and indeed cannot avoid – the range of diversity and difference within the group. In this approach categories have an ambivalent status. Some researchers use categories to define the subjects of analysis and broader structural dynamics, but also see categories as misleading constructs not facilitating the heterogeneity and diversity of experience. Walby (2007a) claims this has become a strategy for seeking out ever finer units for analysis, in pursuit of a pure intersecting category. But, she argues, there are no pure groups – there will always be more forms of difference and there will still be some differences within the group being researched (Jacobsen, 1998; McCall, 2005).

The intercategorical approach acknowledges that there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, and takes those relationships as the centre of analysis. The point of the intercategorical approach is to chart the changing relationships among multiple social groups and in so doing requires the provisional use of categories. The intercategorical approach avoids the fully deconstructive rejection of all categorization, yet remains deeply skeptical of homogenizing generalizations that are inherent in categorization and classification and focuses on the process by which categories are produced, experienced and resisted in everyday life (Fernandes, 1997; Glenn, 2002). ‘The concern is with the nature of the relationships among social groups and, importantly, how they are changing’ (McCall, 2005:1780). In this approach
complexity is managed in comparative, multigroup studies to explore whether meaningful inequalities among groups exist.

The incorporation of gender as an analytical category into any such analysis assumes that two groups will be compared systematically—men and women. If the category of class is incorporated, then gender must be cross-classified with class, which is composed (for simplicity) of three categories (working, middle, and upper), thus creating six groups. If race-ethnicity is incorporated into the analysis, and it consists of only two groups, then the number of groups expands to twelve (ibid: 1786).

Clearly, the comparative and multigroup characteristics of such research designs create a form of complexity and scope that differs significantly from the anticategorical and intracategorical approaches. Despite their contested use I am deliberately using the provisional categories ‘woman’, ‘worker’ and ‘mother’, because I believe, not that these are reducible to biological essences or role expectations, but rather individuals accomplish these identities. Following West and Fenstermaker (1995:9), I use categories to make sense of the different roles - mother and worker - while acknowledging that these identities occur in interactions, not on stable or given understandings of social difference. Furthermore as Skeggs (1997:21) argues, the explanatory power of feminist theory develops from interrogating the production of categories, their applicability, the experiences of them and from assessing their explanatory adequacy for different groups of women in different relations of power at historically specific times and places. Although categories such as woman, race and class are not unitary, as Letherby (2003:56) argues, this does not mean they are meaningless. These categories stand for ‘the social construction of a particular set of people facing a common material reality because of their common oppression’ (Stanley, 1990:152). Following Hancock (2007a), I believe intersectionality as an approach, recognizes that categories matter equally but does not determine a priori the relationship between these competing and / or complementing categories. Furthermore, it recognizes that these categories are not static but that a dynamic interaction between individual and institutional factors is at play. And, as Ferree (2009:86) claims, ‘we use categories and ranks not only to understand but control the world’. I am using the provisional categories of ‘mother’, ‘worker’ and ‘working mother’, in order to understand and draw attention to the unique set of complex
inequalities experienced by ‘working mothers’ at the intersection of the categories ‘mother’ and ‘worker’.

Women who mother and engage in paid work are women who everyday are at a neglected social location. With the exception of motherhood in popular press such as ‘celebrity moms’ including Madonna, Victoria Beckham and Angelina Jolie and the ‘yummy mummy’ phenomenon which promotes glamorous motherhood and presumes a certain wealth and lifestyle, most women who mother and engage in paid work are under-researched and invisible. Because they defy the normative construction of ‘mother’ who does not work outside the home, and the ‘worker’ who has no care responsibilities, they are at the intersection of multiple categories – women, workers and mothers. Therefore, McCall’s (2005) intracategorical complexity is appropriate for this research, to expose the intersecting inequalities experienced by this group at the neglected social location of ‘working mother’.

However, one of the complications of focusing on specific groups in specific locations is that it leads to a problematic form of identity politics. Martinez (1993) has likened the concentration on specific groups to the ‘oppression olympics’, criticizing the notion that oppressions of specific groups can be quantified and that some oppressions are worse than others. With this perspective, the most oppressed group would take first place on top of the ‘hierarchy of oppressions’ (Martinez, 1993). This perspective forecloses any resistance to power and ignores the multiplicity and contradictions in the relationships among different hierarchical systems (Fellows and Razack, 1998). A further complication with theorizing simultaneously multiple complex inequalities is that at the point of intersection of two characteristics of the group, it is insufficient to treat these characteristics as if they are to be added up (Hancock, 2007a; Walby, 2007a). It is not possible to add women’s motherhood in the family to women’s participation in employment and say that women who are ‘working mothers’ experience twice as many inequalities as a woman who only does one or the other. Furthermore, adding up the disadvantages, as in the notion of double or triple disadvantage, does not fully account for the intersection; they may often, at least partially, mutually constitute each other (Crenshaw, 1991; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; McCall, 2005; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006).
Drawing on the work of Young (2005), Weldon (2006) suggests that intersectionality refers to the intersection of social structures of disadvantage and not to the intersection of identities, shifting the focus of gender from questions of identity to questions of the social structures that foster inequality. While Prins (2006) argues that the concept of intersectionality constitutes a critical alternative to identity politics because it not only takes account of differences between groups, but focuses on intra-group differences as well so that ‘intersectionality constitutes a critical alternative to additive claims involving multiple jeopardy’ (2006:278).

Ultimately, while intersectionality highlights differences among women, it also makes visible what women have in common. Intersectionality is a strategy that can reveal the real connections between apparently unrelated experiences women have of inequalities as well as the symbiotic systems of power relations that need each other in order to function to maintain inequalities for women. The concept of intersectionality employed in this research aims to overcome the ‘oppression olympics’ (Martínez, 1993) issue and the limitless postmodernization of identities, which force concentration on one aspect of women’s identity at the expense of ignoring another (Carastathis, 2008).

However, I do not believe ‘working mothers’ are a pure group (Walby, 2007a). Walby argues the intracategorical approach has become a strategy for seeking out ever finer units for analysis, in pursuit of a pure intersecting category. I agree with Walby (2007a) that there are no pure groups and there will always be more forms of difference and there will still be some differences within the group being researched. In this research I aim to uncover the differences and complexities of experience embodied in the social location of ‘working mother’ and at various points of intersection. I aim to reveal the range of diversity and difference within the group, as women, as workers and as mothers, demonstrating the way inequalities regulate and privilege at the same time - employing McCall’s intracategorical approach to do so.

**Intersectionality and the Social System**
Exploring the multiple intersecting inequalities women experience at the level of the individual does not adequately account for the social structural systems which interact with women’s social positions to create intersecting inequalities. Phoenix (2006)
suggests researchers face a trade-off between intersecting inequalities at the level of the individual and at the level of the society. She asks if intersectionality fails to address structural inequalities because it focuses on agency on the one hand and fails to address agency if it produces fixed conceptualizations of structure on the other. McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007b) argue for expanding the concept from its frequent focus on groups and identities to the social structural conditions which contribute to inequalities. Although each affirms the important contributions made by intersectional challenges to the givenness of categories and by attending to the specific perspectives of women of colour and women in other marginalized locations, they also suggest that these approaches excessively privilege the individual level and focus on static structural locations on ‘axes of oppression’ in a ‘matrix of domination’ and ‘relations of ruling’ (Collins, 2001; Braidotti, 1994; Prins, 2006).

Rather than locating an intersectional analysis in the embodied experiences of diverse social actors or in the intersection of systems of oppression, it is necessary to also examine the social structural conditions that contribute to different forms of inequality. Crenshaw (1989) gave intersectionality a meaning that largely understood structural intersections as adding, multiplying and reinforcing particular hierarchies in specific locations. She emphasizes intersectionality as a set of infinitely multiple substantive social locations, generates a long list of important intersectional locations to be studied, and offers voice to the perspectives of many marginalized groups.

Razack (1998) employed the term ‘interlocking systems’, to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between systems of oppression, rather than focusing on specific inequalities at the intersection of these systems.

Interlocking systems need one another, and in tracing the complex ways in which they secure one another, we learn how women are produced into positions that exist symbiotically but hierarchically...how domestic workers and professional women are produced so that neither exists without the other (Razack, 1998:13).

Similarly, Smith’s (1987; 1999) approach to intersectionality includes attention to historical, cultural, textual, discursive, institutional and other structural dimensions that contour the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality and national and religious identity, among other social phenomena. She uses the term ‘relations of ruling’ to
McCall (2001) uses the construct ‘configurations of inequality’ in her structural intersectional analysis of the ways ‘in which race, gender and class intersect in a variety of ways depending on underlying economic conditions in local economies’ (2001:6). However, this only acknowledges the domain of the economy, and following Walby (2007a), this is insufficient to adequately theorize the relationship between the inequalities women experience and the wider society in which this inequality takes place.

Yuval Davis (2006) attempts to create a more complex analysis of inequalities by attaching each set of social relations to a separate domain.

The ontological basis of each of these divisions is autonomous, and each prioritizes different spheres of social relations . . . For example, class divisions are grounded in relation to the economic processes of production and consumption; gender should be understood not as a “real” social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse that relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference . . . Ethnic and racial divisions relate to discourses of collectivities constructed around exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries (ibid: 200-1).

However, the difficulty with only analyzing categories at the intersection is that class is only explored in relation to the economy, gender only analyzed in relation to patriarchal discourse and ethnicity only analyzed in relation to discrimination. Similarly, Esping-Andersen (1999) in his work on Welfare Regimes theorized only one set of social relations in each institutional domain: gender in relation to the family; class in relation to economy and state. Walby (2007a) argues such segregation of the institutional bases of each set of unequal social relations provides little potential for the theorization of intersectionality and in particular for the mutual constitution of the categories. Walby (2007a) considers segregating each set of social relations and grounding it in just one institutional domain to be ‘segregationary reductionism’.

Both McCall (2005) and Walby (2007a) argue there is a disconnect between theory and social reality with current theories unable to fully grasp the current context of
complex inequality. However, as Hayles (1991) argues, reality is complexly patterned but patterned nonetheless. We can determine the source of the complexity, we can describe it and we can theorize it. In this view, changes in patterns of inequality and in the underlying structural conditions of society are dynamic, complex and contingent, but also amenable to explanation (McCall, 2005:1794).

The problem with analyzing multiple complex inequalities, according to Walby (2007a), is the absence of a concept of system in contemporary sociology, even though some concept of system is often found to be needed to address the conceptualization of social interconnections. While the concept of system has often been overtly rejected in sociology, some nearly equivalent notion is often deployed though under a different name. There are many concepts in social theory that are similar to and parallel to that of system that address the issue of social interconnectedness and address a social level that is not reducible to that of individuals. They include the concepts of ‘social relations’ (Emirbayer, 1997), ‘regime’ (Connell, 1987; Esping-Andersen, 1999), ‘network’ (Latour, 1987; Scott, 2000) and ‘discourse’ (Foucault, 1977).

According to Walby (2003), a revised concept of social system is necessary to adequately achieve the theorization of the intersection of multiple complex inequalities. Complexity theory is concerned with the way certain kinds of complex systems change over time and, according to Walby (2003), addresses issues that lie at the heart of classic sociological theory including: the tension between general theory and explanation of specific phenomena; the relationship between micro- and macro-levels of analysis; and the concept of system. Walby (2007a) argues complexity theory is appropriate to studies of intersectionality, precisely because it has the conceptual tools to locate inequalities at the level of the individual and explain these with reference to the social structure, to locate the inequalities and social structures in an overall social system, theorizing the nature and form of intersectionality and its impact on social systems, globally and locally.

The conceptual tools of complexity theory, which Walby (2007a) applies to intersectionality, are concerned with concepts of system. In complexity theory systems are self-reproducing and may be self-organizing and self-defining. The system has autopoietic features, thus each component participates in the production or transformation of other components in the system. The system is produced by its components and in turn
produces those components. In such a complex system, gender is not a dimension limited to the organization of reproduction or family, class is not a dimension equated with the economy, and race is not a category reduced to the primacy of ethnicities, nations and borders, but all of the processes that systematically organize families, economies and nations are co-constructed along with the meanings of gender, race and class that are presented in and reinforced by these institutions separately and together.

The system is an open system and takes all other systems as its environment, systems co-evolve as they complexly adapt to their environment. These are complex adaptive systems rather than hierarchically related elements. As one system changes the others with whom it is interacting also change and they co-evolve. Not only are gender relations constituted in the economy, polity, violence, and civil society, but so also are ethnic relations and class relations. These systems of social relations are constituted at different levels of abstraction; one level is emergent from another. An individual will participate in a number of different sets of social relations and systems that co-evolve in a changing fitness landscape, thus gender relations co-evolve in an environment that includes both class and ethnic relations.

Furthermore, the environment or landscape that each system faces is changed as a result of changes in the systems that constitute that landscape. So as one system evolves, it changes the landscape for others. The concept of path dependency facilitates the inclusion of temporality and sequencing within social theory. Path dependency means that events that occur at one moment in time have consequences at later times and that the order in which events and developments occur has consequences. Therefore, according to Walby (2007a) complexity theory considers each set of social relations - class, gender, and ethnicity as a social system. Each of these sets of social relations is not reduced to a cultural concept of identity, or economic concept of class. Instead, each set of social relations of social inequality is understood as a social system with full ontological depth, being constituted in the institutional domains of economy, polity, violence, and civil society.

Walby (2007a) argues that within each domain (economy, polity, violence, civil society), there are multiple sets of social relations e.g. gender, class, ethnicity (Walby, 1990; 2004; 2009). Each institutional domain and each set of social relations are
conceptualized by Walby as systems, not parts of systems. Each system interacts and overlaps with the others. This avoids the rigidity of the notion of a system as made up of its parts. Conceptualizing and exploring the separate systems of inequality in this way demonstrates the ways these systems mutually constitute each other, and reveals the multiple intersecting inequalities experienced by the subordinate group being researched. It also, importantly for Walby, grounds these systems of inequality in a social system, and avoids the ‘segregationary reductionism’ that places class, race and gender each into just one key institutional ‘system’ (economy, state or family) and instead looks for the interpenetration of meaning and action in systems that are not ‘saturated’ by one concept alone.

The social relations of gender, motherhood, class and the institutional domains of family, workplace and society in which they operate are dynamic and ongoing and evident in shifting times and spaces, therefore gender relations are not fixed either for individual women or for the gender order. I believe Walby’s (2007a) concept of overlapping systems is appropriate to this research, because the economy is not separate from the family and the gender is not separate from motherhood or the economy. The inequalities women experience as workers contribute to the inequalities women experience as mothers and vice versa. The processes and institutions which create these inequalities are mutually dependant therefore; the inequalities may partially constitute and reinforce one another. Conceptualizing inequalities in separate but overlapping systems reveals multiple inequalities and their interpenetration and interdependence with the social system. Walby’s (2007a) conceptualization of complexity theory locates the inequalities and privileges women experience at the level of the individual, and locates them in the structural social system. This is not to focus on structure at the expense of agency or vice versa (Phoenix, 2006), because women are exercising choices and exercising agency in their decisions to combine motherhood with paid work, even if these choices are not in conditions of women’s own choosing.

**Interactive Intersectionality**

Ferree (2009) builds on Walby’s (2007a) work with complexity theory and adopts a more dynamic and institutional understanding of intersectionality, following McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007b), which she calls interactive intersectionality. Rather than
identifying points of intersection, Ferree (2009) sees the dimensions of inequality themselves as dynamic and in changing, mutually constituted relationships with each other from which they cannot be disentangled. Ferree (2009) claims this gives historically realized social relations in any place or time an irreducible complexity in themselves, from which the abstraction of any dimension of comparison (such as race or gender) is an imperfect but potentially useful conceptual achievement of simplification, not an inherent property of the world (2009:85). This is what Prins (2006) defines as a ‘constructionist’ rather than ‘structural’ understanding of intersectionality, but Ferree prefers to call it ‘interactive intersectionality’ to emphasize its ‘structuration’ as an ongoing multi-level process from which agency cannot be erased (Giddens, 1990).

The inequalities women experience because of their motherhood may also partially constitute the inequalities women experience as workers, while these inequalities may privilege as well as regulate. I believe the concepts of ‘structuration’ and in particular ‘agency’ are necessary and important dimensions of the study of the inequalities experienced at the intersections of worker and mother, as women are making choices and exercising agency, even if not always in conditions of women’s own choosing. Furthermore, Ferree (2009) argues that intersectionality cannot be located at any one level of analysis, whether that is individual or institutional. The ‘intersection of gender and race’ is not any number of specific locations occupied by individuals or groups, but a process through which

[‘R]ace’ takes on multiple gendered meanings for particular women (and men), depending on whether, how and by whom race-gender is seen as relevant for their sexuality, reproduction, political authority, employment or housing (Ferree, 2009:85).

In the interactional definition of intersectionality, race takes its operational meaning in any given situation in part from the multiple institutions in play (such as family or nation) and in part from the other dimensions of inequality that are also engaged in giving meaning to each other and to the institutional context. Class, also, is understood as a series of interconnected processes, rather than as an abstract construct to be analyzed or examined within predefined boundaries of enquiry. This more fluid interpretation of class recognizes the ongoing formation of economic relations which are both gender and
racially formed, rooted both in family and communities but also within the global organization of capital. Underlying this fluid concept of class, is an understanding of capitalism as a constantly mutating or evolving entity, changing forms, but always under the premise of a certain, general logic – exploitation and accumulation of wealth. But as the mutation changes, so too do the classes, and therefore also the forms of gender and racial oppression (Acker, 1999).

Class
I operationalize the category class in this study through Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of class stratification. Bourdieu employed the concept of capitals to illustrate how the knowledge and use of economic, cultural and social capitals constitute the markers between dominant and subordinate classes.

A capital is the resource, the command of which enables one to exercise and resist domination and to maintain a position in the hierarchy of society. Economic capital, which is access to wealth and purchasing power, is the dominant principle of domination in capitalist society; however, economic capital on its own is not sufficient to guarantee social position. Cultural capital is an individual’s consumption patterns, taste, manners and aesthetic disposition which are the result of social origin. Social capital is the network of connections which is needed to make use of educational achievements and economic capital. Bourdieu asserts the primacy of cultural capital by claiming that social capital and economic capital, though acquired cumulatively over time, are dependant on cultural capital. Capitals moderate the myriad of struggles between classes and class fractions in modern capitalist society and teach people to tailor their expectations and their view of themselves to their appropriate place in the social and economic hierarchy. At the same time, capitals provide people with vehicles to contest the place of a class in the social hierarchy, or to claim a place in a given class.

Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of class contributes to understanding how other relations of subordination, especially age and gender, merge with economic and cultural relations of subordination in sublimated forms. Thus, Bourdieu illuminates how multiple forms of subordination articulate with one another. Following Bourdieu, in this study, class is also understood as a series of interconnected processes, rather than as an abstract
construct to be analyzed or examined within predefined boundaries of enquiry. Participant’s access to and aspirations with regard to economic, social and cultural capital are markers of their class position. This concept of class stratification is helpful in exposing how ‘working mothers’ experience intersecting inequalities and privileges in Irish society on the basis of class. In this study, I regard gender and class as processes which take on different meanings for individuals in different locations. These locations are work, the family, civil society and can be regarded as domains, or organizational fields (Ferree, 2009) in which the processes are dynamic and changing and in which these processes lead to multidimensional forms of inequality which women experience, contest and reproduce in historically changing forms.

**Discourse and Power.**
To her concept of interactive intersectionality, Ferree (2009) adds an emphasis on discourse as the political process by which the co-creation of inequality between processes (race, class, gender) and domains (family, society, work) occurs. Her approach rests on understanding the co-formation of knowledge and power, stresses the historical development of institutions that shape consciousness and practice, and identifies discourse as a crucial arena of political activity (Foucault, 1977). Ferree’s concept of discourse as the political process which gives meaning to gender, mother, worker in different institutions and social locations is a necessary part of conceptualizing intersectionality.

The concept of discourse in the Foucauldian sense refers to the ‘controlling, positioning, and productive capacities of signifying practices’ (Threadgold, 1997:58). In this sense, a discourse is

[A] group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment…Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language’ (Hall, 2001:72).

Foucault (1981) claims power is exercised through discourse and he demonstrates that discourses are an organization of power. He writes of regimes of ‘power/knowledge’ or ‘discourses’; that is, structured ways of knowing and exercising power, and he exposes
discourse as a decentred form of power, distributed over a complex of discursive sites. ‘[I]t is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together’ (Foucault, 1977:100). Foucault’s claim that modern power operates to produce the phenomena it targets, challenges the juridical notion of power as law which assumes that power is simply the constraint or repression of something that is already constituted. On Foucault’s account, the transition to modernity entails the replacement of the law by the norm as the primary instrument of social control. In modern society the behaviour of individuals and groups is increasingly pervasively controlled through standards of normality which are disseminated by a range of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic and normative knowledges. Modern individuals, moreover, become the agents of their own ‘normalization’ to the extent that they are subjected to, and become invested in, the categories, classifications and norms propagated by scientific and administrative discourses. The techniques of the self for reflection, deliberation and awareness ultimately become a form of self-surveillance and the panoptical gaze enables disciplinary practices to be enacted upon individuals through self-regulating, self-normalizing practices (Bartky 1990).

Foucault claims that modern regimes of power operate to produce us as subjects who are both the objects and vehicles of power.

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is … one of its prime effects (Foucault, 1980:98).

Foucault (1984:100) argues it is necessary to recognize that there is not a simple divide between accepted and excluded discourse nor between a dominant and dominated discourse, however there are ‘a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies’, that can transmit, produce and reinforce power, but also expose power which makes resistance to power possible (Letherby, 2002:286).

The subject of discourse cannot be outside discourse, because it must be subjected to discourse. It must submit to its rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power/knowledge. The subject can become the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces. It can become the
object through which power is relayed. But it cannot stand outside
power/knowledge as its source and author (Hall, 1997:55).

Foucault argues, since modern power operates in a capillary fashion throughout
the social body, it is best grasped in its concrete and local effects and in the everyday
practices which sustain and reproduce power relations. Armstrong (2003) argues
modern disciplinary society can dispense with direct forms of repression and constraint
because social control is achieved by means of subtler strategies of normalization,
strategies which produce self-regulating ‘normalized’ individuals. Subjectivity is used
to mean the conditions of being subjected to frameworks of regulation, knowledge and
discourse and constructing subjectivity in the process.

Individuals are both producing subjectivity and making subject. However, the
powers of subject formation do not operate along discrete lines; this is because they are
not separable in the subject itself. Accordingly, since it is impossible to extract race from
gender, or gender from class, modalities of subject formation cannot be treated in an
additive way because this elides ‘the way subjects are brought into being through
subjectifying discourses’ (Brown, 1997: 87). As Hall (1997:44) notes, ‘since all social
practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct –
all practices have a discursive aspect’.

Letherby (2002:286) argues that one of the problematic features of any notion of
discourse is that it is difficult to assess where the discourse begins and ends, because
discourses become part of our daily lives. Letherby (2002) distinguishes between
dominant discourses as those which are imposed on people, and authoritative discourses
as those which are accepted by people. While such discourses frequently have
institutional power, they may also be appropriated into individuals lives and explanatory
and descriptive schemes as ways to explain events and experiences.

Following Foucault (1977; 1981; 1982), women, mothers and workers are subject
positions constituted through discourse, rather than pre-existing discourse. Women take
up discursive positions, subject positions and social positions deriving from dominant
discourses. Motherhood is a discursive position which informs the take up and content of
the subject position mother. The particular shape subject positions take depends not only
upon their position within wider discourses and institutions but also how they are taken
up. Subject positions are also different from social positions. Social positions are based on structural organization such as class, race and gender which circumscribe and access movement into certain subject positions (Skeggs, 1997:12).

Institutional structures influence the form discourses are able to take and which discourses are available for distribution. ‘Individuals come to speak as particular kinds of subjects – to speak themselves into being – through speaking the discourses that enable the particular institution’ (Lee and Poynton, 2000:5). There are many degrees and forms of privilege and penalty, and these are changeable according to how differing discourses interact. Furthermore, subject positions are the effects of discourse and organizational structures. In this research the discourses of neo-liberalism, motherhood, feminism and individualism are available for distribution and participants construct themselves as mothers and workers with reference to these dominant discourses.

In taking an intersectional approach to ‘working mothers’, what drives the research is a critique of how power operates and its effects. This entails a critique of domination and exploitation, and also the struggle against subjection, forms of subjectivity, and submission that ties the individual to the self and submits the self to others (Foucault, 1982). The focus is on how discourses of neo liberalism, individualism, feminism and motherhood, and the politics of motherhood, the family, ‘working mother’ and ‘worker’ are disciplinary in the sense of ordering and classifying, but are simultaneously productive and creative. Discourses are also understood in relation to social and economic institutions and practices. Discourse is seen here not just as a form of rhetoric but ‘a complex system of meaning that shapes institutions, practices and identities in contradictory and disjunctive ways’ (Larner, 1998:601). Foucault treats discourse ‘sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements’ (1972:80). All utterances have some effect but a particular identifiable group of utterances, for example those that articulate ‘working mother’, ‘mother’, ‘worker’ have some coherence and are invested with power (Gray, 2004:7).

In claiming discourse is the political process in interactive intersectionality, Ferree (2009) draws attention away from ‘different’ identities and bodies to the contextual processes and conditions in which representations of identity and difference
are produced, governed and socially organized. Dhamoon (2008) claims such a shift is analytically important because it exposes the myth that identities naturally pre-exist and the fallacy that subjects have identities and bodies. This, in turn, draws attention to the doing or making of difference, and serves to show that subjects are produced as identities through discursive processes.

Grewal and Kaplan (1994) argue intersectionality can reveal the ‘scattered hegemonies’ that differentially structure our everyday lives by tying discourses of gender to global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, contending traditions and local issues of domination. Similarly Connell (1995) argues ‘There is no Patriarch Headquarters with flags and limousines, where all the strategies are worked out’ (1995:215) instead there is ‘a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions’ (Foucault, 1990: 33). According to Connell (1995:80) the interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further [unequal] relationships. Power operates through the discourses of neo-liberalism, individualism and traditional and ‘new capitalist’ discourses of motherhood to place women in an inferior hierarchical position to men in the gender order.

**Patriarchy**

In this study I use the concept of patriarchy to describe the power which privileges men over women, and also men over other men. Patriarchal power is structural, but also dynamic and unstable and exercised differently with regard to each subject, category and intersection. Patriarchy is seen as a hegemonic gender order imposed through individual, collective and institutional behaviours and discourse is the political process through which patriarchal power is exercised. Women experience both public and private patriarchy, in the family, in the home and in the wider world (Walby, 1990). In intersectional research it is clear that the forms of discrimination are subtle, sexual divisions are complex, and, as Oakley (2002) argues, the representational practices of women’s oppression multiply imaginatively and incessantly.

As a system of social relations providing a material base of men’s domination of women and children, patriarchy is the default mode: what’s always there and will always happen unless it’s actively contended. We are lost without it and lost within it. We need it to comprehend what goes
on, and what goes on is a constant fracturing of our humanness into divisive and destructive ways of being and living (Oakley, 2002:27). This intersectional research reveals the myriad ways patriarchal power has a divisive and destructive impact on women who attempt to combine motherhood with paid work. Using the concept of patriarchy demonstrates that gender interacts with other dimensions such as ethnicity and social class which result in different varieties of gender regimes. Gender regimes (Walby, 1997) are the configuration of gender relations within a particular setting, such as a school, a family or local area. Several varieties of gender regimes are explored in this research, which combine to demonstrate that Ireland is still very much a patriarchal society. Walby (1990) identified six sites where women experience patriarchal power: employment, household production, the state, sexuality, violence and culture. At the time she theorized women were moving from a private patriarchy, experienced in household production, sexuality and culture, to a more public patriarchy where women participated in employment and the state, but were still strongly controlled. More recently, Walby (2009), identified four domains: the Economy, Polity, Violence and Civil Society, and she argues that the social relations of gender, class, ethnicity, age and other relations interact with each domain to produce a particular regime of inequality. Connell (1995:215) claims the fact that patriarchal power relations must be practiced allows for divergence in how they are practiced, and he elaborates masculinity strategies emphasizing command, both in the public and private spheres, and strategies emphasizing expertise in the public sphere. Both public and private patriarchy are evident in Walby’s (2009) domains and this study aims to reveal the way power operates in the domains of paid work, household work, culture and the state to create inequalities for ‘working mothers’.

**Configurations of Inequality**

Ferree (2009) claims each of these dynamic approaches, to categories, to systems and to discourse, specifically rejects the emphasis on generating long lists of diverse ‘frames’ and of ‘axes of inequality’ that has been part of the study of both intersectionality and framing and critiqued by Martinez (1993), Benford (1997), McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007a; 2007b). Ferree (2009) also argues both discourse and intersectionality can be more productively approached through the study of configurations, a term McCall (2005)
uses to describe attention to patterns, interactions among elements that have paradoxical and conflicting meanings depending on the specific context as a whole. Such configurations – both of discourses and of intersectionality in this and other aspects of the social order – have stability but also change. Women’s motherhood in the family interacts with women’s employment in the workplace to create patterns of inequalities or privileges which are only experienced by members of the group of ‘working mothers’. Patriarchal power operates through dominant discourses to ensure that women’s progress in the work world has been effectively limited by power operating through neo-liberalism and individualism discourses, and the backlash against feminism which has resulted in new capitalist- and intensive-mothering discourses.

While no concept is perfectly able to capture all the complexities of an intersectional analysis, the notion of interactive processes of subject formation and differentiation aims to attend to the dynamic and relational activity of producing and resisting power through multiple systems simultaneously; the integrated and distinct ways in which different systems function together; the relationship between and within social groups; and the relationship across and between different kinds of interactions (Dhamoon, 2008). This approach to patterns facilitates exposing the ways women’s paid work and motherhood interacts with family, workplace and society to create multiple intersecting inequalities and privileges, even while patterns are dynamic and changing.

This thesis reveals that there are symbiotic relationships between these discourses which create and maintain new and complex inequalities for ‘working mothers’ in Ireland. Following Ferree (2009) and McCall (2001), there are patterns between these inequalities which create and sustain them, and in this research, I examine the patterns between inequalities which have symbiotic relationships, which ultimately maintain all women in positions of disadvantage.

Conclusion

Intersectionality facilitates theorizing and analyzing the multiple intersecting inequalities and privileges experienced by ‘working mothers’, which are dynamic and changing and which regulate and privilege at the same time. Andersen and Collins (1992: xii) refer to ‘interlocking categories of experience’ arguing that it is not possible to separate out the
categories of gender, race, class and sexuality, nor to explain inequalities through a single framework. However, it is hoped this framework theorizes intersecting inequalities at the level of the individual and the society and explores the patriarchal power operating through discourses which creates and maintains these inequalities.

I am adopting McCall’s (2005) intracategorical approach, and using the provisional categories of ‘mother’ and ‘worker’ to research ‘working mothers’ in Ireland. I believe women with children who engage in paid work are a hitherto neglected group, who are located at the intersection of multiple categories. This intersectional research aims to uncover the differences and complexities of experience embodied in that location as well as revealing the range of diversity and difference within the group and the ways in which women resist, reproduce and maintain inequalities.

I apply Walby’s (2007a) concept of complexity theory which demonstrates that each social relation interacts with several institutional domains, and these are all separate, interrelated systems. These systems are over-lapping and non-nested and demonstrate the mutuality of the relationships between social relations and institutional domains, each of which constitutes a system. In particular I examine women’s relationships as ‘women’, ‘workers’ and ‘mothers’ with the institutional domains of the family, workplace and society to show the interdependence of the inequalities in each of these systems.

I adopt Ferree’s (2009) interactive intersectionality which exposes the way dimensions on inequality are interdependent and mutually constitute each other, even while the relationships between these dimensions are dynamic and changing. I explore the domains of work, family and society to reveal the ways gender, class and motherhood as processes take on different meanings at different times and in different spaces for individual women and for structural institutions.

Following Ferree (2009) and Foucault (1977) I demonstrate the way in which the dynamic and changing, productive yet disciplinary power of discourse is the political process which promotes, regulates and sustains inequalities. In particular, I refer to discourses of neo-liberalism, feminism, motherhood and individualism. Furthermore, following McCall (2005) and Ferree (2009), I examine the ‘configurations of inequality’, the patterns between these discourses, which reveals patterns of inequalities experienced by ‘working mothers’ and their interdependence and interpenetration. These
configurations also reveal the dynamic nature of the relationship between intersectionality and discourse which maintains ‘working mothers’ intersecting inequalities.
Chapter 3  Methodology.

In this chapter, I outline the methodology employed in conducting, theorizing and analyzing this intersectional study. Hawkesworth (2006) claims that feminist scholars have contributed three major methodological innovations: the concept of intersectionality as a guiding research principle; standpoint theory as an analytical tool; and gender as an analytical category. I apply all three in this research. I develop a ‘working mothers’ standpoint, which provides a privileged, yet mediated view of institutional and discursive structures in Irish society. I combine this standpoint with intersectionality to reveal that in addition to a shared standpoint, these women also experience different degrees of privilege and penalty dependant on their individual circumstances. I set out the feminist research methodology and methods employed in conducting the research, designed to reveal the complex whole of women’s experiences. I outline my approach to data analysis and I address the issue of reflexivity.

As noted in Chapter 2, I have selected McCall’s (2005) intracategorical complexity to explore inequality at the level of the individual and Walby’s (2007a) complexity theory to explore these inequalities at the level of society. I apply Ferree’s (2009) interactive intersectionality theory to demonstrate that discourse is the political process which facilitates the production and maintenance of inequalities and I apply McCall and Ferree’s concepts of configurations to demonstrate how these inequalities and the discourses of neo-liberalism, individualism, feminism and motherhood are interdependent and create new and complex patterns of inequality for ‘working mothers’.

Intersectionality has become ‘a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it’ (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006: 187/188). In everyday experiences, distinctions between the institutional and the interactional, between ideology and discourse and between private and public spheres merge and form a complex of social relations and situations (Essed, Goldberg and Kobayashi, 2009). Intersectional research aims to explore these relations and situations in order to reveal complex inequalities. Intersectionality provides a lens for exploring the ways different systemic conditions that vary by time, place and circumstance work together to reproduce conditions of inequality.
According to Nath (2009) intersectionality affirms that women are positioned within different contexts, they bear diverse histories, they experience and resist subordination and discrimination in multiple and complex ways, and they are implicated in relations of power and privilege through their shifting positionality.

Because intersectional research attempts to unpack and identify separate systems of inequality in the complex whole of lived experience, complexity arises at many levels. McCall (2005:1781) notes complexity derives from the analysis of a social location at the intersection of single dimensions of multiple categories. Perhaps because of this complexity, there is a corresponding drag on the development of a methodology of intersectional analysis (Siltanen, 2005; Nath, 2009). McCall (2005:1771) argues that despite the emergence of intersectionality as a major paradigm of research in women’s studies and elsewhere, there has been little discussion of how to study intersectionality (Siltanen, 2005). There is no unified feminist intersectional method and it can best be understood as a loose set of ideas about how to undertake research. ‘People use it in different ways, sometimes inconsistently and with ambiguity’ (Hancock, 2007a:63).

However, as noted already, researchers face a trade-off between intersecting inequalities at the level of the individual and at the level of the society (Phoenix, 2006). Phoenix (2006) asks if intersectionality fails to address structural inequalities because it focuses on agency on the one hand and fails to address agency if it produces fixed conceptualizations of structure on the other. Furthermore, she questions whether intersectionality produces so many intersections that it becomes impossible to know which should be analyzed at any particular time.

The challenge for me is to apply a feminist research methodology to this intersectional research project which addresses both agency and structure to reveal the full range of privileges and inequalities experienced by ‘working mothers’. As Jordan-Zachery (2007:254) asks ‘How do we do intersectionality so that we are able to show how the different systems of oppression converge?’ In this research, I ‘do intersectionality’ by applying a feminist standpoint, a feminist methodology, which includes case study, the research methods of focus groups and interviews, I apply an intersectional analysis to the research findings and address reflexivity in the research process.
**Feminist Standpoint**

Skeggs (1997) notes that experience has been seen as *the* basis of feminism in that feminism as a social movement and as a personal politics began the moment women began to talk to each other and make sense of their experiences as women (Hughes, 2002: 151 original emphasis). Feminist standpoint is one major strand of theorizing experience that has contributed to the development of feminist epistemologies.

Standpoint theorists argue that social production of knowledge is controlled by a certain class, so knowledge produced reflects the interests and values of that class. The ruling class has vested interest in concealing the way it dominates and exploits oppressed classes, so this knowledge will be distorted. ‘The suffering of the subordinated classes will be ignored, redescribed as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved, or inevitable’ (Jaggar, 1983:56).

Using a feminist materialist approach, Hartsock (1997) claims that women’s experiences of their daily lives give them privileged access to understanding the relations of ruling and she argues for a feminist standpoint that will in consequence justify distinctive forms of feminist knowledge and methodologies. Hartsock (1997) argues that women’s experiences of being outside the dominant order can give them a privileged knowledge of social reality.

Like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women’s lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point that can ground a powerful critique of the phallocentric institutions and ideology that constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy….the sexual division of labour forms the basis for such a standpoint and….on the basis of the structures that define women’s activity as contributors to subsistence and as mothers, one could begin, though not complete the construction of such an epistemological tool (1997:463).

According to Hartsock (1997), women’s household labour produces use-values for capitalism and she argues that women’s experiences of this form of production and social reproduction are distinctive from the experiences of workers who produce goods for sale in the market place. Here she suggests that the experience of motherhood as an institution, rather than simply just through individual and personal experience, creates the relational self. Thus,

[M]otherhood in the large sense, i.e. motherhood as an institution rather than experience, including pregnancy and the preparation for motherhood
almost all female children receive as socialization, results in the construction of female existence as centred on a complex relational nexus (ibid:470).

She therefore argues, ‘women’s life activity does form the basis of a specifically feminist materialism, a materialism that can provide a point from which both to critique and work against phallocratic ideology and institutions’ (1997:478). Thus, Hartsock draws on historical materialism and object relations theory to describe a distinctively female subject, attuned to distinctly female realms of connection and relational knowledge. Moreover, informed by a context of compulsory heterosexuality and masculine domination, the ‘lived realities’ of men and women are substantively different. Critically, this has an epistemological consequence with women’s lives providing the basis for a privileged, yet mediated, view of gendered power structures in society.

Harding (1993) observed that research which studies groups at the bottom, or exterior of the social structure necessarily provides fuller understanding of the larger society. ‘Our kind of society is known and experienced rather differently from different positions within it’ (Smith, 1974:30). Standpoint theory provides an understanding of why we must consult previously ignored persons and groups as sources of knowledge and it problematizes seemingly innocent, meaningless events in everyday life. Smith (1974:28) argues, ‘the only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within. We can never stand outside it’.

Smith (1974; 1987; 1999) focused on everyday life and explored the social meanings that can be derived from the ways women talk about their experiences. Smith (1987) stresses her position is not to argue for a feminist standpoint that in consequence will justify feminist knowledge, she argues for attention to be paid to women’s standpoint, and the actualities of women’s lives as sites through which ‘concepts and theories are examined for how they are activated in organizing social relations’ (ibid: 395).

Seeing the world from where we are located, seeing that we are located, allows us to know that what we know is conditional upon that location as part of a relation existing between locations (Smith, 1974:30 original emphasis).
‘A standpoint is *not* how folks in a particular social location think’ (Sprague, 2001:529 original emphasis). This point has been reaffirmed by many, if not all, of the major standpoint theorists since Hartsock distinguished a standpoint from the spontaneous consciousness of social actors. A standpoint can only be achieved through forms of critical consciousness, reflexivity and struggle (Hughes, 2002:160). Harding (2004a) argues that oppressed groups, therefore

[c]an learn to identify their distinctive opportunities to turn an oppressive feature of the group’s conditions into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured. Thus, standpoint theories map how a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage (2004a:7-8).

A crucial element of standpoint theory is the distinction between experience and knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge involves thinking from the point of those with experiences of disadvantage and oppression. Harding (1993) argues against appropriating the experiences of others, she recommends reflection on the first-hand accounts of oppression so as to reveal the partiality of dominant discourse. What grounds standpoint theories is not women’s experience, but the view from women’s lives.

Feminist standpoint theorists have developed the view that oppressed and disadvantaged individuals are well-placed to develop accounts of oppression and thereby to contribute to liberatory knowledge (MacLean, 2009). However, in researching an aspect of women’s lives, it is possible only to achieve partial truth or partial knowledge. One of the most important criticisms of standpoint theory has been a focus on the relationship between reality and experiences that in turn invokes notions of truth (Hughes, 2002:153). Ramazanoglu and Holland (1999:382) describe the theoretical contestation over the place of experience in feminist theory as placing academic feminism ‘between the unacceptable rock of extreme positivism and the unacceptable hard place of extreme relativism’. At the more positivistic ends of the Ramazanoglu and Holland continuum, early versions of standpoint theory suggested that reality could be accessed through political struggle, and, in consequence, that there is a ‘real’ reality to be known (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This knowledge of the ‘real’ reality would show the truth of social relations. Relativism implies that a person could have knowledge of only the sorts of things she had experienced personally and that she would be totally unable to
communicate any of the contents of her knowledge to someone who did not have the same sorts of experiences. However, this is not to say that standpoint theorists necessarily deny that there are truths, or as Harding (1991:15) suggests, ‘less false beliefs’. Haraway (1997) assumes that our picture of reality includes some experiences but excludes others and draws on the fractured identities and plurality of feminisms and wishes to ‘sketch a picture of possible unity’ (1997:511) that draws on socialist and feminist principles. However, Walby (2001a, 2001b) notes that no-one is either an absolutist or a relativist about claims to truth, and Walby is critical of Haraway’s (1997) ‘storying’ of feminist standpoint. Walby (2001a:489) asks ‘Is ‘story telling’ really the best that feminist social science can offer?’ and she argues it is widely accepted within broader scientific communities that all knowledge is provisional and open to doubt. Constantly stressing that feminist knowledge claims are partial or located will be used to downgrade any research findings. Walby (2001b) rejects the idea that all knowledge claims should be reduced to interests, science is not free from interests, but reality is not so easily subjugated to interests (2001b:538).

Moi (1999) is also concerned about the implications that arise from a feminist stress on the interests and perspectives that arise from locationality. Like Walby, one of her concerns is the ‘uncritical embrace of the personal and the subjective and an equally uncritical dismissal of the impersonal and the objective’ (1999:161). Moi (1999) observes that the recent emphasis in feminist debate about the importance of the personal has led to confusion.

Nothing is less contentious … today than the claim that someone’s race, class, sex, sexuality, nationality, and individual experiences (of sexual abuse, rape, and racism, but also other, more innocuous experiences) affect his or her understanding of the world (1999:142).

The notion of lived experience, if taken to an extreme, can privilege individual experience and knowledge to the exclusion of a collective standpoint. Moi (1999) is concerned with how we can avoid turning these locational shorthands into reductive and irrelevant statements that lead us to dismiss someone and their work out of hand (Hughes, 2002:170). All women are different from each other and each woman has multiple identities, any one of which might arguably provide a standpoint for knowledge (Letherby, 2003:47). In developing her analysis of Black feminist thought, Collins
(1989; 1990; 1997) gives a significant role to Black feminist scholars to look for points of synthesis and common themes between what appear to be competing epistemologies or ways of knowing, because, as Collins argues, solely producing alternative knowledge claims or counter-discourses is insufficient. She argues that counter-knowledge claims are ‘rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms’ (Collins, 2000:270). Narayan (1989) suggests instead the notion of a perspectival view of knowledge, that is, who you are and where you are situated does make a difference to the knowledge you produce, but that we then have to assess the best ways of seeking to communicate this knowledge to someone else, situated differently.

Flax (2004) regards gender as a transitional and contradictory space, which operates both as a social fact as well as a normative and regulatory demand, and she argues, in transitional spaces, questions like ‘is this real or not?’ are suspended and irrelevant. Suspending the reality question

[e]nables us to hold in mind the complexity of gender: it is a social fact; a socially constructed category; a possible site of intensely subjective fantasy, emotion and meaning construction; and an effect of power with differential and asymmetric consequences inherent in varying positions within its grid (Flax, 2004:908).

Letherby (2003:57) argues that there is no reality out there waiting to be discovered, but there are many subjective experiences, even though women, and other groups of people, share a commonality of experience and oppression. Stanley and Wise (1993:116) assert that there are multiple realities and that individuals understand social reality through lived experience, which is ‘daily constructed by us in routine and mundane ways, as we go about the ordinary and everyday business of living’ and argue social realities are constructed through human perceptions.

We believe that there are many (often competing) versions of truth…even if such as thing as ‘truth’ exists, this is undemonstrable. This is because ‘truth’ is a belief which people construct out of what they recognise as facts (Stanley and Wise, 1993:119).

The belief that the social world is interpreted and constructed does not deny the importance or validity of agency and lived experience. It is important to ‘take other
people’s truths seriously’ and accord respect to the everyday lives of research participants, for whom experiences are ‘valid and true’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993:114). In fact, as Temple (1997:5.2) argues, ‘it is by listening and learning from other people’s experiences that the researcher can learn “the truth” is not the same for everyone’.

Following Stanley and Wise (1993), Letherby (2003:49) argues that taking a standpoint remains problematic, for once we acknowledge the existence of several standpoints, it becomes impossible to acknowledge ‘strong objectivity’ as a means of establishing superior or ‘better knowledge’, because there will always be alternative knowledge claims arising from contextually grounded knowledge of different standpoints.

However, ‘experience is not something which language reflects. In so far as it is meaningful, experience is constituted in language’ (Weedon, 1997). If experience is a phenomenon of language, then our focus should change from looking at experiences themselves as evidence of reality and toward looking at how discourse and representation constitute experiences (Maynard, 1998). Discourses become effective to the extent that they attach themselves to a technology for their realization. Technologies are collections of forms of knowledge which operate via particular techniques which are ‘oriented to produce certain political outcomes’ (Rose, 1999a:52). There is no preconstituted inner self to be communicated in the world; it comes into being through discourse and the recognition of others. Therefore, the self is not knowable outside of discourse and recognition. Discourses of ‘motherhood’ can operate as a ‘metalanguage’ which produce the subject position ‘mother’ and which mask the operation of other axes of difference and power (Gray, 2004:18/19).

Deconstructionist and discursive analyses also occupy the relativistic end of the Ramazanoglu and Holland continuum. Goodman and Martin (2002) argue that performative views of gender of necessity trouble the category of experience, by undermining the notion of a coherent identity, and rather than there being a fully constituted experiencing subject to whom experiences happen, experience is the site of subject formation. ‘Experience is at once always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation’ (Scott, 1992:37). Experience cannot be the origin of explanation ‘nor
the authoritative evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced (Scott, 1993:401).

Experience conflates the ‘lived’ with those discursive ‘regimes of truth’ that govern the transmission of the ‘lived’ into discourse. The ontological level of ‘lived’ experience can be understood as discursive categories working through embodied living subjects who perceive them as ‘realities’ (Brah, 1996). Brah and Phoenix (2004) suggest in spite of debates over notions of experiential authenticity which have highlighted the limitations of ‘identity’ politics, these debates have also demonstrated that experience itself ‘could not become a redundant category’ (2004:82). Instead, experience remains crucial as a signifying practice of the ways in which we make sense of the world symbolically and narratively (see Mohanty, 2002).

Riley (1988:100) claims feminism can never wholeheartedly dismantle women’s experience because the concept of experience has been central to the development of feminist theory and politics. The experiences articulated by women cannot be seen as ‘a pre-given ontology that precedes its expression’ (Felski, 1995:21). Women’s experiences are constructed through the institutional and discursive technologies of motherhood, neoliberalism, individualism and feminism as well as class and gender and the relative abilities of these technologies, in different contexts, to produce certain kinds of selves (Gray, 2004:19). This research project is not about ‘revealing’ women’s ‘true’ experiences, but about identifying the politics of class, gender, mother and worker and the power dynamics that constitute and normalize particular categories of difference that then get produced as women’s ‘experience’. This research explores how discourse and representation constitute women’s experience. The focus is on how discourses and politics of class, gender, mother, worker, family and ‘working mother’ are disciplinary in the sense of ordering and classifying, but are simultaneously productive and creative and are understood relationally by participants in relation to social and economic institutions and practices. As Letherby (2003:34) argues,

[Language does not determine reality in a fixed way, but it does provide dominant frames of reference and dominant meanings which we attach to experiences at any one time. We need to recognize that language reflects the centrality of power and authority and that we need to study how particular groups are able to control specific institutions which are able to
construct dominant frameworks of meaning...and consider how and why meanings are constructed into theory, into truth.

Developing a ‘working mothers’ standpoint, while providing a view of institutional and discursive power structures, does not assume homogeneity of experience among the group of participants. This is intersectional research, and ‘working mothers’ are not a pure group (Walby 2007a) and in this research, in addition to developing a shared standpoint, I also aim to reveal the intersecting inequalities and privileges which reveal the diversity and difference within the group of women. Because, as Stanley and Wise 1990:21/2) argue, ‘the experience of “women” is ontologically fractured and complex because we do not all share one single and unseamed reality’. Therefore, as Letherby (2003:57 original emphasis) argues, perhaps it is better to speak of ‘feminist standpoints’, differences do exist between women, so the category ‘woman’ needs to be carefully defined in order to focus on ontological separations as well as similarities. According to Letherby (2003:49), the claim that women’s lives provide a better starting point for thought is not about arguing for one position (Harding, 1993) and starting from the thoughts of different people with different experiences than our own, helps to increase our ability to understand the perspectives of the powerful and the less powerful. This standpoint and the experiences of ‘working mothers’ thus provides a privileged, yet mediated view of gendered institutional and discursive power structures in society.

**Standpoint and Intersectionality.**

Feminists have linked feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality. Standpoint feminists have recently argued that individuals are both oppressed in some situations and in relation to some people while at the same time are privileged in others (Harding, 2004b:257). Haraway (1997) recognizes the political importance of validating women’s experiences of their daily lives, however she is critical of the totalizing tendencies of standpoint theory that suggest a shared experience of womanhood. In fact, one of Haraway’s major aims is to illustrate how the production of universalistic theories misses the diversity of experiences and realities in a postmodern, global information age. Haraway uses the metaphor of the cyborg to illustrate how postmodern feminist epistemology can be synthesized with standpoint epistemology, which she achieves
through an exploration of multiple viewpoints and locations. In this way, Haraway does not suggest that the cyborg should be viewed as a totalizing theory in terms that all women experience the world in this way; rather she stresses the situated and perspectival nature of knowledge (Hekman, 1999).

Harding (2004a:8) claims ‘standpoint theorists have struggled to create a different kind of decentred subject of knowledge and history, which has largely been accomplished by developing theories of intersectional social locations’.

It took feminists of colour, and multicultural global feminisms, to develop the powerful resources of “intersectionality” necessary to analyze social relations from the standpoint of their daily lives, which were shaped by the mutually supportive or sometimes competitive relations between androcentrism, eurocentrism and bourgeois projects (2004b:257)

Collins (1998) aims to work with both the notion of a shared standpoint and the notion of intersectionality to develop a highly nuanced and specific model.

Intersectionality…highlights how … social groups are positioned within unjust power relations, but it does so in a way that introduces added complexity to formerly race-, class-, and gender-only approaches to social phenomena (1998:205).

Collins is careful to state that while it is easier to apply intersectionality to individual analyses of experience, it is important not to elevate individual analyses over structural analyses. She argues that individualism can be theoretically insidious, and can remove much of the structural bite of a more systemic analysis. In this context, intersectionality ‘provides an interpretive framework for thinking through how intersections of race and class, or race and gender, or sexuality and class, for example, shape any group’s experience across specific social contexts’ (Collins, 2000:208).

The goal of an intersectional standpoint is to situate woman and men within multiple systems of domination (Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1996). It is important, as Collins notes, to develop a contextual and specific analysis of each group with a view to theorizing hierarchies of intersectionality so that various oppressions are not deemed to be equivalent. Collins promotes analyses which develop and emerge from, rather than simplify and/or suppress the complexities of women’s experiences as both individuals and as members of a group.
Such a standpoint would identify the ways in which being situated in intersections of [various structural and personal characteristics] … constructs relationships among … women as a group, at the same time, a situated standpoint would reflect how these intersections frame …women’s distinctive history (Collins, 2000:228).

Naples (2008) developed what she terms ‘intersectional feminist praxis’, which integrates standpoint with intersectionality. She claims this approach offers methods for contesting dominant categories and revealing the complexities of ‘relations of ruling’ as they are manifest as inequalities and privileges in everyday life. It also foregrounds the ways in which activism or experience shapes knowledge. This approach to intersectionality reflects the feminist praxis that gave rise to the concept of intersectionality and honours the fact that theory develops in a dialogic fashion with practice.

In this research, women’s experiences as outlined in their narratives reveal the inequalities and privileges women encounter every day by combining motherhood with paid work. Following Collins (2000:228), my intention is to place ‘women’s experiences in the center of analysis without privileging those experiences’, by analyzing the experiences of women to reveal the power operating through discourses and institutions which create inequalities and privileges for these women. Their experience is the starting point for analysis, but it is what these experiences reveal about power and its effects that is the focus of this study. Theorizing these experiences shapes our knowledge of intersectionality and facilitates contesting dominant categories.

Analyzing the Composite Category ‘Working Mother’
Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and categories, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality studies, then, avoid the fully deconstructive rejection of all categorization, yet they remain deeply sceptical of the homogenizing generalizations that go with the territory of classification and categorization. The point is not to deny the importance of categories but to focus on the process by which they are created (Fernandes, 1997; Glenn, 2002). Moreover, the point of the analysis is not to isolate
different ‘identities’, within one ‘identity’, such an approach would simply reinscribe the additive model (McCall, 2005). Following Skeggs (2004) and McCall (2005) I treat dominant categories as constructs, but misleading constructs, which will allow the representation of the diversity and heterogeneity of experience.

To say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world. On the contrary, a large and continuing project for subordinated people - and indeed, one of the projects for which postmodern theories have been very helpful - is thinking about the way in which power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others (Crenshaw, 1995:375). The categories of mother, worker, and ‘working mother’, are not only of identification but are also hierarchically organized. As Crenshaw originally articulated, intersectionality is an alternative to the essentialism in ‘identity’ politics. Crenshaw specifies, however, that the problem is not the existence of categories but rather the values of hierarchy that fill up and inform categories.

According to Cole (2009), translating the theoretical insights of intersectionality into empirical research does not require the adoption of a new set of methods, but rather, a reconceptualization of the meaning and consequences of social categories. She suggests three questions that can guide researchers wishing to use this type of reconceptualization in their research: ‘Who is included within this category? What role does inequality play? And where are the similarities?’ I believe Cole’s (2009) reconceptualization of the meaning and consequences of social categories by interrogating membership, inequality and similarities within categories facilitates applying an intersectional standpoint to this empirical research project. ‘Who is included within this category? What role does inequality play? and Where are the similarities?’ in this order, each question takes researchers further away from an approach in which social categories are operationalized through apparently self-evident demographic items and the questions can be viewed as layers of intersectional enquiry, and facilitates focusing on ‘ontological separations as well as similarities’ (Letherby, 2003:57).

The question ‘Who is included within this category?’ aims to draw researchers’ attention to diversity within categories. Analyses that presume to focus on gender, say, in the absence of other category memberships, implicitly assume a host of other social statuses that usually go unnamed: middle class standing, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness
and white race (Sue, 2004). Scholars who attend to which groups are represented and which tend to be excluded – either by focusing their work on members of subordinate groups (hooks, 1996), or conversely, by explicitly identifying and investigating the multiple identities that define privilege (Farough, 2006; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003) disrupt these assumptions by identifying the ways that race, class or other identities shape the meaning of gender (Higginbotham, 1992). Such attention is critical because failure to attend to how social categories depend on one another for meaning renders our knowledge of any one category both incomplete and biased. Spelman (1988) noted that Chodorow (1978) considered only the specific practices of western families with race and class privilege when making universal claims about the characteristics of mothering. She concluded ‘it is theoretically significant…if statements that appear true about ‘men and women’ clearly aren’t true when we specify that we are talking about men and women of different classes or races’ (Spelman, 1988:80). Attending to who is included within a category can lead to a more nuanced understanding of how social categories of identity, difference and disadvantage shape experience and improves our ability to theorize and empirically investigate the ways social categories structure individual and social life. In this research, participants in the category being studied are white, women, mothers, employees, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, some of whom have partners, most of whom are Irish.

Cole’s (2009) second question is ‘What role does inequality play?’ Categories such as race, gender, social class and sexuality not only describe groups that may be different or similar, they encapsulate historical and continuing relations of political, material and social inequality and stigma. Mahalingham (2007) characterized intersectionality in terms of the interplay between person and social location, with particular emphasis on power relations and the values of hierarchy among various social locations. Asking ‘what role does inequality play?’ draws attention to the ways that multiple category memberships position individuals and groups in asymmetrical relation to one another, affecting their perceptions, experiences and outcomes (Cole, 2009). It also identifies differences in and across groups, and makes visible some ways these categories are constructed though historical and ongoing social practices. Constructs like race and gender affect beliefs about what is possible or desirable, and define the contours
of an individual’s opportunities and life chances through social and institutional practices (Boniolla-Silva, 1997; Risman, 2004). Hurtado (1989) theorized the ways structural inequality shapes contact between women who differ by race/ethnicity, arguing that the interests of white women and women of colour are deeply divided by their relationship to white men, the most privileged race/gender group in western culture. As wives, mothers and daughters of white men, white women derive social and economic benefits from existing inequities thus even those who are feminists may participate in a form of complicity with the status quo. Therefore, rather than merely calling for attention to the ways that these categories of identity, difference and disadvantage intersect (Knapp, 2005), we can identify specific mechanisms through which they do so (Cole, 2009).

Weber and Parra-Medina (2003) have made a useful distinction between looking ‘downstream’ for causes (i.e. in individual behaviour that might be associated with social category membership) and ‘upstream’ at ‘the group processes that define systems of social inequality’ (2003:190), such as laws, institutional practices and public policies. Considering the role of inequality enables looking ‘upstream’ by drawing attention to how ‘working mothers’ stand in relation to each other and to public and private institutions including families, workplaces and society, and correspondingly how political, material and social inequality leads to class and gender differences in outcomes (Reid, 1993; Eagly and Wood, 1999; Lott, 2004).

Asking ‘what role does inequality play?’ reveals that gender and motherhood are marking mechanisms for all women in this research, which leads to inequalities experienced at an individual level, in families, workplaces and society, but it is important, as Letherby (2003:57) notes, to recognize that while oppression is common, the forms it takes are conditioned by race, age, sexuality and other structural, historical and geographical differences between women. Differences in women’s class, marital status, occupation, and employment reveal inequalities between women and the ways these inequalities are the product of political, material and social inequality in the structural social system, which lead to different individual outcomes in terms of inequality or privilege.

Cole’s (2009) third question ‘Where are the similarities?’ facilitates looking for sites of commonality across difference. Asking ‘where are the similarities’ exposes
similar privileges as well as inequalities among the group. MacLean (2009) suggests the workings of privilege are often invisible to the privileged and in one sense, it is a commonplace observation that positions of social group privilege tend to shield privileged people from the actualities of other people’s oppression. Having privileges due to membership in dominant groups can insulate agents from opportunities to acquire knowledge about a given form of oppression whereas having experienced a given form of oppression provides opportunities for understanding its contours. As hooks (1986) argues, ‘organizing around your oppression’ may provide an excuse for many privileged women to ignore their own status and the oppression of others (Letherby, 2003: 50/51). MacLean (2009) argues that agents with multiple social group privileges are often positioned so that the intersections of structures of disadvantage are less readily visible to them, which means that oppression can appear less ‘intersectional’ from the standpoint of privilege. However, MacLean (2009) also suggests that a form of oppression appears separable or isolatable when the agent who is being oppressed is not simultaneously experiencing other types of oppression, but is in the presence of his/her own privileges. To the extent that they focus on their own position, oppression in relation to gender appears more obvious to women habitually in situations of social group privilege, and makes it difficult for these privileged women to appreciate their own privileges, or other women’s different oppressions. MacLean’s (2009) argument is relevant to this research. It may be obvious to these privileged, middle class ‘working mothers’ that they are oppressed because of their gender, both in family and in workplace. However, it may be less obvious to them that they are privileged by being, white, middle-class, able bodied, partnered and heterosexual. It is also critically important from an intersectional standpoint that in recognizing similarities, researchers remain sensitive to nuanced differences across groups even where similarities are found, for example, although middle class, white, partnered ‘working mothers’ and working class, white, single ‘working mothers’ might experience some of the same stressors they face in similar ways, their experiences are not equivalent or identical (Cole, 2009).

Intersectionality makes plain that gender, race, class and sexuality simultaneously affect the perceptions, experiences and opportunities of everyone living in a society stratified along these dimensions. To understand any one of these dimensions, we must
address them in combination. Cole’s (2009) insight suggests a way to approach the study of social categories with more complexity, and suggests ways to bring more nuance and context to empirical research. As Hancock (2007b) has argued, intersectionality does not simply describe a content specialization addressing issues germane to specific populations; it also is a paradigm for theory and research offering new ways of understanding the complex causality that characterizes social phenomena. This reconceptualization of social categories can help identify the inequalities and privileges women experience ‘downstream’ as a result of their behaviour deriving from their positioning within dominant discourses, and locate the causes of these inequalities and privileges ‘upstream’ in the structural social system, and reveal the ways that intersecting inequalities depend upon and mutually construct each other and work together to shape outcomes for women in the composite category ‘working mother’.

**Feminist Research Methodology**

There is no particular model of what feminist research should be, but essentially research is feminist if it is concerned with challenging women’s subordinate position, if it acknowledges power in the research process, articulates ethical issues and aspires to having political purpose (Reinharz, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Oakley, 1998; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998; Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Letherby, 2003).

In order to challenge women’s subordinate position, ‘gender is seen, not just as something to be studied, but an integral dimension of the research process’ (Maynard, 1994:16). Hawkesworth (2005:143) suggests that gender as an analytic category functions as a heuristic device ‘illuminating areas for enquiry, [framing] questions for investigations, [identifying] puzzles in need of exploration and [providing] concepts, definitions and hypotheses to guide research’.

Brayton (1997) argues feminist research differs from traditional research for three reasons. It actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between researcher and subject; it is politically motivated; and it begins with the standpoints and experiences of women.

The point of doing feminist research is not to score points for political correctness, or to attain methodological purity, but to give insights into
gendered social existence that would otherwise not exist (Ramanazoglu with Holland, 2002:147).

Acknowledgment and treatment of power relations in the research process is a defining feature of feminist methodology. Wolf (1996) claims that power is discernable in three interrelated dimensions.

The power differentials between the researcher and the researched and the resultant possibilities for exploitation, reciprocity and egalitarian ties cover the three dimensions of power – power in positionality, power during the research process and power in the post fieldwork stage (1996:19).

In the Foucauldian sense, power is exercised through discourse and discourses are regimes of ‘power/knowledge’ that is, structured ways of knowing and exercising power, and Foucault has exposed discourse as a centred form of power, distributed over a complex of discursive sites. ‘[I]t is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together’ (Foucault, 1977:100). As already noted, Letherby (2002) distinguishes between dominant and authoritative discourses, and in this intersectional research, having access to academic discourse positions me in an unequal relationship of power to participants because I have access to ‘a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic [because] discourse is about the production of knowledge through language’ (Hall, 2001:72). This is intersectional research and I am mindful of power in the research relationship.

Researchers’ power can be conceptualized as operating through multiple levels: through the hegemonic cultural perspective contained within the language we (must) use; through the subject positions we take up and are positioned within (including our deliberate claims to researcher positions); and through our particular individual relationships with participants and to our field of enquiry (Alldred, 1998:162). As researchers we often have access to greater academic and through data collection, experiential information, than our respondents and we analyze our data with reference to this knowledge as well as our own values and prejudices (Letherby, 2003:77). Oakley (1998:711) claims feminist researchers should be aware of ‘the moral obligation at the heart of feminism to treat other women as you would wish yourself to be treated’. Feminist research must be accountable to those who are researched and responsible for
producing knowledge that does not harm them. ‘We regard ourselves as people who conduct research among other people, learning with them, rather than conducting research on them’ (Wolcott, 1990:19 original emphasis). Feminist methodology is also a politics which seeks to explore power relations: between the researcher and the researched in the collection, analysis and production of data; in writing up and presenting the research findings; and maintaining a commitment to exposing and challenging power relations in society. Thus, ethics, politics and epistemology interrelate in feminist research. In this research I undertook a case study with a group of ‘working mothers’ located in a particular middle class Irish suburb, I employed feminist research methods and data analysis and addressed the issue of reflexivity.

Case Study
McCall (2005) asserts that case study approaches, which are compatible with the intercategorical complexity approach, represent the most effective way of empirically researching the meanings of social categories in light of their intersections. Case studies are an effective way of managing intersections because one can start with an individual, group, event, or context, then work outward to unravel how categories are lived and experienced (McCall, 2005). According to Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000), case studies strive to portray ‘the close-up reality and thick description of participants’ lived experiences’ (2000: 182). As McCall asserts, this approach considers what identities are being done, by whom and when and also considers when and how some categories might unsettle, undo or cancel out other categories as they intersect.

Personal narratives and single-group studies derive their strength from the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups (McCall, 2005). Personal narratives may aspire to situate subjects within the full network of relationships that define their social locations, but usually it is only possible to situate them from the partial perspective of the particular social group under study (McCall, 2005). Case studies have already been applied by Collins (2000), who traces ‘the family’ as a site of intersectionality; Fraser and Gordon (1997), who trace historically the various dimensions of the concept ‘dependency’; and Fernandes (1997), who examines the
‘politics of categories’ by examining the political production and mutual constitution in everyday practice of the categories of class, gender, caste, and community.

This case study examines the intersecting inequalities and privileges experienced by women who combine motherhood with paid work. I selected a middle-class suburb in a provincial city which is familiar to me and which I believed would facilitate access to many middle class ‘working mothers’. The area is long-established but has undergone a major population boom in the last ten years. This local area is identified as predominantly middle class and suburban.

Research Participants
I identified research participants as women with children who engage in paid work of any kind and elected to target the mothers of primary school-going children, allowing for the possibility that these women might also have older and younger children. In the area of the local study there are four primary schools, two boys’ schools and two girls’ schools with a school-going population between them of 1,800 children. In addition, access is provided to a wider community as pupils travel to primary schools in this area from other locations in the provincial city.

I received approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Limerick in December 2004 (Appendix B), and in January 2005, I approached the Principals of the four local primary schools, met with them and submitted written requests to the management of the four schools. I received permission to send participant letters home to mothers in the school bags of the children inviting women to contact me. The schools distributed the letters to those children who are currently living with their mothers (Appendix C). By the end of February 2005, thirty-eight women had contacted me, self-selecting to participate in this research. Women were almost evenly distributed between the four schools.

In Ireland, the 11 category Socio Economic Grouping (SEG) classification system brings together people with broadly similar economic and social status and people are assigned to a particular SEG on the basis of their occupational and employment status (CSO, 1996). The 7 category Social Class Groups classification aims to bring together persons with similar social and economic statuses on the basis of the level of skill or educational attainment required. The Social Class Group was first used in the 1996
Census and is based on the UK Standard Occupational Classification (SOC, 1995) with modifications to reflect Irish labour market conditions. In determining social class, occupations are ranked by the level of skill required on a social class scale ranging from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest).

Table 3: Irish Classification System.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic groups</th>
<th>Social Class Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Employers and managers</td>
<td>1 Professional workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Higher professional</td>
<td>2 Managerial and technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Lower professional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Non-manual</td>
<td>3 Non-manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Manual skilled</td>
<td>4 Skilled manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Semi-skilled</td>
<td>5 Semi-skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Unskilled</td>
<td>6 Unskilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Own account workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Farmers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Agricultural workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z All others gainfully occupied and unknown</td>
<td>7 All others gainfully occupied and unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants in the study, according to the Irish Classification System are ranked in the top five socio-economic groupings [A-E] and the top five social class groups [1-5].
Table 4: Participants’ Socio-economic Grouping and Social Class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Socio-economic Group</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freya</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eithne</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameila</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avril</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisling</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agatha</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamsin</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabine</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brona</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study was conducted in a middle class suburb of a provincial city, and in the 2006 Census (CSO, 2006d), data on the provincial city reveals that 12 per cent of females are classified as SEG A Employers and Managers, compared to 23 per cent of participants;
similarly 5 per cent of females in the city are classified as SEG B Higher Professionals compared to 17 per cent in the study, 7 per cent of females in the city are classified as SEG C Lower Professionals, compared to 30 per cent of participants and 13 per cent of females in the city are classified as SEG D Non-Manual compared to 27 per cent of participants. Only in SEG E Manual Skilled workers, were participants in the study lower, being 3 per cent in the local study, compared with 10 per cent in the city. This suggests the middle-class nature of the local suburb, relative to the city of which the suburb is a part.

Participant Biographies.
At the focus groups, participants completed biographical questionnaires (Appendix D) which provided details of women’s family, childcare and employment situations. The biographies below were largely provided at the time of the focus group discussions, however, changes in women’s circumstances which were revealed at interview are also included.

Angela is married with three children who range from 9 to 15 years of age and a husband who works full time. Angela works as a respite carer, working 14 hours a week. These hours are irregular based on clients’ needs. Angela is aged between 41 and 45 years, and her childcare is provided by a neighbour. Angela participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Cindy is married with two children aged 4 and 9. Cindy works as a retail sales assistant, working 20 hours a week. She is aged between 36 and 40 years, and her childcare is provided by her parents who collect her children from primary school. Cindy participated in a focus group discussion, but not an interview.

Amanda is married with two children aged 12 and 14 years. Amanda works as a Clinic Nurse Manager, working full time at 39 hours a week. She is aged between 41 and 45 years, and her childcare is provided by a childminder who comes to Amanda’s home.
Amanda’s husband works full time. Amanda participated in a focus group discussion and an interview.

Brona is married with three children aged 3 to 7 years. Brona works as a General Operator in a manufacturing company, working full time at 36 hours a week on a 12 hour shift pattern. Brona is aged between 36 and 40 years, and her childcare is provided by a childminder who comes to Brona’s home. Brona’s husband works full time. Brona participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Jean is married with three children aged 5 to 9 years. Jean works as a Chartered Accountant with a manufacturing company, working reduced hours at 30 hours a week. Jean is aged between 36 and 40 years, and her childcare is provided by a combination of parents and childminder. Jean’s older child is minded by her mother, while the younger two children go to a childminder in the childminder’s home. Jean’s husband works full time in a management role. Jean participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Kate is married with four children, aged 6 to 12 years. Kate works as a University Lecturer, working full time at 40+ hours a week. Kate is aged between 36 and 40 years and her childcare is provided by her sister who collects the children from school. Kate’s husband is self employed and works full time, running his own business. Kate participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Aisling is married with four children, aged 2 to 9 years. Aisling works full time as a teacher in further education, working 38 hours a week. Aisling is aged between 36 and 40 years, and she engages a childminder in the childminder’s home. Aisling’s husband is also a teacher, working full time. Aisling participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Jasmine is married with two children, aged 10 and 13 years. Jasmine works full time as a Primary School Principal, working 30 hours a week. Jasmine is aged between 41 and 45 years.
years, and childcare is provided by a combination of after-school club and Jasmine’s husband, who works at night time as a taxi-driver. Jasmine participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Sabine was married at the time of the focus group discussion, but subsequently separated from her husband. Sabine is aged between 36 and 40 years. Sabine has two children aged 5 and 8 years. At the time of the focus group, Sabine worked part time as an accounts assistant, working 17.5 hours a week and at the time Sabine’s parents-in-law provided childcare when necessary. Sabine participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview. By the time of the interview, Sabine had separated from her husband who had lost his job, and her childcare was provided by an au-pair. Sabine had also changed job and commenced full time work, working as a multi-lingual accounts payable clerk in a financial shared service centre.

Gina is married with two children, aged 3 and 6 years. Gina is aged between 36 and 40 years. Gina works as a Bank Official, and Gina job shares, working one week on, one week off. During the week Gina is at work, her children are minded by a childminder, who comes to Gina’s home. Gina’s husband works full time. Gina participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Yolanda is married with two children aged 3 and 6 years. Yolanda works as an accounts assistant. Yolanda is aged between 36 and 40 years and she engages a childminder for two days and her parents provide childcare for two days, Yolanda is taking parental leave one day a week for the other day. Yolanda works 32 hours per week. Yolanda’s husband works full time. Yolanda participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Tamsin has been divorced and remarried with a child from her first marriage who is 12 years old. Tamsin is aged between 36 and 40 years, and engages a childminder in the childminders’ home. Tamsin works full time as a Shipping Clerk, working 39 hours a week. Tamsin’s husband works full time. Tamsin participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.
Colleen was married at the time of the focus group discussion, but subsequently separated. Colleen is aged between 36 and 40 years. Colleen has a 7 year old child and works reduced hours as a secretary in a manufacturing company, working 32 hours a week. Colleen engaged a childminder in the childminder’s home. Colleen participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview. At the time of the interview, Colleen had changed her childminding arrangements and was using an after-school club.

Amelia is married and has three children aged 2 to 7 years, with a husband who works full time on a shift pattern. Amelia works as a nurse, working part time at 20 hours a week. Amelia is aged between 31 and 35 years, and Amelia has a childminder who comes into Amelia’s home. Amelia participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview. At the time of the interview Amelia had changed job and had moved from working in a public hospital to a private medical practice.

Avril is married and has five children aged from newborn to 15 years. Avril works as a Physiotherapist, working reduced hours at 28 hours a week. Avril is aged between 36 and 40 years and engages a childminder in Avril’s own home. Avril participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Audrey is married and has three children aged between 8 and 15 years. Audrey works full time as a Director of Nursing, and works 39 hours a week. Audrey is aged between 41 and 45 years, and Audrey’s husband works full time. Audrey participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Joy is married and has three children aged 3 to 8 years. Joy works part time between 8 and 16 hours a week doing market research. Joy is aged between 31 and 35 years and Joy’s husband works full time in a management role. Joy participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview. At the time of the interview, Joy had become pregnant with her fourth child.
Freya is married and has three children aged newborn to 8 years. Freya is aged between 31 to 35 years. Freya works full time as an accountant in a manufacturing company working 38 hours a week. Freya engages an au-pair for her older two children, while the baby attends a crèche. Freya’s husband works full time. Freya participated in a focus group discussion, but not in interview.

Florence is married with three children aged from 1 to 10 years. Florence works part time as a nurse, working two days a week. Florence is aged between 36 and 40 years and Florence employs a childminder who comes to Florence’s home. Florence’s husband works full time running his own business. Florence participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Amy is married with two children aged 7 and 10 years. Amy works part time as a midwife. Amy is aged between 41 and 45 years and at the time of the focus group Amy engaged a childminder in the childminder’s home, but subsequently engaged a childminder who comes to Amy’s home. Amy participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Collette is married with two children aged 1 and 7 years and a husband who works full time. Collette works full time as a Software Manager, working 38 hours a week. Collette is aged between 26 and 30 years and engages a childminder in the childminder’s home. Collette participated in a focus group discussion, but not in interview as she had moved job and left the local area.

Jane is divorced with one child, aged 9 years. Jane works as an Advertising Manager, working full time at 36 hours a week. Jane is aged between 36 and 40 years, and uses a combination of grandparents and a childminder in the childminder’s home. Jane participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Faye is married with two children aged 4 and 7 years. Faye works full time, working 45 hours a week as a Company Director. Faye is aged between 36 and 40 years. Faye
engages a childminder four days a week, while Faye’s husband minds the children on the fifth day. Faye participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Grace is married with two children, aged 5 and 9 years and a husband who works full time. Grace is aged between 36 and 40 years. Grace worked full time at the time of the focus group discussion, working 39 hours a week. Grace subsequently reduced her working hours. Grace engages a childminder in the childminder’s home. Grace participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Anita is married with two children, aged 11 and 12 years. Anita is aged between 41 and 45 years. Anita works as a nurse, part time at 15 hours a week and does not need to engage childcare. Anita participated in a focus group discussion, but not in interview.

Agatha is married with two children aged 7 and 11 years. Agatha works full time as a Travel Consultant, working 32 hours a week. Agatha is aged between 41 and 45 years, and her husband and her sister provide childcare. Agatha participated in a focus group discussion, but not in interview.

June is married with three children, aged 1 to 8 years. June works part time as a midwife, working 18 hours a week. June is aged between 36 and 40 and June engages a childminder in the childminder’s home. June’s husband works full time in journalism. June participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Anna is married with three children, aged 4 to 11 years. Anna works part time, working 18 hours a week. Anna is aged between 36 and 40, and Anna engages a childminder in the childminder’s home. Anna’s husband works full time. Anna participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

Anastasia is married with two children aged 10 years and 18 years. Anastasia works part time at 29 hours a week, providing personal care to a care recipient. Anastasia is aged between 41 and 45 years and childcare is provided when necessary by Anastasia’s
husband and her sister. Anastasia’s husband works full time, doing night shifts. Anastasia participated in a focus group discussion, but not in interview.

Eithne is married with two children aged 3 and 5 years. Eithne works full time, as a Product Development Executive, working 35 hours a week. Eithne is aged between 41 and 45 years and Eithne uses a combination of crèche and family care. Eithne’s husband works full time, working a shift pattern. Eithne participated in both a focus group discussion and an interview.

**Research Methods**
The qualitative methods of focus groups and semi-structured interviews were employed in this research project, because, as Letherby (2003:96) argues, we can enhance our understanding both by adding layers of information and by using one type of data to validate or refine another.

**Focus Groups**
I employed the qualitative method of focus groups to initially explore with women the ways dominant discourses of motherhood, working and caring were accepted, challenged, reinforced or resisted, to examine women’s experience of inequalities at the level of the individual as well as to reveal the range of diversity and difference within the group (Appendix E). The focus groups also served as a base for designing the interview guide.

Key features of a focus group are providing access to participants’ own language, encouraging the production of more fully articulated accounts and observing the process of collective-sense making and are particularly appropriate where primary qualitative data is required.

Focus groups are a particularly good choice of method when the purpose of the research is to elicit people’s understandings, opinions and views, or to explore how these are advanced, elaborated and negotiated in a social context (Wilkinson, 1998:187 original emphasis).
The reduced influence of the researcher makes focus groups suited to intersectional feminist research (Morgan, 1988:18) because there is greater scope for participants to set the research agenda and to develop the themes important to them (Cooper, Diamond and High, 1993). The relatively free flow of discussion and debate between the members of a focus group offers an excellent opportunity for listening to local voices (Murray et al., 1994) and for gaining insight into participants’ conceptual worlds on their own terms (Broom and Dozier, 1990).

Organizing focus groups was difficult, primarily because of participants’ (un)availability. Finding times that would suit six or seven women who were attempting to accommodate the focus group discussion in between their obligations to employers and to their families was not easy. For each group, I approached women from different industry sectors and whose children were in different schools, so that participants would be unlikely be acquainted with each other. Where possible I then selected women who worked in full and part time employment. After that, decisions were based on women’s availability to attend the group discussions and the availability of the venue. The local second-level school in the area provided a neutral, quiet venue for the focus group discussions. As I had contacted participants through participating primary schools, I was anxious to avoid using these primary schools as a venue, suspecting that their children’s education might dominate the women’s discussion. The secondary school was an ideal location, however, the school was only available on certain evenings due to constraints of evening classes and this was also a factor in arranging the focus groups, all of which took place between 7pm and 9.30pm on Monday and Wednesday evenings.

Five focus group discussions were held with thirty women, between February and April 2005. Prior to every group discussion, I answered women’s many questions regarding the study, women selected the pseudonyms they wished to use and signed consent forms (Appendix F). The use of the data generated by the focus groups to inform the themes to be explored in semi-structured interviews allowed research participants much greater scope to set the research agenda (Cooper, Diamond and High, 1993). Wilkinson (1998) claims that the researcher is offered an insight into the commonly held assumptions, concepts and meanings that constitute and inform participants’ talk about
their experiences. Focus group interactions revealed shared ways of talking, shared experiences and shared ways of making sense of these experiences.

**Interviews**

In order to locate women’s intersecting inequalities at the level of Irish society and to explore how the relationship between the social relations of mother and worker intersect with the institutions of workplace, family and society, and were experienced by individual women, I elected to also explore these issues with women in semi-structured, one-to-one interviews. Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method for this research, not because interviews are ‘the paradigmatic feminist method’ (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994:34), but because in-depth face to face interviews provide the best way to explore with women their agency, relationships, negotiations and arrangements with the dominant institutions of society. This is particular, contingent and personal and better explored in interviews which allow a depth of exploration that would not be possible among a group of strangers in a focus group discussion. Interviews were very important in allowing for a ‘contextualization of experience’ (Rose, 2001) and a closer look at the multiple dimensions of inequality within women’s lives (Siltanen, 2005).

Interviews have historically been seen by feminist researchers to provide the route through which inter-subjectivity and non-hierarchical relationships between women researchers and women participants can be developed (Duello Klein, 1983; Hartsock, 1987). Interviews have been widely used in feminist research because they indicate a concern with subjective meanings (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984; Hartsock, 1987). A semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix G), designed to reveal women’s take up or refusal of the dominant ‘working’ and ‘caring’ discourses, construction of their identities as mothers and workers, women’s agency in navigating between competing discourses and participants relationships to family, workplace and society.

For feminists who have a particular orientation to women's subjective experiences, there is a disconnect between theory and practice and Oakley (1981) claims interviewing women may be a contradiction in terms, because the interview was historically a masculine method to obtain authorized knowledge and defined the interviewee as subordinate. In feminist research, the objective of exploring women’s
experiences in interviews is best achieved when the interviewer is prepared to invest her personal identity, and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical (Brayton, 1997). Perceptions of power are minimized when the interviewer and interviewee share membership of the same minority group, which participants assumed we did. However, I was also aware of the power imbalance between myself and research participants. I had access to their narratives even while they could elect how much or how little to share with me, but I, nevertheless, had the power to interpret and present their experiences. This is intersectional research and the relationship between participants and myself had potential to be a hierarchical one.

I conducted twenty-four semi-structured interviews with individual participants, sometimes in their homes, and sometimes in mine. These were conducted between January and April 2006. In the period between the focus group discussions and interviews, there had been many changes in participants’ circumstances. One woman became pregnant, one had a baby, two women changed jobs, one moved house, and two separated from their husbands. This illustrates the fast pace of change in contemporary lives. Six women were not contactable, which suggests their circumstances too had changed, or they were no longer interested in participating in the study following their contribution to the focus group discussions.

All women who participated in interviews had reflected on their participation in the focus group and some wished to clarify or change some part of their earlier contribution. Some women wished to question further some aspect of ‘working motherhood’ they had not considered prior to participating in the focus group discussion. All participants claimed to have found focus group discussions informative, and to have found it helpful to have met other women who are ‘working mothers’ as all participants expressed their lack of knowledge of the ways other women combine motherhood with paid work.

**Data Analysis**

As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) found, the area of analysis tends to be neglected in feminist research. Smith (1999) claims that while many feminist scholars have developed sociologies based on women’s experience, using ethical, consultative ways of conducting
research, analyzing and writing up the data is problematic because it places the subject at a remove from the finished written product and the experience from which she starts.

For while we have developed methods of working with women that are fully consultative and open, a moment comes after talk has been inscribed as text and becomes data when it must be worked up as sociology (Smith, 1999:46).

Smith (1999:8 original emphasis) argues for a sociology for women which exploits the power of writing and of the text to analyze and isolate dimensions of organization that are fully embedded in the actualities of living. The aim, she claims, is not to explain people’s behaviour, ‘but to be able to explain to them/ourselves the socially organized powers in which their/our lives are embedded and to which their/our activities contribute’ (Smith, 1999:8).

There are different voices in women’s narratives in the focus groups and in the interviews. The status of the data is very different in the different settings. In the public focus group discussion, women clearly drew on dominant discourses and were aware of the public nature of the discussion, and stressed their efforts in relation to caring for their children and appearing to valorize motherhood. However, in the private interview situation, women revealed more about the difficulties they experience combining motherhood with paid work, their reasons for participating in the study, as well as intimate details of their relationships with family, employment and wider social networks. In this study, there are differences in the statuses of the data from the focus group discussion and the interview, which reveals women’s awareness of authoritative discourses in the public forum of the focus group, and women’s privately held views in the interview situation.

In order to apply a feminist methodology which acknowledges the intersectional position of ‘working mothers’ in Ireland, I decided to start at the level of discourse in order to reveal the ways women understood dominant discourses of motherhood, working and caring. As noted in Chapter 2, following Foucault (1977; 1981; 1982), women, mothers and workers are subject positions constituted through discourse, rather than pre-existing discourse. The concept of discourse shows how the fixing of meaning is never a neutral act, but always privileges certain interests. Thus, the question of what discourses
prevail and whose interests they serve are most important (Weedon, 1997: 11). This is not to discount the importance of material or economic issues, but to emphasize the importance of culture and discursive power.

Social structures and phenomena are experienced and understood at the level of the individual subjectivity, and expressed in stories about lives. Narratives can show how people actively, and sometimes knowingly, take up positions in certain discourses, and how they are positioned by other people, and by social structures and discursive practices. I recognize that there are many competing discourses which gave rise to contradictions. In this analysis, I embraced these contradictions and the tensions they produced, I examined them rather than tried to control or resolve them in order to ‘produce an awareness of the complexity, historical contingency and fragility of the practices that we invent to discover the truth about ourselves’ (Lather, 1991: 7).

What is at stake then, in the analysis of women’s own accounts, is the ways in which the classed and gendered formations of ‘mother’, ‘worker’, and ‘working mother’ ‘operate between [the] abstract structures and concrete specifics of everyday life’ (Skeggs, 1997:8). The focus is on the dynamics of the criteria used for what is seen as the ‘truth’ of the matter in the accounts (Gray, 2004:17). How come certain things can and cannot be articulated? How are particular ‘truths’ authorized and accorded legitimacy by participants? What is produced or made possible in and through these accounts? How is experience, as Rose (1999a:31) asks, ‘cut…in certain ways, to distribute attractions and repulsions, passions and fears across it?’

In her study of migrant Irish women, Gray (2004) considers how certain languages of description, explanation and judgement come to acquire the value of ‘truth’ and the kinds of actions and techniques that are made possible by these truths (Rose, 1999a:8). This approach challenges any essential unified interiority of the subject prior to its expression in thought, conduct, emotion and action, which in turn cannot be understood outside of their relation to certain knowledges and expertise (Rose, 1996). The accounts are analyzed to identify the ‘truths’ that are discursively invoked to explain why things are seen and constructed by women in particular ways (Gray, 2004:17).

Excerpts from the group discussions and interviews are given an independent existence as texts that are brought together to produce readings of how the categories
‘mother’, ‘worker’ and ‘working mother’ are constituted in a local study (Gray, 2004:18). This is not to present evidence of women’s experience. As Gray (2004:18) argues, when experience is constructed as incontestable evidence, the discursive construction of experience and its contextualized conditions of production are ignored. Individuals do not have experience; instead it is subjects who are constituted through experience (Scott, 1993:401).

The group discussions and interviews represent new empirical data and are important cultural constructions in themselves. They are necessarily mediated by my selection from the transcripts, my interpretations of the transcripts and my theoretical concerns. I am distanced from the accounts by my position as researcher and interpreter. By representing the accounts within the framework of a thesis, I ‘take control’ of a body of data that involved particular contexts of collection, recording and transcribing and which could be read, interpreted and re-presented in many ways at different points in the process, and could have been interpreted differently by different researchers.

Focus Group and Interview Analyses
Group discussions allowed participants to share their understandings, opinions and views, in their own language and allowed me to be a participating observer to the interaction of the women in the group. This provided insights into the ways women talk about, and experience ‘working motherhood’ and the shared way they made sense of these experiences. Focus group interactions revealed not only shared ways of talking, but also shared experiences and shared ways of making sense of these experiences, which offered an insight into the commonly held assumptions, concepts and meanings of ‘working mothers’ as well as participants’ awareness and engagement with or rejection of dominant discourses and norms.

Focus groups were designed to reveal dominant discourses, women’s experience of inequalities at the level of the individual as well as revealing the range of diversity and difference within the group. Therefore, I found applying a discourse analysis to the focus group transcripts was useful because ‘it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together’ (Foucault, 1977:100). To begin this analysis, I focused on agreements and disagreements between participants in focus group discussions. Areas that were contested indicated strong views, and women felt variously threatened or supported by
dominant discourses. There were some areas of unanimous agreement suggesting that women had taken up a particular discursive position and identified with it in a variety of ways. Women demonstrated the effects of norms of ‘good mother’ and ‘ideal worker’ on their lives by sharing many examples of the ways they balance responsibilities to work and home. Areas of agreement were illuminating in outlining the contests between women to demonstrate their self-regulating and self-normalizing behaviours in terms of their desire to conform to normative assumptions of motherhood.

Areas of disagreement outlined the extent to which women subscribed to or opposed dominant discourses. It was expected that the discourses women would draw on when sharing experiences of being ‘working mothers’ would include motherhood, caring and working, however, analysis of focus group transcripts revealed that discourses of neo-liberalism, feminism, motherhood and individualism strongly influence women’s concepts of ‘worker’ and ‘mother’ and these are internalized by women. It was in the disagreements that women’s attachment to, or refusal of, these discourses were revealed. One of the striking aspects of the disagreements and contested issues in the focus group discussions was the attacking and defensive behaviour of some participants. During focus group discussions women were forced to confront different ways of being mothers and workers. This led to a search for validation of participant’s own circumstances, values and choices. In some discussions, women were unable to validate their own or other women’s choices when confronted with alternative ways of being ‘mothers’ and ‘workers’ and this created considerable tension.

In approaching analysis of the interview transcripts, I found it helpful to conduct several readings, each with a different focus, and this approach originated from Mauthner and Doucet (1998), even though I did not explicitly use their ‘voice-centred relational method’. They developed a model of data analysis, which views subjects as relational beings, situated in a web of complex social relationships. The method is designed to

[t]ranslate this relational ontology into methodology and into concrete methods of data analysis by exploring individual’s narrative accounts, in terms of their relationships to the people around them and their relationships to the broader, social, structural and cultural contexts within which they live (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998:126).
I found reading interview transcripts time and again, each time reading with a specific purpose, provided a more complete and layered analysis of the interview transcripts. I conducted four readings, each focusing on a different aspect of this intersectional research project. The first reading sought to identify the discourses women draw on. Following analysis of the focus group discussions, which revealed the influence of discourses of motherhood, feminism, individualism and neo-liberalism on women’s lives, the interview transcripts revealed the extent of each individual woman’s attachment to or refusal of these discourses. In a similar way to Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998) method, the second reading explores women’s relational and individual concerns. I specifically sought to identify whose concerns mattered most to women, and if these concerns changed in different times and situations. The third reading located these relational and individual concerns within a wider social nexus and sought to identify the operation of power at the intersection of relational and individual concerns with family, workplace and society. Finally, I read the transcripts for evidence of women’s agency in the ways they combine motherhood with paid work. While this approach is similar to that of Mauthner and Doucet, (1998), the significant difference is my emphasis on dominant discourses, because of the relevance of discourse as a political process in this intersectional research.

In order to reveal the patterns and the configurations of inequality, following Ferree (2009) and McCall (2005), a comparative analysis of both focus group and interview analyses facilitated identifying the patterns of inequalities women experience, by combining motherhood with paid work. Some patterns are experienced by all women because of the intersection of motherhood with paid work, while other patterns are experienced by women in similar occupations and family situations.

**Reflexivity**

Feminist researchers are required to engage in personal reflexivity, that is, to be aware of the ways in which self affects both research processes and outcomes and to rigorously convey to readers of research accounts how this happens (Williams, 1993:578). Cotterill and Letherby (1993) stress it is important to acknowledge the intellectual and personal presence of the researcher in all stages of the research process.
Haraway (1991:88) claims ‘feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge’. This allows for a multitude of viewpoints. It allows and encourages feminist researchers to bring their own particular location and position into the research, to acknowledge and build on their partial perspective, but it makes it imperative for them to do so before any discussion of another’s reality can be introduced. O’Connell (2004) claims the researcher must engage in reflexivity and make her position visible: to herself in order to avoid falling into the trap of believing herself to be ‘objective’ and disinterested; to her research participants so that they can freely choose if and how they wish to participate in her research; and to her readers so that they can utilize this information to further illuminate and critique the research findings.

Hartsock (1987) argued that one’s positionality as a woman is crucial in gaining understanding of other women, and that the epistemological contribution of women researchers is their ‘embodied subjectivity’ because as members of the subordinated group, they have greater potential to have fuller knowledge. Finch (1984) suggests that being a clergyman’s wife during the time of her research with clergymen’s wives meant that she was perceived as ‘one of them’ by respondents, which she argues, both equalized the relationship and justified her interest in the issue. However, Bolles (1985) and Kumar (1992) challenge the assumption of epistemic privilege and ask if it actually does take one to know one? Similarly, Sudbury (1998:29-30) comments there is no guarantee that sharing the same location as the researcher will facilitate the production of ‘truth’. Narayan (1989) argues against any presumption that experiencing oppression will enable one individual to understand others, but she believes that those who have experienced oppression of the group they research are more likely to have critical insights than will outsiders.

It is a mistake to assume that because knowledge is socially constructed based on position/location, then those who are differently located can never attain some understanding of or sympathy for the experiences of others. This would require a commitment to relativism that is not necessary or useful (Narayan, 1989:219-220).

Moi (1999) questions whether the location or speaking position is always as relevant as we now appear to think it is. For Moi it is incumbent on us to illustrate why location is significant to any analysis. Moi challenges us to carefully establish patterns of
say racism or classism and then to make appropriate judgements about how issues of locationality contribute to our argument or understanding. Certainly where

[a] problem of interpretation or evaluation has arisen…we do need to look at who is speaking, what was said, to whom it was said, under what circumstances it was said, and so on (Moi, 1999:146).

Harding (1991) argues for ‘strong objectivity’ as a hallmark of feminist research, in this, one does value the other’s perspective but does not ‘go native’ or merge oneself with the researched. One seeks to consider the particularity of cultural location from critical distance (Hughes, 2002:161). Maynard (1994:16) and Letherby (2003:141) state that rather than being seen as a source of bias, the personal involvement of the interviewer is an important element in establishing trust and thus obtaining good quality information. Reflexivity, according to Maynard (1994:16) can be expressed in two rather differing ways: it can mean reflecting upon, critically examining and exploring analytically the nature of the research process in an attempt to demonstrate the assumptions about gender relations which are built into a specific project; it may also refer to understanding the ‘intellectual biography’ of researchers.

For this research project, my interest stems from my experience as a mother in employment. Letherby (1999) argues this is not unusual, as many academic research projects bear an intimate relationship to researchers’ lives. However, I acknowledge that not all employed mothers share the same experiences. Hartsock (1987) argues that one’s position in the social hierarchy vis a vis other groups potentially limits or broadens one’s understanding of others. In my view, epistemic privilege is useful in providing a starting point for the researcher’s reflexivity, but does not in itself make the research project feminist. It is also important to note, as Letherby (2003:140) claims, the interests and priorities of the researcher and the researched are likely to be different. Respondents have different motivations for being involved in social research, sometimes they wish to help the researcher, sometimes they wish to ‘set the record straight’, sometimes they wish to ‘get something off their chest’, or even to ‘educate the world’ (Letherby, 2003:140). I asked all participants why they participated in the study and the most common response was that women wanted to know how other women combined motherhood with paid work.
In my own working life, I have twenty years experience across industry sectors. For eight of those years, prior to leaving industry, I was a mother, at the time in my career when I moved from middle to senior management positions. My experience during these years was of being an ‘outsider’, and having a definite sense of discomfort because no matter how much commitment I demonstrated to employment, I felt that I was regarded as having conflicting priorities, because I am a mother. The experience of being an outsider and knowing at a deep level, no matter how I played the man’s game by the man’s rules, I would always be ‘other’ and ‘different’ because I am a woman, and I am a mother, was frustrating and exhausting. In addition to my own personal experience, my observation of friends and colleagues, and their stories of their efforts in juggling employment and family responsibilities generated interest in researching this topic. In 2003, I completed an MA in Women’s Studies (O’Hagan, 2003) which explored the extent of the ‘satisficing’ (Crompton and Harris, 1999:136) in which ‘working mothers’ engage. The perspectives and analysis offered by Women’s Studies facilitated my ability to name that feeling of discomfort and to identify gender regimes in families, workplaces and wider society. That research generated further interest in exploring the underlying reasons for this ‘satisficing’ and the causes of the multiple intersecting inequalities women experience by being both mothers and workers.

With regard to this study, the research design, the recruitment of participants and selection of research methods all were designed to be collaborative with participants involved in setting the research agenda. My own position as a ‘working mother’ was helpful in providing access to participants and establishing a relationship with them. Participants saw me as an insider, who had an empathy with their social location and an understanding of the dynamics and play of social relationships that inform being a ‘working mother’. Participants also identified with me being similar to themselves, middle class, white and belonging to the area of the local study. Participants frequently expressed comfort in sharing their experiences with me because I have first hand knowledge of the situation (Matsumoto, 1996:165). This created a dilemma for me in the relationship with participants, and also in analyzing the data, as participants assumed my values and interests were synonymous with theirs. However, as researcher, I am also an outsider. Collins uses the term ‘outsider-within’ to describe ‘the location of people who
no longer belong to any one group’ (Collins, 1998:5), as well as ‘social locations or border spaces occupied by groups of unequal power’, thus, in her formulation, outsider-within refers not to mere duality or plurality but to the power relations which are implicated therein. Outsiders within are able to gain access to the knowledge of the group/community which they inhabit (or visit), but are unable to either authoritatively claim that knowledge or possess the full power given to members of that group.

Collins (1998) points out that one need not be marginalized to have access to this kind of methodology; intellectuals in the academy can make a conscious effort to take part in this ‘migration’ to the borderlands, boundaries, or outsider-within locations linking communities of differential power (1998:233). However, Collins cautions ‘neither the relationships among people in outsider-within locations nor the knowledges produced in these spaces are inherently progressive’ (1998:234) and she echoes hooks’ (1984) call for self-reflexivity.

Following focus group discussions, I was surprised at the extent of women’s efforts to ensure their children’s acquisition of cultural capital; however I reflexively recognized these behaviours in myself. I was also, following focus group discussions, surprised by the treatment of childminders by some women, however, the issue of childcare is one area where privileges and inequalities are clearly evident and I reflexively decided deserves detailed analysis even though this may not meet with participants’ approval. The practice of reflexivity, I found personally very difficult, if enlightening. I did not enjoy reflecting on my own position, refining and reviewing my ontology as the research developed and acknowledging that I share privileges as well as inequalities with participant ‘working mothers’.

The most difficult area for me was data analysis and acknowledging my position of power in this aspect of the research process, because of

[t]he power of researchers to decide what they have in common with those they research, and how difference can be represented. Making this power explicit raises uncomfortable problems about conceptualising and managing the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Ramanazoglu with Holland, 2002:107).

I am conscious that participants identified with me as a white, able-bodied, middle-class, woman, mother and employee, who is sympathetic to the difficulties
women experience by combining motherhood with paid work. I acknowledge I am privileged to have access to these women’s narratives and I have undertaken to present the findings of the research to participants, however, I am aware that their expectation of the findings and the actual findings may be quite different. Even if academics do engage in ongoing reflexivity, this does not alter the structural conditions under which they work. The dilemma posed by unequal power between researcher and research subject is not readily resolved, even when the researcher works with emancipatory intent (Lentin, 1993).

It is generally the researchers who produce the final text, the written record of the research event. This gives them a power of definition which cannot be abrogated at will… One cannot escape the reality of power relations even within the language of emancipation (Lynch, 2000:84/85)

This dilemma exposes very clearly the intersectional nature of the relationship between participants and myself and following Wolf (1996) and Lynch (2000) I am very aware of the possibilities for exploitation in the post-fieldwork stage. Letherby (2003:76) notes, research relationships are complex encounters and the ‘reports’ that arise from them are complex too. Cotterill and Letherby (1993) suggest that researchers need to acknowledge the relevance of their personal as well as intellectual biographies and have responsibility for providing accounts of the research process so that readers have access to the procedures which underlie the way knowledge is presented and constructed by the researcher. It is hoped that my practice of reflexivity and acknowledging my personal and intellectual biography and ‘outsider within’ status, will enable readers to access the way this research was conducted and understand why it is presented in this format.

However, research that starts with the everyday does not finish there. Treating people’s everyday lives as a sociological problematic means exploring the interactions between women and wider social structures and relations (Smith, 1987; McCall, 2005). This research reaches out from the experience of participants to explore gendered power relations in Irish society. By revealing the full range of experiences and complexities within and between the group of ‘working mothers’, I develop a ‘working mothers’ standpoint, which reveals the operation of power at individual and societal levels and the operation of patriarchal power through discourses, which reveals the symbiotic
relationship between categories and intersections, and which creates and maintains inequalities and privileges for ‘working mothers’ in one middle class Irish suburb.

**Conclusion**
In order to apply a feminist research methodology to the empirical issue of the complex multiple intersecting inequalities experienced by ‘working mothers’ in the local study, I have applied a feminist intersectional standpoint, research methodology and intersectional analysis. This methodology and analysis aims to explore the differences and complexities of experience embodied in the social location of ‘working mother’ and at various points of intersection with family, workplace and society. This approach facilitates looking ‘downstream’ at behaviours and individual agency and ‘upstream’ at the operation of power in the structural social system.

The social relations of class, gender, mother and worker intersect with the institutions of the family, workplace and society and these intersections give rise to inequalities and privileges for individual women. The way these inequalities and privileges are created and sustained is by the disciplinary yet productive power operating through the dominant discourses of motherhood, neo-liberalism, feminism and individualism. I explore these inequalities and privileges and the operation of power in the empirical chapters which follow through the key concepts of choice, care and time.
In this chapter I explore the choices women make and the constraints women experience by combining motherhood with employment and examine where women see morality in their choices to combine motherhood with paid work. Choice always means the assumption of responsibility and making choices therefore involves making claims about the individual’s construction of the self as a moral actor. As Bauman (2000) argues, because individuals must construct their own lives, they are constantly faced with moral choices, such as whether or not to use contraceptives, and whether or not to have an abortion. I examine these choices in relation to the Myth of Motherhood (Oakley, 1974), because women’s decisions regarding combining motherhood with paid work are frequently made in relation to the assumptions contained in ‘the myth’. I also explore the ways discourses of motherhood, individualism, neo-liberalism and feminism influence women’s decision making, and examine the inequalities and privileges women experience because of the choices they make. I expose patterns between discourse and intersectionality which create and sustain these inequalities and privileges.

**Choice**

The choice to have a career conflicts with motherhood. Having a career and electing to engage in paid work requires that women be free to perform as ‘ideal workers’ unencumbered by care responsibilities. Careers and working outside the home are entwined with the individualism, rights and freedoms of liberalism. This can be seen in the language of choice that has come to prominence in recent years in political discourses and policies. ‘The idea that we are autonomous human beings who can choose the kind of personal life we wish to live has become a deeply entrenched one’ (Plummer, 2000:432).

In contemporary societies people are charged and burdened with choices about how to live their own lives and create their own biographies. ‘The contemporary individual ‘is characterized by choice, where previous generations had no such choices… he or she must choose fast, as in a reflex’ (Lash, 2002: ix). There is a perceived decline in
the significance of categories of identity such as nation, religion and class, and these forms of authority are being replaced by the authority of the individual who is involved in a process of self-invention (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). At an individual level men and women ‘can and should, may and must, decide for themselves how to shape their own lives’ (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: ix). At the institutional level, people are linked into the institutions of the labour market and welfare state, legal system, educational system and state bureaucracy which have emerged with modern society. These institutions produce various regulations that are addressed to the individual and they demand and promote people’s active steering of their own lives. ‘We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves… what the individual becomes is dependant on the reconstructive endeavours in which he or she engages’ (Giddens, 1991:75).

Within assumptions of rational choice one has a list of options and carefully selects the most appropriate within the ordinary constraints that exist of time, money or information. Within rational choice theory, therefore, the individual is conceptualized as primarily motivated by the rewards and costs of their actions and the likely profit they can make. Becker (1991: ix) comments that rational choice ‘assumes that individuals maximize their utility from basic preferences that do not change rapidly over time’.

Within individualist conceptualisations of choice, the amount of choice available to individuals in most areas of their lives contributes to high expectations in all areas. Schwartz (2004:71) argues, because we have more options, we have an obligation to make the ‘right’ choice.

When you have no options, what can you do? You will feel disappointment, maybe; regret, no. With no options, you just do the best you can. But with many options, the chances increase that a really good one is out there, and you may well feel that you ought to have been able to find it.

Anna demonstrates anxiety about making the ‘right’ choice, following her decision to reduce her working hours in order to be available to her children.

One time I did feel torn, I suppose, is when I actually made the choice to go part time and about a week later, they [children] all wanted to know when they were going back to Mary’s [childminder]. You know, why did I bother? Because they loved going down there, you know. So, I felt, God, had I made the right choice? (Anna, Interview).
Anna desires to be available to care competently and professionally for her children because of her positioning within motherhood discourse, and she chooses to work part time. However, Anna experiences emotional difficulties because of her positioning within individualism and neo-liberalism discourses, and describes herself as ‘torn’. Making the ‘right’ choice is important to participants, however, as Davies (1991:43) notes, the choices the individual makes may be based on rational analysis, but desire may subvert rationality. Desires are integral to the various discourses through which each person is constituted and are not necessarily amenable to change through rational analysis. ‘Working mothers’ are constituted through discourses of neo-liberalism, which produce the desire to participate in paid work and the development of children’s knowledge and skills; feminist discourses which produce the desire to participate in paid work and public life; discourses of individualism which produce the desire to exercise autonomy while motherhood discourses produce the desire to be available to their children and fulfill the demands of intensive nurturing.

Women are obliged to choose between motherhood and paid work or make decisions about ways to combine the two. One may feel autonomous and free to choose, but the power of regulatory discourses means that such choice is both forced and of false appearance. This is because

\[ \text{the subject’s positioning within particular discourses makes the “chosen” line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action, but because one has been subjectively constituted through one’s placement within that discourse to want that line of action (Davies, 1991:46, original emphasis).} \]

The subject positions which women may take up are made available through these discourses, but not all subject positions are equally available. Individuals have differential access to particular discursive positions and discourses have different gendered and classed implications and we can only ‘pick up the tools that are lying there’ (Hughes, 2002:100). In this way, choices are understood as contextualized within the specific regulatory discourses to which we have access. Thus, preferences and choices cannot be decontextualized and Nussbaum (2000) argues, we need to

\[ \text{conduct a critical scrutiny of preference and desire that would reveal the many ways in which habit, fear, low expectations and unjust background} \]
conditions inform people’s choices and even their wishes for their own lives (2000:114).

Hakim (2000; 2003; 2004), argues women’s recently found capacity to exercise ‘choice’ is a reflection of their preferences to be ‘home centred’, ‘work centred’ or ‘adaptive’. These choices, she argues, are dependant on women’s greater attachment to home and family or to the workplace. Hakim (2000) has argued that research on the decision to return to work or not, and attitudes towards childcare show that women’s choices are determined first by a woman’s values, and only second by practical issues such as the availability and cost of childcare. Duncan (2003) also found that women, when forced to prioritize, positioned themselves on a continuum with home at one extreme and work at the other.

It is not disputed that attitudes will shape individual behaviour, or that particular sets of attitudes to work and family may be found across a range of social positions and education levels, however, as Crompton (2006:175) argues, it would seem unwise to assume that women’s employment behaviours may be primarily accounted for by the hypothesized existence of different ‘types’ of women, as ‘preference theory’ suggests. It is not possible to examine women’s preferences without exploring the availability of subject positions deriving from dominant discourses.

Women’s lives are more nuanced and textured than the simple polarization of paid work and unpaid care would suggest and women themselves stress the value they place on both activities. Women articulate their desires for autonomy, for social and economic independence, and their desire to work towards self-actualization. Women also articulate their desires to care competently and professionally for their children. Women who are ‘working mothers’ have difficulty experiencing autonomous action in the face of motherhood discourses. Women with dependant children are neither autonomous nor free to make choices that advance their own interests. However, McNay (2000:10) comments women do exercise agency, and much feminist research devoted to the uncovering of the marginalized experiences of women ‘attests to the capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities’. In examining women’s choices to combine motherhood with paid work, it is possible to see the exercise of agency, as well as the cultural sanctions and structural
inequalities which women encounter as constraints on their freedom to make these choices.

Choice in ‘working mothers’ decision making

Kate has a very busy life, with four children and a demanding career. She claims to be exercising her autonomy by maintaining her commitment to her career.

It’s a choice. I choose to do these things. I’m not good at saying no, that’s my problem… I don’t know how I would even define my hours of work, I don’t know how I would calculate my hours of work really…It’s not really a decision for me….It’s not a choice for me to be part time. No, my workload is much greater now than it ever was at any other time in my career. But it was never a choice to be part time or full time (Kate, Interview).

Kate suggests if she wants to have a career, she has no choice but to make a full time commitment to it. Kate has invested heavily in her career and describes her working hours as 40+ per week. She volunteers for extra work, gives media interviews at all hours and on two occasions she has been to the U.S. for work, and brought her four children with her for five and six months respectively. It is the nature of her work and the culture of the organization that progression in her career is dependant on demonstrating a high level of commitment, which Kate does. However, Kate claims that she is in control of her life, and chooses to work as hard as she does. She could take life at an easier pace, but she does not.

It is self-inflicted. I know there are people in my position, in the kind of job that I do, who take life at an easier pace than I do. And I could do it that way, but it’s just not for me (Kate, Interview).

Kate perceives she has a choice, like the people she mentions above, Kate could choose to ‘take life at an easier pace’, however, she does not select this option, because of her positioning within individualism discourses.

Choosing to work and having the opportunity to work does not mean combining motherhood with paid work is necessarily easy. There is a gender order in society that pervades organizational culture and privileges male ways of working and organizing. The social relations of gender are embedded in complex ways in both the formal and informal workings of organizations and are concealed beneath apparently gender neutral policies relating to targets and performance. These ways of working disadvantage
women occupationally and socially in ways that are made invisible by being presented as both normal and inevitable (Connell, 1987; 1995; 1999; Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997; Bourdieu, 2001; Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Kate has an almost impossibly busy life, yet she describes it as her ‘self-inflicted’ choice. Clearly her positioning within individualism discourses influences her choice to attempt to behave as an ‘ideal worker’, despite having four children, and the practical difficulties involved in combining her career with motherhood.

When mothers use choice rhetoric, they are being realistic in a society where the best jobs require ideal workers to have the ability to command a flow of family work few mothers enjoy (Williams, 2000). The subject position of the agentic person who can make rational choices and act upon them and that experiences oneself as ‘continuous, unified, rational and coherent’ (Davies, 1991:43) is mainly available to middle-class males, thus men have greater access to discourses of autonomy (Hughes, 2002). According to Hadfield (1995), autonomy and choice are traps that will only further ensnare women, because the gender order in society and family prevents many women from exercising ‘free’ choice, yet the individualist burden of exercising choice applies to women as well as to men.

The rhetoric of choice is central to the neo-liberal agenda: we are all the agents of our own choices. Not only the ‘at risk’ girls and young women, lone parents and those with little cultural capital, the ‘reflexivity losers’ (Lash, 1994; Adkins, 2002), but also those claiming to be more successful, the women who complete their schooling, obtain university degrees and professional training, the ‘reflexivity winners’ (Lash, 1994), are faced with conflicts in their personal lives that increasingly appear as individual decisions, as investments even. Kate’s conflict appears as an individual decision, but is the outcome of Kate being socially produced as both mother and worker, and her multiple positioning within both discourses.

For many women, the achievement of autonomy is both tenuous and ambivalent because desire is constituted through the discourses which one is subject of and subject to. Women are subject to, and the subject of, discourses of motherhood which position women as responsible for their children. Women are also subject to discourses of individualism which position women as autonomous, agentic people. ‘Working mothers’
desire autonomy and motherhood, therefore they both exercise agency and are also constrained in their decisions to combine motherhood with paid work. In ‘working mothers’ choices we see

[t]he doubled sense of “subject” (subject/ed to and subject of action)... [which] allows for an individual who is socially produced, and “multiply positioned”- neither determined nor free, but both simultaneously (Jones, 1997:263, original emphasis).

Within Foucauldian discussions of governance at a distance, agency is perceived to be the simultaneous act of free will and regulation. In the act of ‘choosing’ and experiencing this choice as an individual act of will we are submitting to the requirements of particular regulatory discourses. As Archer (2004) argues

[A]t any given time, the future will seem open which accounts for our sense of freedom, but it is being made in the present by the projects that we discursively endorse and the activities which we engage in (2004:115).

Joy has decided to prioritize her children over her career while they are young and describes very busy days working from home at market research and being available to her three children.

There’s this absolute about ‘you’re a working mother or you’re not a working mother’... every mother works, not every mother earns... And I think the pressure is there to work, to be honest... Just to be a mother is not enough to be a successful woman (Joy, Focus group).

Joy perceives greater pressure on women to be engaged in paid work and regards motherhood as less valued than, in her view, it ought to be, in contemporary society, nevertheless, Joy also maintains a part time commitment to paid work. She does market research in the mornings and at night time in order to be available to her children during the day. ‘It’s working at sprint all the time...so it’s constant; it’s just like (.). It’s a hamster wheel, and I know, I bring it on myself’ (Joy, Interview). She too describes her busy days as her choice, ‘I bring it on myself’.

For Anna and Joy reducing their hours in paid work limits their earning power, career prospects and independence, thus they experience gender inequality. However, these women are privileged by being partnered and economically comfortable so they can make the decision to reduce their commitment to paid work in order to spend more time with their children.
Kate describes combining motherhood with paid work as ‘hugely difficult’ on a practical and emotional level, because there are conflicting obligations on women who combine motherhood with paid work.

Being a mother is fine and being a professional is fine, but it’s trying to marry the two. It’s the tension between the two is the difficult bit. It’s not either of them on their own that’s difficult, it’s trying to combine the two that’s hugely difficult and not only on a practical level I suppose, but also on an emotional or a psychological level (Kate, Interview).

In Kate’s account the construction of motherhood and career as polarized contributes to the constraints she experiences by making efforts to combine the two. These constraints manifest themselves in practical and emotional difficulties for Kate. Florence also noted, as currently constructed, the roles of mother and professional worker are incompatible ‘I can’t be a career woman and have children’ (Florence, interview).

Women who are mothers experience constraints on their autonomy and freedom to choose the kind of personal lives they wish to live because motherhood limits women’s freedom. Mothers experience gendered expectations not only to be selfless, nurturing and caring, but to find caring for others fulfilling and rewarding. However individualism discourses produce the desire to develop successful and rewarding careers as well as economic self sufficiency and mothers are also expected to contribute financially to their families.

Some women attempt to achieve autonomy, self-sufficiency, and self-fulfillment through productive paid work; however motherhood is a significant limiting factor. Jean made a reluctant choice to reduce her hours of work to meet gendered norms in relation to the mother role.

From a career point of view, I’ve made all the sacrifices. He [my husband] hasn’t you know. Because I suppose I would have been better qualified than he would, in my area, than he would in his. But yet, I made the choices to go part time, because I was the mother (Jean, Interview).

Jean is a chartered accountant, and better qualified than her husband. Applying instrumental rationality would mean that her husband should take reduced hours, because she has higher earning capacity and can contribute more materially to the family. ‘My job is a better paid job than his job, do you know what I mean, my job even though I work less hours, but that’s just the way it is’ (Jean, Focus group). Furthermore, Jean
suggests that she would have liked to continue working full time, rather than reducing her
hours ‘I would have stayed full time’ (Jean, Interview), which suggests that she really did
not want to reduce her hours. This is not what happened and she reduced her hours of
work, ‘because I was the mother’ (Jean, Interview). However, while Jean acknowledges
gendered pressure on her to reduce her hours, she also claims this decision is her choice,
‘I made the choices’.

Many women spoke about the difficulty of fulfilling their obligations to work
because of their commitment to their families. One way to cope with the practical and
emotional difficulties of combining motherhood with paid work is for women to limit
their career options, or reduce their working hours, or both. Some women compromised
their careers because of family commitments. Eithne believes she would be unable to
meet the demands of a more challenging role and she has limited her career options.

I think if I hadn’t children, I wouldn’t be in that job, I’d have moved to a
more demanding job a long time ago. So I do make compromises based on
my family situation (Eithne, Focus group). While Eithne continues to work full time, she acknowledges her choice to forego ‘a more
demanding job’ because of the practical difficulties of combining motherhood with paid
work. Kate maintains a full time commitment to her career and navigates conflicting
priorities which result in practical and emotional difficulties for Kate. All these women
are privileged in that they are very aware that they are free to make choices, even if these
are within constraints. Women’s awareness of constraints gives them moments of
freedom or the possibility to consider alternative options. Their awareness of being
trapped by constraints reveals to women their scope for making choices, and this
possibility creates freedom.

However, some women, especially those parenting alone, perceive no choice in
their decision to participate in paid work, and see it as an economic necessity to provide
for themselves and their children.

I work purely for money… when Jack was about three I went job sharing,
and it was absolutely fantastic, it was brilliant I loved it… I did part time,
and I did that for about three years and then my marriage broke up. So, I
had to go back (.) and I wouldn’t be there. No way. Absolutely no way. I’d
prefer not to be in full time work (Jane, Interview).
Working full time to Jane is not a choice, but a necessity to provide materially for herself and Jack. However, being solely responsible for rearing her son and working full time, according to Jane:

[j]s impossible and it’s wrong you know, and then when you are on your own, bringing to school, collecting, everything, everything you are responsible for (Jane, Focus group).

Jane’s use of the word ‘wrong’ to describe that she is responsible for ‘everything’, demonstrates that she perceives her situation, parenting alone, as unfair. Jane feels forced to work full time and resents it, whereas when she had a ‘choice’, work was more enjoyable.

Yea. And feeling really, kind of, pissed off about it I suppose, in that, because we have to do it. Whereas before, when I was, I enjoyed it more when I had the choice. But once the choice was taken away from me, suddenly everything that I wanted, I didn’t want it then anymore. It was ‘this is drudgery, it’s you know, I have to pay all the bills, I have to do [everything]’ (Jane, Interview).

Jane has less freedom than Eithne and Kate, because women who parent alone experience a greater economic obligation to participate in paid work, however there is no lessening of their responsibility for children. Women who perceived an obligation to generate family income regarded it as a constraint on their choices regarding the way they would combine motherhood with paid work. For these women, working is a chore which is resented as it is an economic necessity in order to fulfill obligations to provide economically for their children. As Petchesky (1980:68) argues, ‘the “right to choose” means very little when women are powerless’. Therefore in Jane’s account of combining motherhood with paid work, there is a sense of fatalism far from the notion of individualistic self-invention.

Despite the moral opprobrium accorded increasingly to the employee rational economic actor citizen as one who is not only autonomous and rational, but also market-oriented, consuming and calculatingly self-interested (Inglis, 2008), the fact remains that a large part of humanity at any given time are not self-financing consumers, notably children, people who are very frail, unpaid carers, people with work-constraining disabilities and people who are ill (Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Lone parents who are supporting dependant children are also not self-financing consumers (Russell and
Corcoran, 2000), therefore, ‘claims about the market as a suitable or even crucial vehicle for the exercise of autonomy proceed without inquiry into what actually makes human autonomy possible’ (Nedelsky, 2005:2). The market does not acknowledge or accommodate dependency and Jane experiences inequality relative to other women because she parents alone, which is reported to cause practical as well as emotional difficulties for Jane.

While women navigate their own way in choosing how to combine motherhood with paid work, mother’s choices are subject to public scrutiny and sanction and the interest taken in women’s choices regarding combining motherhood with paid work is an intrusion to which no other worker or male parent is subject. Motherhood is a high profile, public role and women experience public scrutiny, from non-mothers, mothers, men and women, families and friends.

All your peers have an opinion on it [motherhood]. All age groups, it’s both your parent’s generation and your siblings and your friends and everybody seems to have an opinion on what choice you made or didn’t make (Eithne, Interview).

As Crittenden (2001:250) found, ‘mothers have no shortage of critics, but precious few friends’. ‘Not even world leaders and presidents are subject to the same amount of judgment and derision as mothers are, and everyone has an opinion…And they are not scared to share it’ (Tertia, 2006). This scrutiny adds to the pressure on women to make ‘correct’ choices. Feminism is no exception in taking up the liberalist discourse of choice.

Although differences [between feminisms] still exist … the more interesting point is that significant similarities exist as well. And at the core of all the differences remains “the” liberal feminist recognition of woman as an individual with “rights” to freedom of choice (Eisenstein, 1993:xiii original emphasis).

While it is not disputed that women should have rights and entitlements to freedom of choice, feminists struggle with the dilemma of choice, in part, because of an overarching concern about the paradigm of the rational economic man and the atomistic concept of liberal individualism. Earle and Letherby (2007:234) argue that ‘rights’ can only be realized within favourable social and economic conditions and that, at any given time, some women will have little, or no, choice. If a woman is free to choose to engage in
mothering or paid work, this suggests she has autonomy and control over the direction of her life as individualism discourse suggests. Feminist’s challenge to sexism and male dominance both in public and private domains explicitly relies on individualism to claim women’s human subjectivity and equal entitlement, but feminism finds it almost impossible to challenge motherhood on individualist terms (DiQuinzio, 1999). Women found that intensive motherhood discourses are promoted in the media and widely taken up in society. Jean describes her friends’ attitudes to her working

[O]ther friends of mine who don’t work …say ‘why bother having children if you’re going to work’? ‘Do you not feel bad when you’re not there when they come out of school?’ (Jean, Focus group).

Yolanda also identified this pressure from the media ‘you know the way you’d hear or read things about ‘working mothers’, and “why did they bother having kids if they’re going to go out and work?”’ (Yolanda, Interview). The expression ‘why bother having kids if you’re going to work?’ was mentioned again and again by participants, suggesting this is a dominant social message women had internalized. Women do feel bad that they are not always available to their children and in this research, half of all participants describe themselves as working full time and half working part time, reduced hours or job sharing (Appendix H).

I think every decision you make as a parent, whether you work or don’t work, whether you (.) Whatever you do with your children, people either agree or disagree… people do sort of point it out to you as well… You know, I think mothers feel very guilty about it because there are so many choices they have to make and they feel that whatever choice they make somebody will say ‘Oh!’[Critically] when you tell them what you did (Eithne, Interview).

Women must make choices, and the visibility of motherhood puts pressure on women to make the ‘right’ choices between discourses which conflict. This is an inequality with non-mothers, who are not subject to the same pressure, scrutiny or sanction. As Hardie (1989) claims society suffers from ‘motherism’ as opposed to ‘sexism’. This public scrutiny and the dominance of motherhood discourses puts pressure on women, not only to choose, but also to choose a socially acceptable way of combining motherhood with paid work.
Many women are navigating their way between competing dominant discourses and making decisions, possibly undecidable decisions, certainly not free, but forced by others and wrested out of oneself, under conditions that lead to dilemmas (Beck, 1994:16).

For many women, their choices result in compromises, sacrifices or dilemmas. Faye has a very involved committed career as Company Director and said it was never even a possibility that she would consider reducing her hours of work because of her children.

I just knew, that was it with the company, you just (.) it was the sort of position that you had to be there. And if you wanted to go in and lead something, you just had to be there in terms of full time. So, that had a big influence on my choices going forward. And I suppose my wanting to have children, that was always there (Faye, Interview).

In Faye’s organization, full time commitment is required to advance in her career, however Faye also wanted to have children, and Faye’s ‘choices’ to combine motherhood with paid work were influenced by practical considerations. Faye compromised by limiting her family to two children.

I wanted two children… I felt that’s what I could, not so much cope with, but that’s what I wanted in life. And I wanted to work full time, and I didn’t want to kind of be compromising (Faye, Interview).

However, while Faye has a full time career and has two children, she did compromise her family size in order to avoid compromising her contribution to her career, because two children is what Fay could ‘cope with’, if combining motherhood with paid work. Workplaces which demand employee’s full time commitment create difficulties for ‘working mothers’ and Faye and Kate describe very busy lives maintaining ‘ideal worker’ commitment to their employing organizations, while combining their careers with motherhood. This does not suggest that motherhood is less important to women with high levels of career commitment. It does mean they experience more practical difficulties, and that they experience emotional difficulties in the form of guilt. Rubery, Smith and Fagan (1998) argue there is a polarization in the workplace between women with and without children, with only the latter being able to pursue a career. Whether opting to be childless, or reducing the number of children, either way as O’Connor
(1998:236) claims ‘this kind of “reconciliation” of work and family is one which exacts a very high personal cost indeed’.

Joy has decided to prioritize her family now and concentrate on her career when her children are older.

I’m feeling very happy at where we are from a family and children and that’s working, it’s working well. It’s taken a lot of effort to get it to this point and I’m very happy with it and I wouldn’t change the way we have it at the moment (Joy, Interview).

Joy describes her choices with reference to her personal happiness: when working three days Joy ‘wasn’t happy’ (Joy, Interview) but now having reduced her hours and working flexibly Joy is ‘feeling very happy’. In Ireland as elsewhere, women’s choices are framed in transition from status to effect. In popular culture and the media it is commonly claimed that women ‘choose’ to give up work and stay home to rear their children because this is most effective for family functioning, not that women stay home because they have no choice in a patriarchal society. This is a shift in justification of gender discrimination - from a system where gender arrangements are described in the language of hierarchy to one in which they are described in the language of emotion, from an open acknowledgement of male entitlements to one that justifies them as the optimal path to self-fulfillment for women as well as for men (Williams, 2000:16). Joy describes the consequences of her choice in emotional terms, she is happy now that she has prioritized her children over her career.

In Faye and Joy’s accounts, they describe their satisfaction with the choices they have made, however, Faye has compromised her family size and limited herself to having two children because that is what she and her career could ‘cope with’, while Joy has compromised her career to devote herself to her children, but anticipates spending more time on her career when her children are older.

Jean and Eithne compromised their careers to fulfill obligations to the mother role and to conform to gendered expectations in workplace and society. However, some women who reduced their hours of work perceived a reduction in their personal autonomy. Exactly half the participants in this study had reduced their hours of work, following motherhood. Bourdieu (1977) describes the ways in which expectations and aspirations of subordinate groups are scaled down to what is possible, or as he puts it ‘the
choice of the necessary’. People form dispositions, he claims, which engender aspirations and practices compatible with their available options.

[T]he most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination as unthinkable, or at the cost of the double negation which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable (Bourdieu, 1977:77 original emphasis).

While Jean claimed to exercise autonomy over her decision to reduce her hours of work, her account suggests she was refusing what was anyway refused because she acknowledged gendered societal pressure on the mother to reduce her hours. Faye, Joy, Eithne, Anna and Kate all claim to have made ‘choices’ in determining the ways they will combine motherhood with paid work, however, the reality is that many women’s decisions amount to a series of unsatisfactory trade offs, masquerading as individual choice, because the choices are not entirely free and many women make decisions to combine motherhood with paid work under duress. Duress is not just limited to paradigmatic threats of the ‘your money or your life’ variety. The robbery victim’s freedom to choose does not increase her welfare because she was forced to choose between her money and her life (Hadfield, 1995). Discourses of individualism offer no self-referencing definition of duress: it is not identified by the presence or absence of ‘true’ consent. Rather, duress is judged on the basis of a normative assessment of the quality of the choices available. What distinguishes the conventional doctrine of duress from the feminist argument that a woman’s consent to engage in employment or motherhood or combine the two, is where the moral baseline is drawn. It is not enough that a person has consented: she must also have had normatively acceptable options from which to choose. Is it normatively acceptable for ‘working mothers’ to have to choose between career and motherhood because these are constructed as polarized in Irish society?

Although much of the pressure to choose between motherhood and paid work is framed by a discourse of equivalent choice between career and work in the home, for many women who reduce their hours of work, their time at home with children is circumscribed by drudgery, while the promise of autonomy and fulfillment in careers is also not fulfilled for many women; indeed Jane and Eithne’s accounts suggest this is not
the case. Some women, like Eithne, compromise their careers. Other women, like Faye, limit their family size, while women who try to maintain intense commitment to both, like Kate, are frenetically busy. Women with partners are arguably privileged in that they can reduce their hours of work, income and limit their career plans in order to provide more direct care for their children. This ‘choice’ maintains these women’s unequal position at home and at work. Jane, because she parents alone, experiences inequality relative to partnered women, and experiences more practical difficulties combining motherhood with paid work. Women experience gender inequality because only women are mothers, and fatherhood is not reported to carry the same public scrutiny and sanction as motherhood does.

It is evident that women experience different degrees of penalty and privilege, consequent on their individual circumstances, however, it is also possible to see the power operating through discourses of individualism and motherhood and evident in families and workplaces which reinforces the gendered order of caring, and which creates inequalities for women who attempt to combine motherhood with paid work. Women experience these inequalities as sacrifices, dilemmas and compromises, which cause emotional and practical difficulties for women.

Walby (2009) argues examining inequalities and privileges in relation to the structural social system reveals ‘regimes of inequality’ and exploring women’s choices reveals that their ‘choices’ are frequently made under duress, because the conditions under which the choice is made are not of the woman’s own choosing. It is duress for a woman to be forced into limiting her career options, limiting the number of children she has, reducing hours of work, reducing her income or working under ‘ideal worker’ conditions because of gendered expectations in workplace and society, a lack of fatherly support, and public scrutiny and sanction.

All women spoke of ‘my choice’. This is one pattern between discourses, which configures women’s choice to combine motherhood with paid work as each woman’s personal problem, and the negative consequences of the choice are her own responsibility. As demonstrated, discourses operate to constrain the choices available to women, so no women can make a ‘free’ choice, which is free of duress under these conditions. When women’s choices invariably result in inequalities women blame
themselves for making poor choices. Thus, a pattern which emerges from the relationship between intersectionality and discourse is that the inequalities and privileges which are the product of women’s choices are maintained as each woman’s private problem or conversely her achievement. Making choices under duress, taking responsibility for these choices and maintaining them as their own private problem are evidence of the influence of discourses of individualism on the inequalities women experience by combining motherhood with paid work.

Arising from women’s responsibility for her own decisions, a further pattern emerges which maintains the inequalities women experience as private affairs. However, these private troubles are in fact public issues. Mills (1959) argued that a trouble is a private matter, it occurs when values cherished by an individual are felt by her to be threatened. A trouble can be resolved by the individual’s willful activity. Whereas an issue is a public matter, when some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. An issue transcends the local environment of the individual and concerns society as a whole, the historical and social institutions and their interrelation in that society. However, these ‘issues’ are maintained as women’s private troubles because this pattern emerges from the relationship between discourse and intersectionality, consequently women’s inequalities and privileges are created and sustained. Following Mills (1959), ‘working mothers’ private troubles are in fact public issues, but their maintenance as private concerns is a pattern which emerges between intersectionality and discourse, which, by privileging some women sometimes, creates enduring inequalities for all.

**Morality**

Desire, choice and morality are linked. Bauman (1990) argues the most fundamental condition of modern society that tends to suppress the influence of morality is the dominance of a certain mode of reasoning, namely the logic of means towards ends, instrumental rationality. In this process of rational decision making, Bauman (1990) argues, the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency have replaced the moral criteria of good and evil. However, Bauman also claims there is a heightened interest in ethical debates in postmodernity for two reasons: on one hand there are the effects of the pluralism of authority. Since there is no single authority which can be called on to provide unequivocal answers to questions, individuals must negotiate with one another
and they much reach an understanding on the rules they agree to recognize. On the other hand, there is the centrality of choice in the self-constitution of post modern individuals who are self-governing, and have the freedom and discretion to make decisions about the way they live their lives, following their own individual guiding principles. This individualism requires reflexivity, and is also a fundamentally moral concept insofar as individuals must choose a way of being in the world.

**Morality in ‘working mothers’ decision making**

Some women framed their choice to participate in paid work in moral terms. Some women felt a moral obligation to make an economic contribution to society and Eithne and Grace spoke about the investment in their education and their perceived moral obligation to seek a return on that investment. Eithne has two children and works full time, she said she felt a moral obligation to use her education and Eithne had always expected to continue in employment after the birth of her children

> [b]ecause you decide to go into higher education and because you decide to do a doctorate, yes, I think there is that implicit understanding that you’ll use it and you’ll work with it (Eithne, Interview).

There is morality in Eithne’s choice to use her education ‘Because you’ve been supported through your college education by both the state and by your parents’ (Eithne, Interview), she feels obliged to provide a return on others’ investment as well as her own. Likewise, Grace also believes she should seek a return on her investment in her education ‘And yes, when you are younger you feel the need to get something back for having put all that in’ (Grace, Interview). However, Grace also perceives a moral obligation to work for equality, for feminism and for other women. Grace claimed her generation would have been the first with the opportunity to work in male-dominated areas, which she did, so she felt compelled to succeed in that environment.

> That you must do it for women, to be an example… You have been given these gifts, and you should do it, because it’s the right thing to do for other women, to change the world (Grace, Interview).

Jasmine has a career and believes she has a moral imperative to challenge gendered assumptions and provide a feminist example for her children ‘I’m rearing two
girls, I do think it’s positive role modelling for them to see me going out to work, and being seen having my own [independence]’ (Jasmine, Focus group).

Eithne, Grace and Jasmine all perceive moral obligations to participate in paid work. The influence of discourses of individualism is evident in Eithne and Grace’s moral reasoning. These women have made economic and emotional investments in their education and training and are making rational choices to maintain their contribution to paid work in order to obtain a return on that investment. Jasmine also sees an obligation to continue in paid work to provide a role model for her daughters, thus feminist discourses are evident in Jasmine’s moral reasoning. While these women perceive moral obligations to participate in paid work, it should be noted that these women are privileged; they are all partnered, professional women with careers.

Gina reported being conflicted, because she too had invested in her career and felt obliged to seek a return on that investment, however, Gina currently job-shares, working one week on, one week off, and while she feels this meets one set of moral obligations it is at the expense of the other.

Part of me then does feel that you totally give up, you have totally given up your career and what did you go to school and college and do all that for and you’re going to turn around and give it up (Gina, Interview).

Nevertheless, many women who reduced their hours of work also feel moral obligations to their colleagues and employers. Grace reduced her working hours because she felt her children were disadvantaged by her working full time and she wanted to spend more time with them, however she also has a moral obligation to fulfill the requirements of her role and a commitment to her colleagues.

What we were trying to achieve really, is more contact time with the kids and to be able to do the after school thing. So the afternoons, really, was the option. And the reason then that I went for the two days full time was that I really couldn’t do my job properly with just working mornings. There’s certain elements of my job that I need a full day to do it. So I knew, that it would be a disservice for me to pretend that I could do my job by just working mornings, I really couldn’t (Grace, Interview). Grace demonstrates rather than working mornings only, which would have been her ideal choice, she elected to reduce her hours and work two full days and three half-days in order to ‘do her job properly’. Jean has also reduced her hours of work to satisfy
gendered moral norms, however she continues to feel a moral obligation to her colleagues when she is not at work.

I feel guilty for walking out the door when I’m at work, because, like, my job is not the kind of job that you can share. It’s not the sort of thing you can chop up and give to somebody else, and really, I suppose, squashing a full time week into a part time week. And then, if I have to, I’ll bring work home on the laptop and log on or whatever. I mean sometimes, the odd time, in the evenings or weekends. But I sort of feel, because I have a group of people working for me, sometimes I feel guilty when I have to say ‘well I’m off now it’s quarter past three and I must get my children sorted out’ (Jean, Focus group).

Jean describes experiencing guilt because she has a position of responsibility with colleagues reporting to her and she perceives she is letting her colleagues down by leaving them to work in her absence. While many women feel moral obligations towards their colleagues, many women also experienced moral opprobrium from their colleagues, for continuing to work full time when they became mothers. Grace described the difficulties of working at management level in the private sector and the gendered expectations of male colleagues that professional women with children should not work.

I was the first woman in that company to go out on maternity leave, who was [at managerial level] … And then, what I found is that when you came back to work was that they were all watching you, to see ‘is she going to fall apart?’ you know, ‘is she going to be able to manage this now?’ You’d come in in the mornings and they’d say ‘oh she’s on time this week’ … And the comments people would make, the personal comments that people felt they had the right to make, never ceases to amaze me (Grace, Focus group).

Grace demonstrates the public scrutiny of mothers, her male colleagues waiting for her to fail and to demonstrate her inability to fulfill working and mothering roles. This might suggest that perhaps it is only women who experience a moral imperative to combine paid work and care, given the relatively recent opportunities and choices available, however, in some workplaces it is only acceptable for women without children to work. However, as Grace noted, fatherhood did not impact her colleagues’ commitment to employment in the way motherhood was expected to impact hers.

They all had the security blanket themselves, that’s what I felt about it at the time…If one of their children was sick you never knew about it, because it all happened outside of work for them. Very much so. Whereas you were bringing this into work and they didn’t necessarily want to know about it (Grace, Focus group).
Grace demonstrates the gendered expectations of her colleagues and their interference in her personal life, which she felt transgressed professional and common courtesy, which also demonstrates that motherhood is the property of everyone. Some organizations demonstrate that ‘ideal worker’ cultures persist, despite the number of women and mothers in paid work. As Cockburn (2002:185) notes, mothers’ employment creates ‘practical difficulties for managers, increases the proportion of women in the labour force and brings an unwelcome domestic odour, a whiff of the kitchen and nursery into the workplace’. Organization cultures varied and some women with high levels of career commitment, particularly those working in masculine environments experienced resentment and interference from colleagues who suggested women were not fulfilling their moral obligations to work by becoming mothers. Kate also experienced disapproval from colleagues for maintaining career commitment with four children.

One … gentleman told me I was irresponsible to have four children in the first place, so (.). All my own fault. Yea. People often make negative comments, about the fact that my life is so busy, that it’s really my own fault, that I should have stopped after two [children] (Kate, Focus group).

As Williams (2000:6) argues, allowing women the ‘choice’ to perform as ideal workers without the privileges that support male ideal workers is not equality. Women who work long hours and have children find it very difficult to manage their commitment to paid work and to motherhood. Women may choose not to perform as ideal workers, but they do not choose the marginalization that currently accompanies that decision. Grace changed organization after the birth of her second child.

Colleagues frequently did not want to know about women’s care responsibilities because in the workplace, ‘ideal workers’ care responsibilities are rendered invisible, because they are taken care of, outside of work, by someone else. When women transgress and perform as ‘ideal workers’ and also have families, colleagues judge and criticize this choice. The expectation that all workers are unencumbered by care responsibilities leads to gendered expectations of women with children in paid work, many of whom reduce their hours. Women with children who defy these expectations and continue to work full time experience the disapproval of their colleagues.
Many women perceive moral obligations to participate in paid work; Grace and Eithne perceive a moral obligation to obtain a return on the investment in their education and training, deriving from neo-liberalism discourses. Jasmine perceives she has a moral obligation to provide a feminist role model for her daughters and many women who work both full time and reduced hours perceive moral obligations to support their colleagues. Kate, Grace and Jean demonstrate they perceive moral obligations to employment, their colleagues and to fulfilling the performance requirements of their roles. Women who reduce their hours of work like Gina, Grace and Jean limit their career options, reduce their earning power and reinforce gendered expectations of the mother role. However, these women are privileged in the sense that they are all partnered which gives these women more economic choice, and they are professional, which gives them more options in terms of the type of work they will do and the employing organization in which they will work.

Women in this study demonstrate that they experience difficulties fulfilling their obligations to paid work because of their care commitments and their continuing responsibility for home and family. These women either limit their career options, choose to reduce their hours of work or have frenetically busy lives, all of which result in women believing they do not fully satisfy their moral obligations to paid work. As Williams (2000) argues, as long as domesticity governs the organization of family work and market work, people’s aspirations for family life will remain pitted against their aspirations for autonomy. Women in this study who maintain high levels of career commitment, while attempting to be ‘good moral mothers’ are guilt ridden and stressed, because if their choice is flawed, they blame themselves.

Hakim’s preference-based approach takes the gender division of labour between market and caring work as an unproblematic ‘given’, and it is assumed that women desire dual roles, not men, but ‘it is at least arguable that women might actually “prefer” not to have to make a choice between marginalized “mother- (or family) -friendly employment” and “standard worker mother-(or family)-unfriendly employment”’ (Crompton, 2006:123). The notion of ‘refusing what is anyway refused’ (Bourdieu, 1977) is apt for many women, particularly those who reluctantly reduced their working hours to meet
gendered expectations of the mother role. These women are not really autonomous, and do not really have free choice.

While some workplaces have made some limited accommodation to women’s employment, there is resistance to mothers’ participation in employment. Women who maintain careers while attempting to fulfill their gendered obligations to motherhood are criticized by colleagues who promote the view that women cease to be committed employees once they become mothers and cease to be committed mothers if they continue to participate in paid work. The disapproval of their colleagues causes women emotional difficulties and this criticism has negative impacts on women, who have little choice but to demonstrate greater commitment to either motherhood or employment, which causes more practical difficulties for ‘working mothers’, and confirms and perpetrates the prejudice of their colleagues.

Walby (2007a) argues, in complexity theory, the system is produced by its components, and in turn reproduces those components. Workplaces continue to promote the notion of an ‘ideal worker’ unencumbered by care responsibilities, and in turn the system produces women as ‘ideal workers’ who experience conflict because behaving like an ‘ideal worker’ is difficult when women are mothers. Attempting to behave as ‘ideal workers’, while retaining responsibility for home and family creates considerable stress which has negative consequences for women’s health and well-being (Women’s Health Council, 2004).

The concept of path dependency is evident with events that occur at one time having consequences at later times, and the influx of women, and mothers, into the public sphere by their participation in paid work has had few consequences in terms of the structural changes necessary to facilitate women’s employment, but many consequences in terms of the resistance in workplaces and society to women’s participation in the public sphere. This resistance is promoted through intensive mothering discourses, evident in the persistence of the myth of motherhood.

**The Myth of Motherhood**

The moral imperative to undertake care work in all forms is much stronger for women than for men (Bubeck, 1995; O’Brien, 2005). Women are moral actors, and voluntarily recognize ‘obligations that present themselves as necessary to be fulfilled but are neither
forced on one or are enforceable’ (Hoy, 2004:103). For middle-class women in particular, there is a strong command to be ‘moral mothers’, to care competently and professionally for their children (Hays, 1996; Williams, 2000; 2001; 2004; O’Brien, 2005; 2007).

Oakley (1974:186) termed the motherhood ideology, ‘the myth of motherhood’, which, she argues, contains three popular assertions.

The first is the most influential: that children need mothers. The second is the obverse of this: that mothers need their children. The third assertion is a generalisation which holds that motherhood represents the greatest achievement of a woman’s life: the sole true means of self-realisation. Women, in other words, need to be mothers (Oakley, 1974:186).

This myth provides a useful explanatory framework for the ways women in this study regard motherhood, for themselves and in wider society. Women demonstrate they see morality in their decisions to combine motherhood with paid work and despite the influence of discourses of individualism, feminism and neo-liberalism, in early twenty-first century Ireland, the myth of motherhood is still very relevant. Each of the assertions is examined in relation to women’s decisions to combine motherhood with paid work, and demonstrates the way women frame their decisions in moral terms.

**Children need mothers**

The norm that children need their mothers was internalized by participants and Eithne claimed ‘they [children] do need their mother…there’s nothing you can do about it’ (Eithne, Focus group). Eithne suggests that children only need their mothers, and it is a biological given that cannot be changed. Amanda demonstrates that she too has internalized the powerful normative assumption that mothers provide the best care for children.

It’s about the mothering of our children that we do as well. I know Dads are very, very good, but they don’t do that same softness and that same gentleness (Amanda, Focus group).

Similarly, all women described themselves as being the one to care for children when they are sick, even when husbands volunteered.
Part of you, inside you says ‘oh well, this is the mother’s job, this is something I must do’… it’s not that he wouldn’t want to do it, it’s because it’s ‘the right thing to do’ (Grace, Focus group).

Grace uses moral language, caring for sick children is ‘the right thing’ for mothers to do, because it is ‘the mothers’ job’, demonstrating the way the gendered order of caring is presented as natural and inevitable. This leads to gender inequalities in families where women have greater responsibility for parenting than their partners.

Even though Audrey has the career in her family, she too believes the mothers’ primary role is as carer.

I don’t have a childminder this week, and my husband is taking half days to collect the kids from school, and I mean, ‘tis he would be doing the things, he’s doing the things you know, that I should be doing (Audrey, Focus group).

When I asked Audrey why she felt she should be looking after the children rather than her husband, she replied ‘things I’m supposed to be doing’ (Audrey, Focus group) demonstrating the way the differences between the genders have been naturalized. All women in this study perceive moral obligations to care for their children themselves, because of the persistent norm that children need their mothers and there is a clear moral obligation on women to meet this need. Families and society vigorously promote the norm that children need their mothers. This contributes to the guilt ‘working mothers’ experience, regardless of whether or not they adjust their paid work to suit their motherhood by reducing their hours of work. Women’s take up or refusal of these moral obligations and their different ways of combining motherhood with paid work results in ‘the mother war’ (Buxton, 1998).

Nothing wrangles the mother in the home, who has made a huge financial, who has sacrificed a career path and sacrificed some personal aspirations to hear ‘oh but I have to work’ from somebody who’s wearing Prada sunglasses and Jimmy Choo shoes. And I have met them, ‘Oh but I have to work, we have a huge mortgage’ and I’m thinking ‘hello? The glasses? The shoes? (Joy, Interview).

The ways women refer to their ‘choice’ to combine motherhood with paid work reveals how women are positioned by dominant discourses. Women who prioritized their children claimed superior moral authority and many of these women were also highly critical of women who continued to work full time, suggesting these women were not
fulfilling their moral obligations to motherhood by meeting their children’s needs. Joy uncritically assumes women are working purely for material gain and does not acknowledge these women might also experience emotional as well as practical difficulties in combining motherhood with paid work.

Grace observed women who work very long hours at their chosen careers may benefit materially, but at the expense of not satisfying their moral obligations to their children.

I’d say that most of these people then are very well paid and they have a lot of material things and they can probably do a lot of very nice things, but I think eventually it will catch up with you, that you will realize what you’ve missed, and all the years that have gone by, that you haven’t seen them [children] and you haven’t been there for [your children] and you don’t get them back (Grace, Interview).

There is a disapproving tone to Grace’s observation ‘It will catch up with you’, if you allow someone else to care for your children while you work, because children need their mothers. Folbre (1994) comments that, in economics the term selfishness is often used in such a way as to imply that it is more rational than altruism. Utility-maximization is linked to the individualism and competitiveness of markets. Women who are perceived to assert their self-interest risk transgressing norms of femininity. Women who pursue careers may therefore find themselves in a contradictory position when attempting to combine careers with motherhood. In respect of the division of resources within the family, discourses of motherhood require women to put their children first. Not to do so can reap severe sanction (Hughes, 2002:94), as evident in the disapproval of Grace and Joy of women who work full time. Women may compete in the labour market if they are contributing to their families, but must not relinquish their primary responsibility for caring. Richardson (1993) found that attitudes vary according to whether a woman is seen as having to work to help support a family, or alternatively, is going out to work to satisfy her own needs and interests. The public condemnation of women who appear to prioritize careers over families is indicative of the opprobrium poured on rational economic actors, and mothers who attempt to perform as rational economic actors are perceived to be failing as women and mothers and are roundly condemned.

Interestingly, some women saw their participation in paid work as fulfilling the moral obligation to provide materially for their children, as part of meeting children’s
needs. ‘If they [children] want some things, you have to work to pay for them’ (Aisling, Focus group). Gattrell (2005) argues that mothers who feel guilty about a wish to leave their children with others in order to be able to work, may find that this burden is eased if their earnings were construed as essential to family maintenance.

Brona has few career options and claims to be very stressed working full time as a factory operator, working three twelve hour shifts a week, with a husband she describes as ‘useless’ and an unreliable child-minder. She claimed ‘I’m a bit resentful of work at the moment, because I feel I’m killing myself working’ (Brona, Interview). Brona resents work, not the unfair burden of managing home and three children, with no support. However, Brona reckoned her income is necessary to properly meet her children’s needs.

I have to pay money for insurance for his rugby this week and the tennis classes, that’s ninety five this week for just one child. When you see the cost of three lads, doctors, anything that’s out of the ordinary (.). All those classes and sports, they all cost money (Brona, Interview).

Reflexively Brona decided she has no option but to continue ‘killing’ herself working for the economic contribution her employment makes to the family, because ‘If I give up, we would have to give up an awful lot of that’ (Brona, Interview). Brona frames her choice as a moral one, her children need her to make an economic contribution to the family, to support ‘all those classes and sports’ even though it limits her ability to provide direct care herself. Brona experiences gender inequality in family because childcare and housework are not shared equally between her husband and herself, even though both work full time.

Women who had an economic imperative to work framed this ‘choice’ in terms of meeting children’s material needs. These women perceive an inequality with women who can financially afford to reduce their hours in paid work. Some women perceive they are not meeting moral obligations to motherhood because of their participation in paid work and many women appreciate it would be easier to give up or reduce their commitment to paid work, particularly in the middle-class area of the study. Jean has reduced her hours, and acknowledges it would be easier in the middle class area to conform to the dominant practice of giving up work altogether.
It’s when I see people in the morning, people I went to school with, and you might be under pressure. You might be facing into a difficult morning, let’s say, you know. And you see these women and they are out power walking, having dropped the kids to school. And I’m saying ‘I would have been one of the intelligent, inverted commas, ones in the class, who got lots of honours in the Leaving Cert, and there, these women are out power walking in their designer tracksuits, and I’m the fool rushing to work to get abuse for the morning, with sort of pressure and stress and everything like’. And I’m saying ‘where did I go wrong?’ (Jean, Interview).

Jean comments that women who are available to mother full time in the local area, enjoy personal time when their children are in school, and she acknowledges her life is more difficult in many ways than the women who do not engage in paid work ‘where did I go wrong?’, implying that these women’s choices are right. However, reflexively, Jean has decided, the difficulties of combining motherhood with paid work notwithstanding, she intends to continue in paid work.

Quite possibly, if I was out power walking, I might get fed up of it after a week or two and I’d probably be, well maybe I’m just saying this to console myself. But I think it’s, are you motivated to have a career? are you happy to stay at home? I don’t know if it would be enough for me to stay at home (Jean, Interview).

Jean’s reflexive deliberations demonstrate the difficulties of combining motherhood with paid work, both of which are morally inscribed. Jean has reduced her working hours to fulfill the desire to be available to her children, as motherhood discourses suggest, however, individualism discourses produce the desire to have a career, and Jean has clearly invested significantly in her studies and become a chartered accountant. Joy and Grace clearly regard professional ‘working mothers’ as a legitimate dumping ground for their anxieties about individualization, however Jean as a professional ‘working mother’ regards the affluent women who are full time in the home as having a far easier, more comfortable lifestyle. Lifestyle and material possessions sets up difference amongst women who come to be defined by what are constructed as their mutual differences, each claiming moral authority over other women’s choices.

Many women identify pressure to prioritize their children’s needs over their own, which causes women to justify and defend their choices to combine motherhood with paid work.
[I] never feel cheated in not being with my children all the time. I feel I have been there every step of the way for them and I feel that I know more about them than anybody else, that I would be the expert on them, no matter what and that, just because I’m not with them a few hours every day, doesn’t mean I don’t know exactly what they get up to and what they’re like (Eithne, Interview).

Because Eithne maintains her commitment to paid work, she is defensive and feels obliged to affirm that her children’s needs are being met by her. Fathers are not reported to share this obligation. Women experience guilt because they perceive they are not properly satisfying moral obligations to their children, which is not shared with their partners. This is a gendered inequality because combining paid work with fatherhood was not reported to carry the same moral obligations as combining motherhood with paid work does for women. In fact, not having to do caring is part of the patriarchal dividend, something that accrues to men by virtue of being a man, even if men do not set out to avoid it (Connell, 1995; O’Connor, 2000). This masculine privilege is created and maintained by the power of motherhood discourses to promote the myth that children need mothers.

Mothers need Children

Letherby (1999) argues that motherhood is regarded as a privilege and a duty, a natural consequence of marriage and proof of adulthood. Rich (1977) claims motherhood ideologies and discourses frequently identify women as mothers first and women second, and she argues that motherhood is only one part of female process; it is not an identity for all time. Nevertheless the idea that mothers need children in order to be truly feminine is a powerful normative assumption. Letherby and Williams (1999:721) claim that having a child is central to femininity, that without this desire or ability, women are unfeminine and abnormal because society still takes for granted that “woman” equals “mother” equals “wife” equals “adult”; and this presumption remains part of medical, political and public discourse. Conner (1974) also claims that mothering is ‘the activity that above all, completes and confirms feminine identity’ (1974:165). Thus, women’s identity is linked to their ability to mother and women who cannot or do not wish to reproduce are placed in a relationship to motherhood, even if a negative one.
Joy identified with this and enjoyed the feeling of importance and being needed that motherhood provided when she had her first child ‘when I just had one, I perhaps did feel that I was the be all and end all’ (Joy, Interview). While Eithne claimed she had always wanted to become a mother ‘It [motherhood] was an experience I wanted to experience in my lifetime, to… be pregnant and have a baby’ (Eithne, Focus group), and Eithne finds motherhood enriching and rewarding ‘I absolutely adore being a mother and it has enriched my life way more than I expected it to… I didn’t expect it to be as fulfilling as it actually is’ (Eithne, Focus group).

This suggests that some women themselves do not recognize their need to be mothers, until they become mothers, and the pressure to conform to norms of mothering thereafter ensures that ‘mothers’ needs are always occluded in favour of the child’s’ (Lawler, 2000: 149). Audrey took all her parental leave when her children were young in order to spend as much time as possible with her children at that stage.

You enjoy seeing them grow and get big and having the time with them and not missing it… Taking them to school and taking them to playschool and going to birthday parties, that’s all a great time really, and a great time for the mother as well (Audrey, Interview).

Audrey derived pleasure from attending to her children when they were small. But, as Lawler (2000:20) states ‘neither pleasure nor choice indicate an absence of authority or of the operation of power’. The power operating through motherhood discourses is evident in Audrey’s account. Audrey’s pleasure at being available to her children is described as ‘a great time for the mother as well’ [as the child]. The normative assumption that women need to mother and will find it fulfilling is clear in Audrey’s description of spending time with her children when they were young.

The pervasiveness of norms of good mothering suggests women have little choice but to conform to prevailing norms or risk social sanction. Perhaps being with young children is only ‘a great time for the mother’ (Audrey, Interview) because it conforms to gendered expectations, and there is a certain comfort in that. All women in this study claimed to enjoy motherhood and to find it fulfilling and rewarding. Motherhood provides women with cultural capital, particularly in the middle-class area of the study and there is a particular pressure generated by middle class, full-time-in-the-home mothers in the local area, which creates difficulties for women who also engage in paid
work. While all women claimed to enjoy their children, many women sought visibility as mothers. Grace had just reduced her hours of work in order to be able to collect her children from school three days a week and to spend the afternoons facilitating their activities.

Oh God, and you arrive to the school and suddenly everyone’s saying ‘her mom’s there, her mom’s there’ and you’re just thinking ‘oh my God, what kind of mother am I?’ you just have to pick them up from school and you’re after making their whole week (Grace, Focus group).

The expression ‘what kind of mother am I?’ was very telling in terms of the way Grace believed good motherhood is synonymous with being visible at the school gates and in the community and her perception that she was not meeting the requirements of the ‘good mother’ role, by not being available to facilitate her children’s after-school activities. This was given as one of the reasons Grace reduced her hours in paid work. Both Eithne and Joy are involved in mothering organizations, the Irish Childbirth Trust and La Lèche League which absolutely confirms their need to promote and affirm their motherhood.

Motherhood represents the greatest achievement of a woman’s life

During focus group discussions, women expressed different opinions regarding women who mother full- and part- time and while all women claimed to find motherhood fulfilling and rewarding, their participation in paid work set up differences between women. Not all women wanted to be ‘just a mother’ (Eithne, Focus group). ‘Isn’t that sad? The way you say it “not just a mother”…mothers are so, so important, and we are so important as mothers’ (Florence, Focus group).

Amy claimed she had always wanted to mother, but initially expected motherhood to fit around her career. However she now finds motherhood more rewarding than her career ‘it’s what you get back, maybe I’m getting more back from my children now than I am actually from my career’ (Amy, Interview), likewise Aisling claimed that having four children, while being very busy, was rewarding and fulfilling. ‘I don’t think you can say that we’re constantly giving, giving, giving to the kids and not receiving anything back’ (Aisling, Interview).

Colleen assured herself, and me, that our participation in paid work would not be detrimental to our children, or society, and we are fulfilling our maternal obligations ‘It’s
not a bad thing that we are ‘working mothers’, we are not reneging on our duty as a mum’ (Colleen, Interview).

What you put into your kid now, you’re going to reap at the end of the day, somewhere down the road, just by seeing that they are a great, moral upstanding person (Colleen, interview).

Colleen clearly sees motherhood as a duty, not just to her child, but also to society, and Colleen regards fulfilling her responsibility to rear the next generation of moral people as a personal achievement.

Beck (1992) argues it is a defining characteristic of contemporary western societies that individuals experience pressure to become what one is – and especially to demonstrate to family, friends and colleagues, that one has truly ‘made it’ and achieved success in personal and professional lives. Joy believes she has ‘made it’ personally and she will make it professionally by having the status a career will bring her in the future

It’s not that I don’t see myself as having a career; I see it as being modular. That’s just the way I feel. I have to compartmentalize that part of my life as being on the back burner for now, and that I will have it all, but not necessarily all at the same time (Joy, Interview).

Joy believes she has made the ‘right choices’ and her decision to prioritize caring for her children over her career is the optimal path to fulfillment for Joy. And Joy described how she had returned to part-time work after the birth of her first child, working three days a week, but found the experience too stressful, because she perceived she was not adequately fulfilling the mother role.

I wasn’t happy because I felt I wasn’t giving, I wasn’t delivering the goods the way I was used to delivering the goods, and I felt ‘God, I’m letting the side down here’, I felt I was letting the side down (Joy, Interview).

There is a religious tone to the way Joy speaks of her children ‘I can devote the time to them’ (Joy, Interview), and many participants framed motherhood discourses in religious or moral terms, (e.g. duty, giving and devotion) particularly in relation to their obligations towards their children. Joy chose to work more flexibly at market research, which she juggles around her children’s needs, because she felt she had to prioritize the mother role and she reconciles this with her expectation that she will return to her career when her children are older. To Joy, motherhood clearly is the greatest achievement of a woman’s life. All women in this research identified with the myth of motherhood and
assured themselves, and me, that they were satisfying their children’s needs, their own needs as mothers and they found motherhood fulfilling and rewarding despite their participation in paid work.

There are inequalities and privileges in the amount of choice available to women and the extent of the moral obligations they choose to recognize. Women with partners, with higher education levels and with greater earning power could afford to reduce their hours in work in order to prioritize motherhood, because of the persistence of the myth of motherhood. Women who reduced their hours of work experienced greater domestic responsibility and limited their careers, earning power and independence. Women who maintained high levels of commitment to work reported experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties because of the impossibility of combining a full time career with motherhood.

Women are compelled to make choices in relation to combining motherhood with paid work and to take responsibility for the outcome of their choices. Women’s participation in paid work has caused a backlash which is evident in intensive mothering discourses and the persistence of the myth of motherhood. Many participants framed children’s needs in terms of children needing their mothers’ care and time, and many women who had prioritized caring for their children by reducing their time in paid work condemned other women’s choices, experienced moral authority and joined the public scrutiny and criticism of full time ‘working mothers’. Women see morality in relation to their commitment to paid work and morality in relation to motherhood. ‘Working mothers’ demonstrate they make choices to combine motherhood with paid work by engaging in gendered reflexive moral reasoning. These decisions are gendered because they deal with notions of mothering, they are moral in providing answers about the right thing to do in relation to motherhood, and in relation to employment, and they are rationalities in providing a framework for taking decisions (Duncan, 2005:54) Women reflected on concerns in relation to their children, families, employers and their colleagues. They reflexively made decisions about the ways they would combine motherhood with paid work, and engaged in moral reasoning during these reflexive deliberations. Gendered structures in workplaces, in the home and in society make it difficult for women to reconcile conflicting moral obligations. ‘Working mothers’
decisions are still made rationally, but with a different sort of rationality to that assumed by individualism discourses. This is one way women can reconcile the consequences of their decisions and the dilemmas these decisions create. Duncan (2003) also found that the decisions women make regarding work and care suggest little evidence of their being atomized individuals exercising unencumbered lifestyle choices and people take decisions about how parenting might be combined with paid work, with reference to moral and socially negotiated views about what behaviour is ‘right and proper’.

Reflexive moral reasoning is the mechanism which facilitates women believing they are exercising agency, thus they present their choices as freely chosen. Women need to feel in control, so they engage in gendered moral reasoning which conceals that women are making decisions under duress, not promoting their well being, prioritizing others’ needs, presenting them as freely chosen and taking full personal responsibility for the consequences of these decisions. If women’s choices create dilemmas, they blame themselves.

In this study, women demonstrate they engage in moral reasoning as a way of reconciling their decisions to combine motherhood with paid work in conditions not of their own choosing. However, women are not empowered by moral reasoning, but in fact are constrained by it, as it provides women with the illusion of choice which masks the clear and defined limits to women’s participation in the public sphere and the persistence of the gendered order of caring. Women’s moral reasoning perpetuates gendered assumptions regarding women’s role in families and in the workplace. Because, as Warner (2007:713) argues,

[A]ll this moralizing we routinely do is a ridiculous waste of time and energy. And it also rests upon assumptions that have no basis in reality. Chief among them is that mothers do what they do most of the time out of choice.

Women navigate the terrain between autonomy and motherhood by making gendered moral choices, under duress, which inevitably do not promote their own well being. By recognizing morality in their decisions to combine motherhood with paid work, women contribute to the dominant discourses which reinforce the polarization of working and caring and which create intersecting inequalities for women who try to do both. As reflexive social actors, participants employ techniques of resistance and self-
governance by making gendered, reflexive, moral choices which conceal the public and private gender regimes operating in families, workplaces and society.

**Conclusion**

This intersectional approach reveals that women experience inequalities and privileges evident in the choices they make to combine motherhood with paid work. Women experience inequalities because of gendered obligations to care for their children, promoted in dominant motherhood discourses, and in this research, all women claimed to experience guilt because they were not always available to their children. Women also reported experiencing gendered inequalities in families, where they were expected to undertake greater responsibility for caring than their partners. Many women reported experiencing gendered assumptions about their (in)ability to fulfill working roles, because in many workplaces, ‘ideal workers’ are unencumbered by care responsibilities. Women navigate between ‘ideal mother’ and ‘ideal worker’ norms by engaging in gendered moral reasoning.

Women who are mothers rarely act in their own best interests, because morally inscribed motherhood charges women with prioritizing the interests of their children. Here, the dilemma of choice is evident. This is not an episodic failure of autonomy to promote well-being which arises when there are problems of coercion, or choices that occur occasionally, but the systemic failure of women to make choices that promote their well-being because motherhood permanently demands women to defer to, or act on the basis of, others’ interests. This precludes women promoting their own well-being. This dilemma arises and is maintained from the relationship between dominant discourses of motherhood and discourses of individualism, because individualism assumes women have a full appreciation of the implications of the choice for their wellbeing and of women’s ability to recognize and act in their own best interests, while discourses of motherhood demand the sublimation of women’s interests to those of their children.

Women’s decisions regarding the ways they will combine motherhood with paid work frequently amount to no more than a series of unsatisfactory trade-offs masquerading as choice. The commonplace observation is that women are hurt by the hard choices they face, however, once the focus shifts away from women’s choices to the gender system that sets the frame within which these choices occur, the realistic limits to
women’s choices are revealed. Gendered expectations in family, workplace and society shape both the patterning of mothers’ wishes in respect of employment as well as their capacities to realize their preferences because of their maternity.

The gender system is both produced by its components, with women in the home criticizing and condemning professional working mothers, and this in turn produces women who reduce their hours in paid work or give up paid work altogether to conform to gendered expectations of the motherhood role, thereby being produced by the gender system as full-time-in-the-home mothers, or mothers who reduce their working hours, becoming marginalized workers.

There is a weak path dependency in the sequencing of legislation to facilitate women’s employment and the structural and social changes necessary to support women’s employment. In Ireland, women have been waiting a long time for attendant changes in the landscapes of family, workplace and society. Given that married women have had opportunities to participate in paid work since 1973 (Government of Ireland, 1973) and arguably have had choice since then, this delay is considerable and reflects the strength of Ireland’s attachment to deeply patriarchal, traditional gendered roles for women and mothers. Families, workplaces and society continue to promote older hierarchies and traditional gendered inequalities, which expose the real limits to women’s ‘choice’ to combine motherhood with paid work.

A pattern which emerges between intersectionality and discourse is that women do not make choices that promote their own well being. This emerges because of the inherent conflict between discourses of motherhood which promote self-sacrifice and discourses of individualism which demand women make the best choices leading to the greatest satisfaction for all. The powerless responsibility for choices which are made in conditions not of women’s own choosing reveals the power operating through discourses of individualism which produces the desire to participate in paid work, and neo-liberalism which produces the desire to develop children who are ‘exemplary capitalist winners’ (Warner, 2006). The power operating through dominant intensive mothering discourses produces the desire to spend copious amounts of time caring for children and conceals the backlash against women’s progress and the patriarchal power operating
through these discourses which sets clear and defined limits on women’s ability to combine motherhood with paid work.

Consequently, women make choices in conditions not of their own choosing between morally inscribed motherhood and morally inscribed participation in paid work with little social support. However, by making choices which women regard as private matters, women’s choices conceal the essentialism that underscores many of the norms deriving from dominant discourses, in particular ‘ideal mother’ and ‘ideal worker’ and maintains the gendered inequalities women experience in workplaces, families and society as each woman’s personal problem, and the consequences of her choices are her own fault or her own achievement.
Chapter 5: Childcare: Valuation and Commodification.

As women participate more in employment, care is transferred more to the market and caring occupations are organized according to the rational economic model – how much time it takes to deliver particular care-giving tasks, and how much the time and the task are worth in instrumental terms. Thus, in contemporary neo-liberal capitalist society, care is measured increasingly as a commodity in terms of time, cost and value. In this chapter, I examine women’s childcare arrangements which reveal the persistence of the gendered order of caring in Irish society, in families and in households. I explore the value attached to caring work and to those who do the caring, which reveals that ‘working mothers’ and child care workers are produced hierarchically in relation to each other, and both experience inequalities in a society that places little value on caring work.

The Gendered Order of Caring

Care work, overwhelmingly performed by women, is universally not valued (Lynch and Lyons, 2008). Barry (2008:14) argues ‘there is a continuing assumption of the provision of care, primarily by women, in households or through the private market place’. The low level of public provision and the lack of statutory support for women in the home and childminders reinforces these assumptions. The State’s contribution to childcare provision extends to capital grants for private and community crèche providers. This neo-liberal market based model is predicated on liberal-individualist notions of choice and the neo-liberal assumption that the market will respond to demand with supply.

Women’s preferences for personal forms of care are not acknowledged in the State’s neo-liberal market based approach to childcare which provides grants to crèche providers only, while an estimated 75,000 children are placed with 37,900 childminders every working day, making it the most popular form of childcare in the State (OECD, 2002). However, there is little regulation of this service. Only 229 of these childminders are registered with the Health Services Executive (HSE), as childminders who care for fewer than four children in their own home are not subject to any regulation, mandatory training or Garda clearance. Barry (2008) claims there is a growing crisis in care
provision, linked to both lack of availability and high cost in the context of low-level public provision of child care services.

Looking for a child-minder is difficult, and obviously finding the right child-minder is difficult and keeping the same child-minder is also difficult. Obviously there is a cost issue as well; it’s much higher with two children (Collette, Focus Group).

Women spend considerable effort on making childcare choices, because certain forms of caring, namely ‘love labour’ (Lynch, 1989), cannot be provided on a hire and fire basis (Lynch, 2007). Because private childminders are not regulated, choosing childcare is one of the most difficult and important decisions a ‘working mother’ has to make in relation to combining motherhood with paid work. The choice women make in relation to childcare is gendered, because overwhelmingly women are responsible for making this decision, and childminders are invariably women. Amanda spoke about the stress involved in finding a childminder who would work in Amanda’s home from seven in the morning and she noted the responsibility for arranging childcare in her family is gendered.

That was a huge stress for me trying to hold onto a babysitter who would come in in the morning, at seven. It was impossible to get and the fear of losing them, because, I felt it was my responsibility. My husband would not be involved in getting the new childminder. I don’t know what other people’s experience of that would be, but it was always me. Me who would put the ad in the paper, [me] who would ask around (Amanda, Focus group).

Care work is gendered. In families it is the woman who finds and engages childminders, and in all cases, childminders are women. All women were responsible for managing and organizing caring, even if they do not do all the day-to-day hands on caring work (Bubeck, 1995). Sevenhuijsen (1998) and Duncan (2003) found that even where gender and power are identified in social research, there is limited discussion of the gendered obligations to care. However, all participants in this research acknowledge gendered obligations to care, and this affects their decisions about how they will combine working and mothering, and the childcare arrangements they make.

Women spoke of the stress involved in finding childminders, particularly women who were not from the local area and did not have family support nearby.
I had to find a childminder. I remember I came back here and there was no sort of [available register]. And I wasn’t from [the local area] and my husband wasn’t from [the local area] and it was the most stressful two years of my life, almost to the stage where I would, very, I almost gave up work, and it was a real struggle I must say (Amy, Focus group).

In Amy’s account, the lack of state provision of childcare had a direct negative impact on her participation in paid work. Amy described being very committed to her career in London and holds the lack of quality childcare directly responsible for her decision to reduce her hours in paid work following her return to the area of the local study. However, as Collins and Wickham (2001) note, the issue of childcare has not actually prevented women from entering the workforce. ‘Irish women, and in particular Irish mothers, are entering the workforce in increasing numbers without the help of formal childcare’ (Collins and Wickham, 2001:11). In families, childcare is the responsibility of individual women, who source, arrange and pay for childcare and have full responsibility for its success or failure. Collette described the most common situation, whereby men are interested, but women have the responsibility for arranging care.

I’d say my husband would be very interested in making sure we have the right person … Yea, he would get involved, but yea, at the end of the day, I think it is utterly I think the mother’s responsibility (Collette, Focus group).

The Women’s Health Council (2004) argues this inequitable burden has been found to cause women significant physical and emotional distress and Amy, Amanda and Collette demonstrate the gendered inequalities they experience because they have responsibility for sourcing and arranging childcare in a context where the state and their partners are less than helpful.

Eithne describes her husband’s gendered expectation that she would be responsible for childcare. Before their first child was born they discussed childcare arrangements.

And Tom said ‘OK, so we’ll send the child to the crèche, Monday to Friday and you can mind the child Saturday and Sunday’ and I’m there, ‘No’. He said ‘what do you mean. No?’ And I said ‘you are off during the week, you know, you might be working Saturday and Sunday night, but you are off Monday and Tuesday, so you can be minding the child Monday and Tuesday’ ‘But I’ve stuff to do’. I said ‘what do you think I have at the weekends? ‘I have stuff to do too’. And he, you know, it took
him a few months to come around to the concept that he’d have to parent when he was off, because he loves his time off in the middle of the week, because he was ‘doing stuff’, there was lots of ‘stuff’ he could do (Eithne, Focus group).

Tom does now indeed care for both children when he is off during the week and enjoys it; however, it was not his expectation that he would be involved in childcare because of gendered assumptions of the mother’s role.

Deriving from motherhood discourses, women are concerned with the quality of the care children receive, both the ‘love labour’ (Lynch, 1989) carers perform as well as the material tasks and work involved in caring so that children’s physical, social and emotional well being is not compromised when women leave their children in the care of others. Motherhood discourses generate pressure on women to choose the ‘best’ care for their children. There is an unfounded assumption that crèche care is impersonal and formal with children not receiving the individual attention they would in a home environment, because it is regarded as commoditized caring on an industrial scale. There was widespread condemnation of crèche care by women who engaged childminders or family members.

And this business of children being in crèches from eight o’clock in the morning, till eight o’clock at night, five days a week, and (.) I don’t think that’s right. You know. I mean a child didn’t ask to be brought into the world, and it most certainly didn’t ask to be dumped into a crèche for forty-something hours a week you know (Grace, Interview).

Grace engaged a childminder, and even though she was not entirely satisfied with her own childminding arrangements, she nevertheless felt they were superior to women who engaged crèche care. There is gendered inequality in the way women experience public criticism for using crèche care, even though crèche care is regulated and arguably safer. Women who used crèche care generally explained their choice with reference to its availability every week of the year, which is the only form of childcare to guarantee this.

There is an interesting paradox surrounding crèche care. Popular views regularly link ‘dumped’ with crèche, and crèche care is commonly seen as inferior to maternal care. ‘It goes against the whole thing about having a child if they’re going to be sitting in a crèche from nine to six all day long’ (Gina, Interview). Yet, the government regards provision of childcare places through capital grants for crèche providers and crèche
places for disadvantaged children as all that is necessary to facilitate women’s employment and frames success in childcare policy in financial or market terms.

Women retain responsibility for the choice of childcare and for making the best choice within extremely limited options. Both Freya and Eithne combine crèche care with other forms of care. These are the only two women in the study who use crèche facilities despite crèches being the focus of state intervention. Freya has her older two children minded by an au-pair, while the baby attends a crèche. Eithne combines family care with crèche care, whenever her husband is available, and Eithne’s girls attend a crèche, one for the full day and one for after-school care. Eithne found public scrutiny of motherhood extends to childcare and she found crèche care is roundly condemned.

And you know, we get a lot ‘Oh, you have them in a crèche?’… A lot of people don’t think crèches are very good for the child - in terms of the child’s development; in that they don’t get the one to one care that they would get in a home environment; and that your child is deprived somewhat by being in a crèche; or that you dumped them in the crèche from eight in the morning to six in the evening, day after day (Eithne, Interview).

As caring is gendered, these difficult choices are women’s responsibility and choosing crèche care is a socially unpopular decision that women are obliged to defend. Women’s desire to have their children cared for and loved by their carers led to many women claiming to have preferred family care to engaging a paid childminder or crèche to care for their children. However, only eight participants managed to achieve this at any stage (Appendix I).

Kate described herself as ‘fortunate’ in being able to access family care which is provided by her sister. However, the care of female relatives reinforces the gendered order of caring.

She [my sister] collects them from school, she keeps them, she’ll do their homework with them every day. She brings them to, or collects them from, activities after school. So she’s like their surrogate mum, I suppose really. And it’s great that she’s my sister, it’s wonderful (Kate, Interview).

Six women combined family care with paid care; Jean has her older child minded by her own mother, while her younger two go to a childminder’s home. Similarly
Yolanda’s parents come to her home two days, and her children go to the childminder for the other days. And, six women described their husbands as being actively involved in the care of their own children, which may suggest men are challenging and valuing care. This is consistent with the national data, in 2008, men spent on average 4 hours and 40 minutes per day on paid work and just under two hours per day on caring and housework (McGinnity and Russell, 2008). Joy only works when her husband is home in the evenings and weekends to care for their children. Faye’s husband has reduced his hours of work and minds their children one day every week, while other husbands are available to older children after school.

In a minority of cases, women’s care patterns changed with the birth of their second child. Four women had their own parents minding the first child, but moved to childminding or combination of crèche and childminding when the second child was born. Jasmine had her sister-in-law caring for her children when they were pre-school ages, but now combines after-school care with her husband, who has recently changed to working nights.

I suppose I’m very lucky now at the moment, because Patrick is working in a different job now and he’s working mostly at night, and he collects them mostly in the afternoon and that gives me the freedom not to be rushing home from work either, you know, that I can take an hour, whether its to do a bit of extra work after school, or, you know, just to meet a colleague for a cup of coffee or something, so I’m kind of lucky enough at the moment, you know (Jasmine, Focus group).

While Jasmine is privileged in relation to childcare because her husband is available to care for their children during the day, there is an inequality which arises from this position - her husband’s job is as a taxi driver, which means Jasmine has primary responsibility for economically supporting the family. Having family available for childcare, while regarded as a privilege by Jasmine and Kate, is completely arbitrary and maintains caring as a private issue. Family caring also means that the caring is not commoditized, and fits with traditional expectations of caring as outside the remit of the market, deriving from motherhood discourses.

Women who engaged childminders experienced criticism from those women who only availed of family care. Joy believed only family care was good enough for her children, and claimed women who went outside family for childcare were neglecting
their children, by ‘dumping’ them. ‘So and so’s dumping their children to be reared by other women… and I felt so strongly about it… it just felt so deeply uncomfortable for me’ (Joy, Focus group). This was quite a strong statement to make in a focus group discussion where women had discussed their distress regarding sourcing childminders, children’s unhappiness with childminders, women’s stress in managing work while worrying about childcare and women reluctantly reducing their hours of work. Joy was convinced her way of caring was morally superior and insisted on sharing it with the group.

Women were concerned that the people they engaged as childminders would care for their children to the same extent as they themselves, did. However, sourcing and retaining suitable childminders was a great concern for women, because women were unable to participate in paid work unless their responsibilities towards care of their children were satisfied. Sourcing carers who will care for children, physically and emotionally to the level women desire is difficult, because registered childcare is primarily available in the form of crèche care. However, most participants expressed a preference for more personal forms of care and sought individual childminders who would develop long term relationships with their children. A private childminder is the most common form of care the women in this study utilized. Fifteen women engaged childminders either in the minders’ home or in the woman’s home, while four other women engaged childminders in shared arrangements (Appendix I).

Childminding has been a hidden part of the economy for a very long time, so we’re not surprised at the numbers . . . it also suits society to have it this way, to have cheap, accessible childcare available (Childminding Ireland, 2009). There is an implication by Childminding Ireland that because childminders are not registered, they are providing an inexpensive service. There is also an implication that childcare is accessible. It is neither. The lack of statutory support and intervention has created a largely inaccessible and inequitable childcare market in Ireland. Because so many childminders are not registered with the HSE, the invisibility of childminders, both in the formal economy and in society, make it difficult for ‘working mothers’ to make and retain satisfactory childcare arrangements, which suit themselves, their children and their childminders. In all care arrangements, childminders are women, and all
‘working mothers’ have responsibility for sourcing, arranging and paying for childcare demonstrating the way caring work is gendered, even if it is commoditized somewhat by being undertaken by paid care workers.

Class contributes to inequality between women and the cost of privatized reproductive services such as childcare can create and maintain class and gender inequalities for poorly paid ‘working mothers’. Brona works a shift schedule of three twelve hour days each week ‘There’s a month of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and then a month of Thursday, Friday, Saturday’ (Brona, Interview). Brona’s husband works a regular Monday to Friday week and I enquired why Bona’s husband would not care for the children on the Saturdays Brona works.

She [childminder] usually works on a Saturday. Well, even if he didn’t want to work on a Saturday she wants her money. You know, she wants that set money. He, actually, some Saturdays he’d have nothing to do and he’d go off killing time (Brona, Interview).

Brona demonstrates that she pays her childminder on a daily basis, rather than calculating an average rate based on three days one month and two days the next month. This reflects the instrumental nature of the relationship between Brona and her childminder. However, the fact that Brona’s husband would ‘go off killing time’ if he was not working in order to maintain this arrangement demonstrates that childcare arrangements are Brona’s responsibility and he has no involvement or responsibility for care in their home. Connell (1987) found men’s ‘collective choice not to do childcare reflects the dominant definition of men’s interests and in fact helps them keep predominant power’ (1987:106). As Lynch and Lyons (2008:181) argue, the challenge in realizing social change is that patriarchal practices of caring do not have to be re-configured in every individual case or in every household; they are already encoded in the norms of femininity, masculinity and domesticity. Not having to do caring is part of the patriarchal dividend, something that accrues to you by virtue of being a man, even if you do not set out to avoid it (Connell, 1995; O’Connor, 2000).

Clearly, paying for childcare is also Brona’s responsibility.

So I’d be wasting fifty-five euros, but I have to pay it out, but I understand that… But it’s a bit of a waste though… the third day is a bit of a balls in one way (Brona, Interview).
Mahon (1991) found women incurred replacement costs for childcare which increased with the number of children. When taxation and childcare costs were subtracted from their wages, many found it was not economically viable for them to remain at work. Brona was unable to pay her childminder more than €55 a day, and acknowledged this restricted her choice in terms of available childcare. ‘If I’d a better job I’d consider giving a way more money, I’d love to be able to, but my job doesn’t [pay me]’ (Brona, Interview). Average hourly childcare costs in 2007 were €4.90 for pre-school children and €6.00 for primary school-going children (CSO, 2007). Brona has two school-going children and one pre-school child, if Brona were to pay the average hourly rate; she would by paying €202.80\(^{16}\) per day, which is almost four times what Brona currently pays. Brona also found it difficult to continue justifying her participation in paid work in economic terms ‘other people with bigger wages are fine, I do think it’s very hard for the likes of us to stay working, to have the incentive to stay working’ (Brona, Interview) and Brona observed many women change their way of working to avoid childcare costs ‘there’s a lot of women that give up, and go working at night, but they’re at home all day then and working at night so they don’t have to pay a babysitter’, which Brona would do, except her job does not lend itself to this.

As is evident from Brona’s account, the division of care labour is gendered and classed. Class was evident in the resources Brona had available to devote to childcare costs and Lynch and Lyons (2008) found those who are poorer cannot afford prohibitive childcare costs. Thus, women with little disposable income are limited in the childcare available to them, and class and gender interact to ensure both these ‘working mothers’ and childminders earned less, and class and gender inequalities are reproduced. The impact of inequality in the caring sphere has negatively impacted on women’s position in other spheres of life and has served as a basis for their subordinate position in the economic, cultural and political systems (Baker et al., 2004). The feminization of care has not been contained within the family, but has also been reflected in paid care work. Much of the paid employment which women have taken up in recent years has been in caring jobs of all kinds. One third of participants in this research are employed in caring

\(^{16}\) Pre school child @ € 4.90 plus 2 school going children at € 6.00 each x 12 hrs = € 202.80.
The gendered order of caring means women are responsible for choosing, arranging and paying for childcare and gender intersects with class to ensure that women with fewer resources have fewer options in their childminding choices. In all cases, childminders are women, therefore gender and class inequalities are reproduced in ‘working mothers’ childcare arrangements.

The gendered order of caring has not changed because of women’s participation in paid work, and women are obliged to arrange and pay for care of their children, with most not questioning these gendered obligations.

**Valuation of Care Workers**

When women attempt to replace the care work they do for their children, they experience dilemmas because all ‘love labour’ (Lynch, 1989, 2008) involves caring, but not all caring involves love labour and it is possible to care for children without feeling emotionally attached to them. The quality of childcare is a major concern for parents and satisfaction with the arrangement in respect of the emotional well-being of the child has been found to be at least as important as economic considerations (Wheelock and Jones, 2002). Avril feels even the terms ‘childcare’ and ‘childminding’ do not do justice to the relationship involved.

[T]hinking of it as childminding, I think, is (.). I never think of it like that, I think of it as what’s benefiting for the child… I think that even no matter if it’s five hours or ten hours, it has to be a very secure environment. And that has to be right for the child (Avril, Focus group).

Faye also appreciates the difference her childminder makes to the quality of her life and claims ‘this woman, is just like, probably one of the most important parts of our lives, bar the immediate family’ (Faye, Focus group).

Once again I realize how absolutely lucky I am with her, and I think these are the last kids she’s going to mind. She’s kind of in her mid fifties now, mm, but like that, she does all the dropping off to school, and the collecting, all the dancing and the tennis and she does all of that. So, the guilt comes in sometimes that I’m not there to do that and (.). I hear where Sheila took the kids today, she did this, and she took them to McDonalds

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17 1 Physiotherapist, 1 Director of Nursing, 1 Clinic Nurse Manager, 1 Personal Carer, 3 Nurses, 2 Midwives and 1 Respite Carer = 10 (Appendix J).
and she took them to the party and all of that, but you kind of have to
move along with it as well. That’s a lucky kind of side, every day I wake
up and think how lucky, how great this scene is you know, at the same
time (Faye, Focus group).

Guilt and luck are linked together in Faye’s account. She experiences guilt because she is
unable to take her children to activities, but luck because Sheila is able to do it.

Maybe that’s the first relationship that has to actually happen. You know,
I would think you have to like the person, you have to respect them and
you know, work with them, that it is something you are both taking on
together. That’s certainly, you know, what I would think is paramount to
the whole thing because I don’t think, if there isn’t a relationship there it
will fail, and that’s definite (Avril, Focus group).

Clearly Avril sees the arrangement with her childminder as a cooperative one, based on
mutual respect. The job of caring for children is ‘something you are both taking on
together’ and the relationship between mother and childminder is more than an
employment one, and requires mutual cooperation or it will fail. To facilitate the
‘relationship’ they are ‘taking on together’, Avril finds spending time with her
childminder very important for herself, the children and the childminder.

I would be there for a lot of the time with her. For half a day a week I am
there with her… I work within the house with her for that half day and I
always did that. And I just felt that that was good for her and good for me
(Avril, Interview).

While some women were concerned about the care of their children while with
childminders, women were also concerned that their children would value their
childminders and Audrey was quite upset that her elder two children did not treat their
childminder properly.

I suppose the biggest thing I would find now, at this stage, where the kids
are getting a bit bigger, is the disciplining of them really. … You tell
them they have to respect her and everything and we’ve probably got over
that now, they are better now with her … I felt bad about the way they
treated, they way they answered her back a couple of times, I felt, my
goodness, is this their attitude? Is this the way they’re turning out? …But
I mean at least she brought it to my attention and we were able to deal
with it (Audrey, Interview).
The most obvious evidence of women valuing their childminders is in the way they regard the issue of payment for the caring service provided. Women who commanded high salaries themselves could afford to pay their childminders higher wages. Some of these women received loyalty and quality service in return for decent terms and conditions. ‘I would say that most of my salary would go out on childcare. Definitely. You end up with very little at the end, very little at the end of the month’ (Avril, Focus group). Avril pays for childcare from her salary. However childcare is a family expense, not a mother’s expense, thus Avril is unequal in the family because of gendered obligations to care. In this research all women spoke of the cost of childcare as their financial responsibility. This is consistent with the findings of Mahon (1998a) and Hattery (2001) and who also found that childcare is a woman’s expense, not a family’s expense. In fact, Mahon (1998a) found the gendered responsibility of paying for childcare is a disincentive to women’s participation in paid work.

There is, of course, an individual responsibility for employers of carers to act ethically (Kittay, 1999; Tronto, 2002) and many women do. ‘I pay her well and I look after her well, so it definitely works both ways’ (Amelia, Interview). Colleen also believes childminding is a professional relationship involving trust and responsibility on the part of both mother and childminder.

I also don’t stop wages for my childminder when I take holidays… if I take holidays I am taking him away from her, she didn’t ask me for that time, I feel that she is entitled to get paid. I get paid sick pay, I get paid bank holidays so I don’t deduct her any of those things. So it comes back to that trust thing. I want her to look after my son. I am very happy with the way she is doing it, I will pay her for those days, I think she is fully entitled to them (Colleen, Focus group).

Colleen extends the benefits she receives in employment to the woman she employs to care for her son. Avril, Colleen, Amelia and Audrey describe their satisfaction with their childminding arrangements which they reported had been in place for some time. While there is a hierarchical relationship between mothers and childminders as in all employment relationships, these women demonstrate they value their childminders and the work they do, and they employ their childminders on equitable terms and conditions.

The lady who used to do all my cleaning and everything, eleven years ago, I used to pay eighty pounds a week. Well it was all my housework done and everything, she was fabulous and then I used to pay her for her
holidays. But then she was kind of a poor lady anyway, so she came from a poor background and her husband wasn’t working, she was a fantastic worker, she was fabulous, you know and I used to love to give her the money because I felt, it was kind of giving it to a good cause, that she would spend it well or whatever, you know (Anita, Focus Group).

Anita describes ‘my housework… and everything’, demonstrating that one gendered worker replaced another. And Anita was happy to pay the woman, because in addition to being a ‘fantastic worker’, she also deserved to be paid as a ‘good cause’. Anita does not describe paying the women, but ‘to give her the money’ which suggests Anita felt she was being altruistic and generous, not that the woman was providing a service for which she was entitled to be paid. Some women’s valuation of caring work reflects the wider societal view and caring is made invisible and not regarded as ‘work’ because it is carried out by women, in the private sphere of the home.

However, other women also do not regard caring work as valuable and either resent or do not pay childminders’ holiday pay or sick pay. This leads to further inequalities for women who are caring for ‘working mothers’ children and it reinforces the low value placed on care and care work.

Well what made me, I know this is to tally off the point, what made me very cross, when I actually got her she wanted to be paid for holidays, but I said ‘no’. She was quite demanding about being paid for holidays… There was a week at Christmas when I only worked one day and at New Year’s week when I only worked one day, and I only paid her for the one day, but she cribbed, big time, do you know. But, I don’t know. I feel it’s dreadful to be paying out a hundred and forty quid when you don’t have to (Florence, Focus group).

Because Florence works two days a week, she has retained this woman to work two days every week, which prevents the woman from engaging in alternative paid work on those days. When Florence takes holidays and does not pay the woman, the woman is materially disadvantaged. However, Florence does not see the work as employment, but regards it in a more casual, invisible way. However, Florence is paid by her employer when she takes holidays. Likewise, Yolanda agreed to pay holiday pay when engaging her childminder, but now regrets it, because she sees no return for that payment.

I have a week off at Easter and a week off at Christmas and four other weeks that I can take off during the year, and the arrangement that I made was that if I was off I’d pay her, but if she was off I wouldn’t. But I’m
sorry for that now, because I pay her six weeks a year for doing absolutely nothing (Yolanda, Focus group)

Interestingly Florence sees paying holiday pay to her childminder as ‘paying out…when you don’t have to’. Similarly Yolanda regards retaining her childminder by paying holiday pay as paying her childminder for ‘doing absolutely nothing’. No other employment would be so invisible, with no legal entitlement to holiday pay. Both Yolanda and Florence are paid holiday pay by their employers, however, the nature of caring work, being in the home and invisible, does not carry the same entitlements as the formal employment relationships Florence and Yolanda enjoy. Deriving from neo-liberalism discourses, in Ireland, earning or paid work in the formal labour market is more valued than caring in the family. And many women do not value their childminder’s caring work. This is evidence of liberal-individualist attitudes; it is up to individuals to negotiate the best arrangements for themselves with the labour market. ‘Working mothers’ negotiate the best arrangements for themselves with their employers and accept the privilege that accrues to them when their childminders are unable to negotiate better arrangements for themselves.

Their treatment of childminders sets up differences between women. There is inequality between women consequent on their occupations and economic circumstances however; there are also inequalities between women and their childminders. Many women did not see the women who cared for their children in the private sphere of the home as employees, entitled to the legal protection afforded to ‘working mothers’ who work in the public sphere. Neo-liberal capitalist discourses are evident in the treatment of care, care work and care workers in Irish social policy. Reproductive workers are paid less and have less employment entitlements than productive workers. These are the ‘precariat’, those in precarious employment, working outside tax and social insurance networks with little or no job security, and little or no access to sick pay or pension entitlements or to other non-pay benefits. According to TASC (2009), their rates of pay are generally lower than those of the regular workforce, and unsurprisingly, the ‘precariat’ is dominated by women. The OECD (2008) reported that Ireland ranks first in the EU-15 in terms of income inequality and that in Ireland, 23 per cent of women have incomes that put them at risk of poverty (OECD 2009). Many of these women are employed as reproductive, or caring, workers.
Women bear disproportionate responsibility for care work, in the informal world of the family and in the formal world of the care economy (Daly, 2001; Folbre, 2004; Reay, 2005; Barry, 2008). In all sectors, care workers are paid less than other workers. In Ireland, workers who are employed in the care sector have the same status as semi-skilled workers such as bar staff, goods porters and mail sorters, which is the second lowest occupational ranking (Lynch and Lyons, 2008:177). If care workers are employed in domestic situations in private households, they are classified as unskilled workers at the bottom of the occupational ranking index (Lynch and Lyons, 2008:177). It is not surprising, therefore, that ‘service workers, especially those who have worked as domestics, are convinced that “public jobs” are preferable to domestic service’ (Nanako Glenn, 1992:22-3).

As the care sector has grown, women have formed an ever larger majority of paid care workers (Daly and Rake, 2003). In keeping with the low value assigned to caregiving in the private sphere, this sector is characterized by low pay and poor working conditions, devaluing the value of care in economic and employment terms (Womens Health Council, 2004). Certain tasks are commodifiable though, and there is a case for substantially improving the conditions of its commodification to preclude exploitation (Meagher, 2002). All ‘working mothers’ in this study also earn more than the minimum wage. The childminders’ tax free allowance of €15,000 for minding up to three children in the woman’s own home reflects a wage of €7.21 per hour for all three children, based on a forty hour week. This is 83 per cent of the national minimum wage and equates to earning €2.40 per hour per child. Some private childminders do not enjoy the benefit of contractual employment because their care work is invisible, unrecognized and undervalued.

Eithne’s experience of crèche care is positive and her children are cared for competently and professionally. But, Eithne observed the employees in the crèche where her children are minded cannot afford to take unpaid maternity or parental leave, because care workers generally earn less than other types of workers.

Several of the girls who work in the crèche have had babies within the last twelve months, and they were all back to work after the eighteen weeks maternity leave, they didn’t take any of the unpaid leave that they were
offered, couldn’t afford it obviously. And they don’t talk about taking parental leave or anything (Eithne, Interview).

The women working in Eithne’s crèche may not be very well paid, but they do enjoy employment contracts, and are entitled to all the legal protections afforded to employees. However, like other care workers who earn little, they cannot afford to take the unpaid maternity and parental leave which many of the mothers of the children they care for avail of. Eithne acknowledged she is privileged in comparison with the carers of her children. She could afford to avail of unpaid leave, while the women in the crèche who cared for Eithne’s children could not. Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) and Lynch and Lyons (2008) found the employment conditions of reproductive workers may not be particularly favourable. McKay (1998) noted that certain powerful groups and actors benefit from while simultaneously devaluing care because of the way it is not valued in social or political systems. There is stark inequality between Eithne and the crèche workers who care for Eithne’s children. Eithne acknowledges this inequality. However, both Eithne and the ‘girls who work in the crèche’ are not members of the powerful groups and actors who benefit from devaluing care. The owners of the crèche, to whom Eithne pays a significant proportion of her salary, are the beneficiaries. The ‘girls who work in the crèche’ are paid a fraction of Eithne’s crèche costs. There is a symbiotic relationship between professional ‘working mothers’ and care workers, and Eithne’s acknowledgement of the inequality between herself and the ‘girls who work in the crèche’ demonstrates the intersecting inequality whereby both professional women and care-workers are produced hierarchically in relation to each other. As Dhamoon (2008) argues, regardless of whether a specific relation of penalty and privilege is constituted by a subject marked as dominant or subordinate, we all occupy differing degrees and forms of privilege and penalty and are therefore always and already implicated in that structure.

The gendered order of caring extends to the valuation of care workers, and the state, crèche providers, and some ‘working mothers’ do not recognize nor value the caring work crèche workers and childminders do. In all cases, women who engaged in paid work were materially privileged relative to the women who cared for their children.
Commodification of Caring

As women participate more in employment, care is transferred more to the market and caring occupations are organized according to the rational economic model: how much time it takes to deliver particular care-giving tasks, and how much the time and the task are worth in instrumental terms. As Lynch and Lyons (2008:179) argue, the emotional work involved in loving another person ‘is not readily transferred to a paid other by arrangement’. To attempt to pay someone to visit a friend in hospital or share a meal with a partner is to undermine the premise of care. ‘It is not possible to produce ‘fast care’ like fast food in standardized packages’ (Lynch and Lyons, 2008:180). Badgett and Folbre (1999:318) argue that commodifying all caring will result in ‘pre-packaged units of supervision’ and a society where there is a lack of focus on the welfare of others.

In the focus group, Grace discussed approaching her childminder regarding Grace’s plan to reduce her working hours.

Grace  My intention was to try and get her to stay with us and to do the reduced hours, and… what she said to me was ‘what are you going to do if I don’t do it?’ So I said ‘Well, you know, we really haven’t thought that far ahead, but if you don’t, well, I’ll try and get somebody else’, and she said ‘Oh I’d hate to think of Katie dumped in with someone else’ … ‘Dumped’ Not a word about Susan, of course. I could have sold her to the gypsies. She wouldn’t have cared.

Faye   Doesn’t that make you think what she thinks you’re doing with your children is dumping them?

Grace    But this is it. That’s what I was saying. So, it’s at the back of your mind you see. The way care work is regarded as women’s work, and its low valuation, was evident in both Grace’s and the childminder’s accounts. It was interesting that the childminder used the term ‘dumped’ in relation to a child she is currently minding, and to whom she is clearly attached. Obviously the childminder does think children are dumped by their mothers. Grace is aware of this and bringing her children every day to this woman causes Grace distress. It is also clear that while Grace is ‘dumping’ her children, they are ‘dumped’ on the childminder, who has little value on the work she herself does. However, power relations are also evident in the relationship. Grace can arbitrarily reduce her hours of work without negotiation or notice, while the childminder can withdraw the service altogether. Grace was also concerned that her childminder treated
Grace’s children differently to the childminder’s children and also differently to each other, and Grace’s older child was reported to be very unhappy, which influenced Grace’s decision to reduce her working hours. The way Grace describes being concerned about her children’s welfare, while having no regard for her childminder’s welfare demonstrates the effect commodifying caring can have on individual relationships.

So I think maybe she had it too easy, really to be honest, for years, and she just took us for granted. And we never really argued with her, and we gave her whatever she wanted, and we went along with it, and we sorted it out ourselves here, or seethed quietly, probably more to the point. Whereas I think she kind of got a bit of a wake up call, and she realized, free money here for doing very little. So that has improved quite a bit, and the fact that they see less of her is a good thing I think now as well… the balance has come back into it, and I suppose the other advantage for me is that I’m very definitely now their mother, do you know what I mean? and she is in her role (Grace, Interview).

Grace demonstrates the delicate dynamic in the relationship between ‘working mother’ and childminder. As childminders are difficult to source, Grace was reluctant to upset the woman who minds her children to the point where she ‘went along’ with whatever she wanted, and ‘seethed quietly’ because she resented having to give her ‘whatever she wanted’. However, by reducing the time her children spend with the childminder, Grace is happy that she has asserted her role as primary carer by being with her children three afternoons, while the childminder minds the children for two. Freund and Maguire (1999:89/90) suggest that ‘control over time – our own and other people’s - is a form of power’. By exercising this power, Grace also establishes new boundaries in the childminding relationship and ‘she is in her role’ suggesting that the childminder role is one of employee, while Grace is ‘very definitely now their mother’. The relationship between ‘working mother’ and childminder is clearly hierarchical and emotionally competitive in some cases.

Mothers can unilaterally change or reduce their hours in paid work, which has consequences for childminders’ earnings and hours of work. Grace also does not regard the caring work as valuable ‘free money here for doing very little’. Grace regards the caring when undertaken by a paid childminder as a transaction. The woman is paid to do a job, but when Grace cares for her own children, it is valued, ‘natural’ and outside the remit of the market. However, the widely held view that mothers’ care is the best care
for children was evident when women were concerned that there was slippage between
the mother’s primary role as carer and the childminders’ role as carer.

At the end of the day they are your kids, they’re not her kids, you know
what I mean. And like, this is a job and her kids come first, if it was any
other way, it would be wrong from her point of view. But of course, you
see, you want it all, you know what I mean? You want her to cosset your
kids the way you [do] and of course, she’s not going to flipping do that,
and if she did, you wouldn’t like it either (Grace, Interview).

Grace acknowledges the delicate dynamic involved in the childminder - mother
relationship. It is difficult to commodify caring. On one hand Grace describes the
childminder’s role in instrumental terms as ‘a job’, but on the other hand, she expects the
woman to provide ‘love labour’ (Lynch, 1989, 2008) for Grace’s children ‘to cosset your
kids’ (Grace, Interview). Many women were concerned that their childminders would
provide emotional labour (Kittay, 1999; Tronto, 1993; 2002) and develop attachments to
their children in order to replicate mother’s care and this reinforces the notion of
motherhood as a ‘natural’ relationship between mother and child. However, women feel
usurped when their children become too attached to childminders and women do not
want their positions as mothers undermined - ‘you wouldn’t like it either’ (Grace,
Interview).

Women were concerned that childminders would perform the material tasks
necessary to properly care for their children, particularly participating in extra curricular
activities and homework. Yolanda was concerned that her children did not have an
opportunity to do homework properly in the childminders’ home.

They don’t do the homework in the childminders’ house, because there’s
too many kids up there, there’s too many televisions on, mm, I just said it
at the start, I said, ‘look, don’t do the homework, I’ll do it when I come
home’ (Yolanda, Focus group).

This was reported to cause tension in the relationship between Yolanda and the woman
who minds Yolanda’s children and Grace was concerned that her children could not
engage in sporting and social activities unless it suited the childminder’s own children.

Women are also concerned that their children will develop into ‘exemplary
capitalist winners’ (Warner, 2006) with a well-developed set of interpersonal skills
(Rubin, 1994) deriving from ‘new capitalist mother’ discourses. With the intensification
of mothering, there is a focus on outcomes in terms of children’s development. This
means that almost professionalized tasks may be easier to commodify, such as supervising homework or taking children to activities and some women saw childminding in instrumental terms. The net effect of not recognizing the work dimensions of caring is that it ‘not seen as producing anything of great value, although it does’ (Lynch and Lyons, 2008:176), however, as Oakley (2002:88) argues:

[W]hen almost everything else has a cost and a price, the concept of ‘value’ becomes wholly economic; terms such as ‘value’, ‘labour’, ‘production’, ‘reproduction’, and ‘work’ have all been hijacked into the service of economics.

Women’s participation in the public world of work has had an effect on the way women’s work is regarded in the home. From being a site of private, unpaid caring, the home has also become a site of commoditized transactions and choosing and paying for childcare involves a renegotiation of home and mothering for these women because in some cases the home is also a site of paid work. While the home is a site of commoditized transactions, it also reinforces the mother’s role as natural in the sense that women attempt to replace themselves in the home. Interestingly, in most cases where women engaged childminders to come into their homes, they reported having more satisfactory childminding arrangements, and with one exception, employing their childminders on equitable terms and conditions. Perhaps this is because both ‘working mothers’ and childminding women are happier with caring for children in their own home, maintaining home as the ‘natural’ site of social reproduction. Welcoming women into their own homes also demonstrates the trust implicit in the mother-childminder relationship.

Where women took their children to childminder’s homes, there is a different dynamic in the relationship, the child is a visitor to the minder’s home, and has ‘paying guest’ status, while it maintains the childminder’s control of the home space. In either case, paying for childcare represents a shift from traditional paid production and unpaid social reproduction and the home / work dichotomy is variously shaped by these women’s childcare choices and arrangements even while all caring work is gendered.

Some women did not regard childminding as ‘work’. Neo-liberal and individualism discourses were evident in the way some women did not recognize or reward the labour involved in childcare, yet were anxious that care workers would do the
material tasks involved in caring for children’s physical needs as well as ensuring their children’s acquisition of skills and knowledge. Motherhood discourses also positioned women as being responsible for the care needs of children. This is a complex pattern reflecting liberal-individualist attitudes and privileging some women by allowing them to participate in paid work, leads in some cases to these women engaging childminders on hierarchically ordered and sometimes exploitative terms.

However, it is not possible to commodify all caring, and women’s efforts to commodify the caring that childminding women do, combined with the gendered order of caring, results in childminding women having precarious employment, and results in some cases, in significant tension between ‘working mothers’ and the women they engage to care for their children, because ‘working mothers’ value care when it is done by themselves, but caring when paid for, is neither valued, nor regarded as valuable by some ‘working mothers’. This creates persistent inequalities for all those providing care.

There are patterns between these discourses which work together to create and maintain intersecting inequalities for women. Deriving from the relationship between discourses of motherhood which position women as responsible for caring, and discourses of neo-liberalism which is concerned with commoditization, privatization and value, the first pattern that emerges is that caring work is gendered and not valued. Women’s caring, both as a personal activity and as paid work is retained as invisible, undervalued and under-rewarded as a consequence of the configuration of motherhood and neo-liberalism discourses in Irish Society. Some women only value caring when they do it themselves, and some women do not value the domestic work or the caring childminders do.

However, because the gendered order of caring only charges women with all caring work this exploitation of childminders is regarded as a woman’s issue because men refuse to engage in the issue of care, and childcare in particular (Connell, 1987). By maintaining caring as a women’s issue, consequently any exploitation of carers is regarded as the responsibility and fault of women. Childminders who are not registered have no employment protection and their treatment is entirely at the discretion of employing women and households. There is a common tendency in policy and research to blame better-off women for exploiting poorer and low income women who care for
children. However, as Lynch and Lyons (2008) argue, such an allegation is both profoundly gendered and sociologically misleading. Caring is not simply a women’s responsibility, so men in households that hire women to care on exploitative terms are as culpable as their female partners. Not only that, but when childminders or other carers are exploited, the problem occurs because of weak labour laws and lack of enforcement of these laws that allow people to be employed in care situations, especially in domestic situations, without full regulation and proper wages. The problem is a neo-liberal policy one, not a personal one for individual women – but individual women are made to carry the moral responsibility because of the persistence of intensive motherhood discourses which maintains the gendered order of caring. This pattern divides and conquers women, by privileging some ‘working mothers’ sometimes, this pattern creates enduring inequalities for all women.

Vulnerable Carers and Children
Women are aware of a black market in childminding and Brona claims all her childminders have also been in receipt of welfare, either disability, lone parent or job seekers benefits which supplement their childcare earnings. This excerpt from one focus group discussion is telling.

Brona There was about ten of them out [socializing], and there was six of them on-the-sick [receiving disability benefit]. Once you get away with it after twelve months. I don’t think, they only call you every twelve months after that… They go out with either depression or depression.

Amy You can start again and you can keep it going. I know somebody who has kept it going until her child was two or three, you know.

Brona I think you get paid like a hundred and sixty, a hundred and sixty euros a week.

June For staying at home.

Brona It’s still a hundred and sixty euros a week, every week for the rest of your life.

Freya That’s it.
Anna And you’re not paying childminders. These women demonstrate that they appreciate the difficulties for some women of balancing motherhood with paid work. Many women do not want to leave their children when they are very small even if they could source and afford adequate childcare. One way of navigating the lack of childcare options is to claim disability benefit in order to generate an income while staying off work. This facilitates women being home with their children when they are small and retains a job to return to when children start school.

It was also reported that some unemployed women on long term disability benefit take up childminding. Brona claimed two of her childminders had been claiming disability benefit to bolster their income from childminding.

And both of them are on-the-sick, claiming all their benefits… And they’ve medical cards and everything…. But you see, there’s very little incentive for childminders as well, they don’t get paid an awful lot, but someone that’s on-the-sick that wants cash into their hand, there’s a whole underground industry there … Neither of the two of them have ever worked legitimately in their life. It’s always been under the counter, you know. I can understand why they do that too though (Brona, Interview).

It is easier for the State to pay disability benefit to many women than to address the issue of childcare with conflicting policy coalitions regarding women’s place either in the home or in paid work. The Irish Government refuses to support mothers in paid work with proper childcare provision or by regulating the quality of childcare thereby ensuring that caring is neither seen as valued nor valuable and always a woman’s issue. O’Connor and Murphy (2008) argue this delay in developing a childcare policy, combined with the lack of state intervention to support parenting and care work has reinforced women’s disadvantaged position in society. Care work continues to be seen, and addressed within a policy context, as predominantly a private concern and a female responsibility (O’Connor, Smithson and des Dores Goerreiro, 2002). The Government’s lack of support for carers reflects the low valuation of care and care workers and also a lack of political and societal consensus about where mothers should be on the employability continuum. Women demonstrated their awareness of government policy in a focus group discussion.
Brona: I think it’s the Irish Government putting their head in the sand. Do you know the way in some countries women who decide to stay at home get a nominal amount of money to stay at home. I think the Government kind of know it’s going on but aren’t addressing it.

Angela: But I don’t think you can just blame the Government because at the end of the day we are all responsible for that. You have people there, needed for the services industry, very low paid jobs, who are they? The women. The women will go into the lower paid sector. And they’re needed. So if there’s a little small amount of those, and I’m not saying it’s a small amount, but if there’s a little fraction of those that are (.).

Brona: Skimming.

Angela: Screwing the system, that’s OK.

Freya: I actually don’t blame people in many ways, they’re keeping the flow going.

Brona: I don’t know how to remedy it you know, its sort of catch 22. I can see why women do it, because it does, on the lower paid jobs, it doesn’t really pay them to get a babysitter. It hardly pays me. But I’m just saying it’s a huge part of society. The amount of money that goes on it, and the people that get away with it.

Angela: But its still suiting the government, and its still not costing them so much because the fact that the layer of people are being paid so little.

Clearly, some women are in receipt of disability benefit and are childminding because of its invisibility. Participants were not critical of individual women who claim disability benefit and mind children and acknowledge these women are necessary ‘to keep the flow going’, because these women provide childcare which is in short supply. Women who claim disability benefit and mind other women’s children are available in a scarce market, as they ‘will go into the lower paid sector’. The government legitimizes this inequality by turning a blind eye to the women who claim disability benefit to care for their own or other women’s children. Some of these women supplement their childminding income with disability benefit, thereby reducing the cost of childminding for other ‘working mothers’.

Neo-liberal capitalist economic policies have enabled the Irish state to abdicate its role in providing a childcare infrastructure. The provision of supports for private crèche
providers is evidence of the state’s neo-liberal policies as it provides a means of generating capital for entrepreneurial crèche providers. In 2010, the government withdrew welfare support for Lone Parents once their children reach age 8, and at that age replaced the lone parent allowance with job seekers benefit, in a clear move to force lone parents, mainly women, to enter the labour market. Two private childminders in this research are lone parents, which demonstrates the clear link between state neo-liberal capitalist policies and the marginalization of women who are welfare recipients and care workers.

The combination of welfare and black market is complex and maintains all invisible workers in a poverty trap. All workers in the black market have no social security and no protection. This creates ‘the precariat’ - a vulnerable group who is available to service the market and is totally at the mercy of the market. Liberal-individualist attitudes are evident in ‘working mothers’ employing invisible workers, and their acknowledgement of other women’s vulnerable position [they] ‘will go into the lower paid sector’. This arrangement which maintains the black market in childminding is bad for individual low paid childminders, for society and for women generally as it reinforces the low value placed on care and care work. There is a symbiotic relationship between poor/welfare dependant women and caring work which maintains poverty and gendered inequality.

Childminders who supplement welfare benefit with childminding wages have no employment protection at all. Welfare payments supplement childcare earnings and vice versa, suggesting the marginalized status of these women, the low level of welfare and the lack of support for women and carers. The symbiotic relationship between welfare and caring for children is clear evidence of the patriarchal, gendered nature of Irish society, which economically and socially marginalizes women who combine both in order to survive. Participants appreciate this is some women’s solution to the lack of affordable, accessible childcare, which the government tacitly supports. The government is pursuing an avoidance strategy, by not regulating childcare, by not supporting ‘working mothers’ with tax relief on childcare, by not paying women with young children a carer’s allowance and by not paying for parental leave, the state maintains caring as each woman’s private problem.
Women in different positions are better able to deal with the lack of affordable, regulated childcare. Women who availed of family care consider themselves most fortunate, women with economic resources can source and afford better care because they can employ childminders on equitable terms and conditions, though this does not guarantee satisfactory care arrangements. Women who employed childminders who supplement their earnings with welfare were in the most precarious position as neither woman had security in the arrangement.

Sabine is from Belgium and she became a mother in Ireland and was appalled at the low level of State support for working parents.

It’s really hard to be a working mother in Ireland. Very hard in Ireland in particular...Because I see my friends in Belgium, my family and my brother’s wife, and they have a lot more options you know, and cheaper options. A lot more cheaper options, a lot more [is] state funded (Sabine, Interview).

While the Barcelona Council agreed a target of childcare provision for at least 90 per cent of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school-going age and a target of childcare for at least 33 per cent of children under 3 years by 2010, Ireland has made little progress towards these targets and in an EU study of child care in 2004, Ireland ranked lowest in terms of child care supports and maternity leave (EC, 2004).

In society, for those who provide childcare, class and gender intersect to create and sustain inequalities. There are 37,671 private childminders who enjoy no social protection as they are unregistered for taxation and social security and have no employment rights or protection under the law. The state’s concern with childminders extends to drawing them out of the black economy, by providing a derisory tax free ceiling of €15,000 per annum, rather than supporting them. Not supporting these childminders allows the state to avoid regulating them and results in childcare being precarious for both childminders, ‘working mothers’ and children. The prevalence of a large number of childminders operating in the informal or black economy raises a number of concerns. Many of these childminders are believed to be untrained and are isolated by their informal status from networks of registered childminders. Informal childminding arrangements are precarious for the minders who have no social protection as they are unregistered for taxation and social security and have no employment rights or
protection under the law. Informal childminding arrangements with childminders who are not registered with the HSE, have had no training and no Garda Clearance are concerns for parents. Care arrangements may come to an abrupt and sudden end at the discretion of either the minder or the parents (OECD, 2002) and there are also concerns for children in the care of these untrained, unregulated childminders.

‘To have good public services, including caring services, a state must invest in them’ (Lynch and Lyons, 2008:173). Maintaining the gendered order of caring facilitates the state not investing in caring services and means women cannot have substantive, as opposed to formal equality with men. Failing to invest in a care infrastructure is paradoxical in a competition state aiming to increase the labour supply of mothers. Women who attempt to combine motherhood with paid employment experience difficulties sourcing, accessing and affording safe childcare because of the lack of state provision or support for childcare. By drawing on neo-liberal discourses in failing to regulate the childminding sector, arguing that the market will self-regulate, moving lone parents from welfare to work, and refusing the publish the National Carer’s Strategy on economic grounds, the state legitimizes and overtly supports the gendered order of caring and exploitation of care workers. This exploitation extends to childminders, ‘working mothers’ and the children of ‘working mothers’ who are denied state protection.

Sabine had a distressing experience with a private childminder.

[B]ecause, now we had a child minder here and the whiskey was going down and one day I came home and the child had a stain on the bib, that was cough bottle, adult cough bottle…with alcohol in it, given to the baby (Sabine, Interview).

As did Brona

[W]hen she was minding my children, that she brought them to her house and she used to be having sex with her boyfriend upstairs, and they caught her…‘they were naked in the bed’ (.) that was only last year. [The children’s ages were] three and four (Brona, Interview).

However Amy had a situation which was dangerous, and which had a long term effect on herself and her family.
And for me…my first childcare placement here, was with somebody who changed, utterly changed my whole life. It was a bad, bad experience. It was just one experience, but it was one sort of thing, that certainly before that I would have thought, ‘it’s ok to be a working mother’ or whatever you know. And then I suppose I started to look at the other kids that were being in care, I started to look at the crèche across the road, where babies are being left off at eight o’clock in the morning. And with my second child, who was ten months at the time, I chose not. I didn’t want that kind of care for him, where he’d be put into a room, even though again, you know, I wanted him to have one to one care, but that proved to be a mistake you know. So it was a price I paid, that I didn’t expect that I had to pay, and I suppose I resent the fact that there was no, there was nothing in place to prevent that from happening (Amy, Interview).

Choosing childcare is gendered, and as women demonstrate, the responsibility for this choice rests with women and if the choice, as in Amy’s case, does not work, then Amy blames herself for making a bad decision. ‘So it was a price I paid, that I didn’t expect that I had to pay’, and Amy paid the price for what she sees as poor choice. Interestingly, the price to be paid is Amy’s, not Amy and her husbands’, because women retain responsibility for organizing childcare. However, Amy also acknowledges the failure of the State to regulate private childminders and put structures ‘in place to prevent that from happening’.

The criticism of crèche care is evident in Amy’s account, yet paradoxically, crèche care is the only type of care that is regulated in Ireland, this suggests the power of dominant discourses of motherhood to influence women’s choices, even though personal forms of care are unregulated, and in the case of Amy, Brona and Sabine, also unsafe. For these individual women, despite the lack of regulation and unavailability of affordable childminders, women blame themselves when their decisions resulted in negative outcomes for their children and themselves.

Given the number of unregulated childminders, who mind up to four children in their own homes, have no Garda clearance, no training and are not registered with the HSE, it is surprising that more negative outcomes are not reported and it raises questions about the continuing reluctance of the state to address this issue. For women who engage in paid work and have children, the complete absence of regulation of private childminders is a serious concern. The failure of the state to act in this unregulated market, results in the state not adequately protecting its children. Given recent
revelations regarding the state’s historical failure to protect children\textsuperscript{18}, the persistence of this policy is remarkable and reflects the continuing influence of patriarchal assumptions regarding the gendered order of caring and maintains caring as a private issue for individual families (women) to resolve.

**Conclusion**
Choosing childcare is difficult, but essential, if women are to combine motherhood with paid work. The gendered order of caring means women are responsible for choosing, arranging and paying for childcare and gender intersects with class to ensure that women with fewer resources have fewer options in their childminding choices. The state’s lack of childcare provision and its lack of regulation creates many inequalities for ‘working mothers’, because they are charged with full responsibility for choosing childcare and being responsible for their choices in a situation where the state is less than helpful. Caring is maintained as women’s private problem and this conceals the systemic gendered and classed constraints that make different childcare choices available to different groups of women. In all cases, childminders are women, therefore gender and class inequalities are reproduced in ‘working mothers’ childcare arrangements. Many women, and some childminders, do not value caring work. All ‘working mothers’ in this research were materially privileged relative to the women who cared for their children.

Some ‘working mothers’ were concerned that their childminders would provide emotional labour (Kittay, 1999; Tronto, 1993; 2002) and develop attachments to their children in order to replicate mother’s care as this reinforces the notion of motherhood as a ‘natural’ relationship between mother and child. However, some women feel usurped when their children become too attached to childminders and do not want their positions as mothers undermined. This demonstrates the inequality experienced by all carers, mothers’ care is valorized when mothers’ do it, however, this makes combining motherhood with paid work difficult for women. When women attempt to replace

\textsuperscript{18} The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was established in 2000. The commission investigated more than 20 residential institutions, and published its report in 2009. The report ran to five volumes and concluded that ‘physical and emotional abuse and neglect were features of the institutions. Sexual abuse occurred in many of them, particularly boys’ institutions. Schools were run in a severe, regimented manner that imposed unreasonable and oppressive discipline on children’ (Ryan, 2009).
mothers’ care, the caring is sometimes devalued, commoditized and those who provide
the caring experience gendered and classed inequalities.

Earning and caring give access to different social rights and this leads to a
dualism in social citizenship (Dietz, 1985; Voet, 1998). It can be argued that the state
values earning or paid work in the formal labour market more than caring in the family.
However, with the intensification of mothering, there is a focus on outcomes in terms of
children’s development and many women attempted to commodify the caring that
childminder’s do. From being a site of private, unpaid caring, the home has also become
a site of commoditized transactions and in some cases the home is also a site of paid
work. Thus, choosing and paying for childcare involves a renegotiation of home and
mothering for these women.

Liberal-individualist attitudes are evident in ‘working mothers’ employing
invisible, inexpensive childminders without employment contracts. This arrangement
maintains the black market in childminding; is bad for individual low paid childminders,
for society and for women generally as it reinforces the low value placed on care and care
work. There is a symbiotic relationship between poor/welfare dependant women and
caring work which maintains poverty and gendered inequality. Women’s responsibility
for caring work in a society that legitimates exploitation of care workers (who invariably
are women) produces domestic workers hierarchically in relation to ‘working mothers’.
However, both experience inequalities and the pattern between neo-liberalism which
produces the desire to engage profitably with the market, individualism which suggests
people maximize their opportunities and exercise autonomy and motherhood discourses
which require women to prioritize their children’s needs, reveals that all women
experience inequalities by being responsible for caring. The conflict between
commodifying caring in discourses of neo-liberalism and valuing care work in discourses
of motherhood results in ‘working mother’s’ sometimes engaging in, and always being
responsible for the poor conditions of childcare workers in Irish society. This is a pattern
which divides and conquers all women.

Women’s move to a more public gender regime by participating in paid work has
had little impact on the care infrastructure. The persistent gendered assumption by the
state and in families of the provision of care, primarily by women, in households or
through the private market place has not changed because of women’s participation in paid work. Women’s participation in paid work has caused no corresponding change in the childcare landscape and the state has resisted most measures which would ensure support, provision and regulation of childcare. This demonstrates the gendered order of caring and the persistence of gendered expectations of women’s caring role, in spite of the state’s stated aim to encourage women’s employment.

Walby (2007a) argues that the system is produced by and in turn produces its components. Exploring women’s childcare arrangements reveals that allowing some women into the world of work, produces gendered, invisible care workers in the private sphere of the home. Applying complexity theory also reveals that events that take place at one time have consequences at other times and the order of the events and consequences are significant. Women’s participation in the public world of work has had little corresponding change in the gendered order of caring, and this reveals patriarchal power operating through dominant discourses, with caring being maintained as work of low value, undertaken by women in the private sphere. Consequently those who do caring are generally not valued, with the exception of mothers who relinquish their positions in the public sphere to become ‘new capitalist mothers’ (Pitt, 2002). Given that the Parental Leave Act was introduced in 1988, which grants both men and women leave to care for their children, in this study, no men are availing of this statutory entitlement. As Connell noted, over 30 years ago, men’s ‘collective choice not to do childcare reflects the dominant definition of men’s interests and in fact helps them keep predominant power’ (1987:106). There is resistance to women’s changing role, and as long as caring is maintained as women’s private responsibility, it is difficult to see how women can make satisfactory care arrangements, which suit themselves and their children, and that does not involve creating greater inequalities for childminding women.

Women’s decisions are made in constricted circumstances. When women achieve good care arrangements they attribute this to luck, invariably those with good childcare arrangements have more resources, which leads to greater luck. The patterns between discourses which emerged in relation to women’s choices regarding combining motherhood with paid work also extend to women’s childcare choices. Women’s decisions are made under duress, they are maintained as private issues, and the
consequences of women’s choices are their own responsibility. Exploring women’s childcare arrangements and choices reveals systemic inequalities in family and society which maintain women’s subordinate position and which divides all women by privileging some women sometimes. This is a pattern between discourses that ultimately involves women colluding in the propagation of the social and sexual divisions in which they are ultimately subordinate.
Chapter 6: Time Poverty and Time Pressure in the Caringscape

That ‘working mothers’ experience a shortage of time is not a new issue. It is well documented that women in dual-earner couples have a significantly higher total work burden than women in male breadwinner couples, and women’s recent substantial increase in paid employment has increased their total work burden (McGinnity et al., 2005:214). Consequently, with more paid and unpaid work, women experience more time poverty and time pressure. In this chapter I explore women’s caringscapes, which according to McKie, Gregory and Bowlby (2004:3)

considers the complexity of the spatial and the temporal and engages with a range of activities, feelings and reflective positions in people’s mapping and shaping of routes through caring and working.

I examine women’s time in paid work, the primacy of ‘work’ time cultures, the ways women perform caring tasks in work time and the concept of time flexibility. I explore the time women spend doing caring work, their caring time at home and the time they devote to their children. Finally, I explore the concept of personal time and women’s lack of time for themselves. There are temporal inequalities and privileges which exist between women consequent on their class, marital status, and occupation. In this chapter I examine the discourses women draw on to explain their reporting of constant time pressure and time poverty and the patterns between these discourses which maintain ‘working mothers’ intersecting inequalities as they navigate the caringscape in combining paid work and caring work.

Time

Adam (1998) argues that a multitude of times exist in a single moment and suggests that the recognition of such multiplicity and complexity allows for a firm grounding of the analysis of women’s experience. However, frequently the complexity of women’s experience in time is reduced to a dualism where feminine experience tends to be located in the level of everyday temporality understood as cyclical, reproductive and expressive and which falls in the shadow of a masculine temporality understood as progressive, standardized and instrumental (Ermath, 1989). Knights and Odih (1995) claim that ‘female time’ is relational, continuous, processual and cyclical and exists in relation to the time demands of others. As this time is mediated through the needs of others, it is
quite unlike decontextualized, commoditized, controlled and linear clock time. Thus, the majority of feminist research that has used time as a key concept has stayed within dualistic framings of what Davies (1990) refers to as ‘male time’ which is ‘a more linear, forward planning model of time’ and ‘female time’ which is ‘which is partly cyclical… involving the allocation and juggling of a multiplicity of times’ (Morgan, 1996: 149). However, both concepts of time are combined in the ways women merge and manage working and caring, and Adam (2000) developed a timescape perspective, whereby ‘phenomena, processes and events may be conceptualized as timescapes’ (Adam, 2000:125). Timescapes are analogous to landscapes because they include the temporal features of social events in a variety of socially constructed contexts (Adam, 2000; Harvey and Napier, 2004). Drawing on Adam’s (2000) concept of timescapes, McKie, Gregory and Bowlby (2002, 2004) developed the concept of a caringscape, which

\[\text{[c]an be thought of as shifting and changing multi-dimensional terrain that comprises people’s vision of caring possibilities and obligations; routes that are influenced by everyday scheduling, combining caring work with paid work and the paid work of carers (McKie, Gregory and Bowlby, 2004:2).}\]

The caringscape concept, like the timescape, moves beyond the functional view of time, to interpretations of time and what people do with time in unique settings, as well as how time can influence people’s perceptions and values.

**Working Time**
Adam (1990; 1995; 2004) contends that the project of keeping time and space explicit in social research and theory is made problematic by the complexity of social time and the difficulties of disentangling the power relations involved in the construction of conventional times in economic and industrial cultures.

\[\text{Not all time is money. Not all human relations are governed by the rationalized time of the clock. Not all times are equal. That is to say, all work relations touched by clock time, are tied up with hegemony and power (Adam, 1995:94).}\]

Work time is not only the main way through which we order and understand time; it also provides the framework through which tasks are valued. For example, Marxist analyses of the commoditization of time indicate its economic value and the exchange relations of labour power and profit maximization. Monthly, weekly and hourly wages indicate how time is used as a measure of labour value. Alongside labour, capital and machinery, time
becomes an economic variable and allows us to speak of a time economy. ‘We spend it, waste it, invest it, budget it and save it. We equate it, in other words, with money’ (Adam, 1995:89).

Everything is always a rush, I mean, there’s always [pressure]. Your whole life really revolves around the next day and the next thing, and weekends are busy doing stuff and there’s no [time]. There’s a huge sense of a shortage of time, and that is the worst thing [about being a ‘working mother’] (Freya, Focus group).

Though there are women who have always negotiated multiple times (e.g. Hall, 1983; Whipp, 1994; Glucksman, 1998; Jurczyk, 1998), the current dominant conception of time remains anchored in the economic sphere. For many workers, the place and time of paid work is singular and fixed and hegemonic work time dominates the ways work is managed and ordered (McKie, Gregory and Bowlby, 2002). Consequently, in strong work-time cultures, all employees are expected to honour their contractual time obligations to paid work. Brona works full time as a factory operator, working three twelve-hour shifts, eight am to eight pm. Brona spoke about the fixed and static nature of the shift schedule operating in the manufacturing environment and her lack of discretion over work time and space.

I work three days a week for twelve hours, so I’m up at seven in the morning and I don’t get home until half past eight at night… my job is only a factory job (Brona, Interview).

Brona finds her hours of work make it difficult for her to combine motherhood with paid work.

It’s just the intensity of the three days; you don’t get to see your children really. You’re gone in the morning before they get up and they’re hopefully in bed when you get home at night, you might go up for twenty minutes (Brona, Focus group).

However, as Brona has ‘only a factory job’, she has no discretion regarding the time she spends in paid work with very structured work time and break times. Women who have ‘jobs’ as opposed to ‘careers’ have less choice regarding the type of work they do, have less earning power, and less discretion regarding the times and spaces of paid work.

Amanda also works three twelve hour shifts in a busy hospital where her role demands not just her presence but her full concentration on work to the exclusion of everything else.
Once I was at work, I was at work and I was Amanda the Staff Nurse, or Amanda the Clinic Nurse Manager, or whatever I was, that’s what I was. And I used to describe it as ‘Stars in your Eyes’. That you just walked through that door in the morning and no matter what was happening outside, you just walked in the door, and you were at work now. And as you walked out the door, if you were in the middle of a three day argument with your husband, as you sat into your car, you said ‘Oh shit, I’ve to go home now’ and I would have hardly thought of it (Amanda, Interview).

Amanda and Brona’s workplaces prioritize work time and space and demand a significant commitment to work while at work. Grace also reported the expectation that work time be prioritized over all other areas of her life, including invading home time, while she was working as an engineer in the private sector.

In my past job now, there were no lines. They would ring you in the labour ward to ask you something and they really would ‘sorry to do this to you now, but’ you know what I mean? And there were no lines, none whatsoever…Because you’d be on-call and you could get phone calls at any time, and, they owned you, really at the end of the day (Grace, Focus group).

The description ‘they owned you’ is apt for many women and men. Many organizations demand employees’ permanent commitment, even when not physically at work, and assume there are no other forms of time that impact on an individual’s life. Adam (1995:91) notes:

[T]his socially created, artefactual resource has become so all-embracing that it is now related to as if it were time per se, as if there were no other times. This has the effect that even the embedded, lived times of work and non-work are understood through the mediating filter of our own creation of non-temporal time (original emphasis).

As is evident in Grace’s account, work time is all pervasive. Time out of work, time not working, is not considered productive, useful time, and with e-mail and cell phones, employees are expected to prioritize work over all other times, whether physically at work or not. Grace resented the intrusion of work into her home time-space and left that organization after the birth of her second child. However, Grace is privileged on the basis of her occupation, as an engineer, Grace has more career options than Brona who is a factory operator and it was relatively easy for Grace to change employer.
According to Treanor (2007), the neo-liberal ideal is the absolutely flexible and employable employee who will be always available. Kate does not resent the intrusion of work into her home time-space and describes her commitment to the long-hours culture in her workplace.

I probably spend much too much time on work, and I would probably like to rectify that, but I’m not quite sure how to pull back from work really… So I would be checking e-mails up till ten o’clock at night. Getting e-mails from work people and things like that, here and abroad. So I’m very attached to my work, even when I come home (Kate, Interview).

Hochschild (1997) notes that cell phones and e-mail allow paid work responsibilities to encroach into family life and heighten expectations that employees be available around the clock. To demonstrate commitment and meet performance targets, it is expected that Kate will work whatever hours are necessary. Halford, Savage and Witz (1997) argue the social relations of gender are historically and deeply embedded in complex ways in both the formal and informal workings of organizations. They claim this is often ‘hidden’ beneath apparently gender neutral policies relating to targets and performance. ‘The gendered substructure is hidden under a shell of rationality and neutrality’ (ibid: 15).

My employers would think nothing of organizing a meeting at a quarter to five on Friday or expecting you to come in on a Saturday. And if you said anything ‘well you know, I have children, or that’s my personal time to spend with my family’ or whatever. They’d say ‘oh sure we all have families of one sort or another, it’s part of your commitment, part of your responsibility’ (Kate, Focus group).

In Ireland, Mahon (1991), Garavan (1994), Barker and Monks (1994) and O’Connor (1998; 2000; 2001) have also demonstrated the hegemonic power relations operating in professions that have traditionally been regarded as ‘masculine’. One of the ways these power relations operate is through the concept of work time. It is simply part of Kate’s commitment to her profession that she be available for work whenever necessary. Job schedules continue to be predicated on outdated assumptions that workers have someone at home to tend to family responsibilities and most employers expect workers to prioritize the demands of employment ahead of family demands (Williams,
Long hours cultures in some organizations are particularly difficult for those with caring responsibilities.

The acceptance, rejection or resentment of work time reveals individual differences between Brona, Grace and Kate. Their occupations determine the amount of choice they have in conforming to or resisting hegemonic work-time cultures. Grace is an engineer and was able to change organization because she resented the intrusion of work into her home life, whereas Brona resents the fixed and static nature of the manufacturing shift cycle, but has little discretion over it. Kate is a university lecturer and describes herself as attached to her work, which is why she is accepting of work time invading her home time. She attempts to behave as an ideal employee, being absolutely flexible and always available for work.

There are gender differences also. Grace and Kate have careers in engineering and law, spheres that would traditionally have been considered masculine, whereas Brona and Amanda as factory operator and nurse have ‘female’ occupations. However, whether in masculine or feminine professions, the four workplaces promote work-time cultures, where work time is prioritized over all other times. Thus, these women’s participation in paid work demonstrates that these workplaces demand all workers conformance to neo-liberal demands of employees’ time flexibility, and their commitment to spend whatever time is necessary to achieve work outcomes.

The degree to which the ‘true’ late-capitalist self is conceptualized as essentially masculine, bounded, controlled, cleanly individuated (Bordo, 1993) is evident in hegemonic work-time cultures. Brona’s organization culture is typical of industrial capitalism, with a regular manufacturing shift schedule. While discourses of neo-liberal capitalism are drawn on by women to explain their commitment to their employing organizations time cultures, and their being as flexible as the organization demands, Kate also draws on discourses of individualism to explain her commitment to her profession. Neo-liberal and industrial capitalist discourses prioritize a time economy and worker’s time is a resource to which organizations see themselves as entitled. Individualism discourses encourage women, and men, to participate in paid work, develop careers and be economically independent. When women behave like ‘ideal workers’ by conforming to strong work-time cultures, they perpetrate the notion that
ideal workers are always available for work, thus allowing work time to dominate all areas of people’s lives.

**Work-Time Flexibility**

Davies (1990) refers to linear and clock time as ‘male time’ in order to draw attention to the ‘patriarchal character of the groups and classes that have been able to influence this concept and measurement of time’ (1990:17). This is a feature of neo-liberalism discourse, that work be prioritized over everything else. Faye is a director of a company that does not facilitate flexible working arrangements and she declined an employee’s request to work part-time.

I did work with a girl, who recently left, and she had worked with us for nine years, because having her second child didn’t work in with her job, but I felt then, for example, this girl was taking absolute liberties. There was a sense of flexibility there, mm, and then we ended up sitting down, having a chat about it. She felt she wasn’t getting a fair deal and I said ‘look, I have two kids myself, I can work, I’m not being hard about this, but there are things you can do outside working hours’. I just think, you know, she wasn’t happy. She didn’t want to work full time anymore. She wanted a part time position, so I ended up having to deal with this from a totally other perspective, you know. We both were married, we both had two kids, we both were working the same hours, and I was like this cold monster who couldn’t deal with it, but, just, people approach it in different ways (Faye, Focus group).

The ‘sense of flexibility’ that Faye indicates was present in her workplace, suggests that organizations and employees regard flexibility differently according to who is receiving the flexibility from whom. Faye is highly committed to her paid work, to the extent that she spends very little time during the week with her own children. She describes her colleague as having ‘her job’, whereas Faye, as a Director of the Company has a career. Faye clearly prioritizes work time and the requirement to prioritize work is constant regardless of individual circumstances. Faye claimed her colleague’s need for flexibility did not match the organization culture. ‘Having her second child didn’t work in with her job’. Faye reconciled her colleagues’ desire to work part time with the company’s lack of flexibility by suggesting ‘people approach it in different ways’. She suggests the woman’s different ways were unacceptable to the organization because the woman’s
desire for reduced hours did not conform to the primacy of work time. Faye accepts the primacy of work time herself, she prioritizes the times and spaces of working over her personal time and expected her colleague to do likewise, by doing ‘things…outside working hours’. This reconciliation of paid work and motherhood is a price not all women are prepared to pay, and Faye’s colleague resigned. This demonstrates the hegemonic nature of work time, and Faye, in a position of power, has become a member of the ‘groups and classes that can influence the concept and measurement of time’ (Davies, 1990:17). Thus hegemonic organization cultures ensure that some women themselves do not question the demand to prioritize work time over other times and some women themselves promote these cultures when in positions of power.

Jane is manager of a busy telesales department with an almost entirely female staff. The nature of telesales work requires the physical presence of staff at work in order to take calls when the business is operational. Jane appreciates the difficulties of maintaining productivity and adherence to work time while attempting to facilitate her colleagues’ requests for flexibility.

And it’s very difficult. As a full time worker and especially a full time worker and mother…you are carrying the load. And at Christmas, you know, times like that, all of the people, you know, with children, they want Christmas off. And it’s the same, there’s war every year then, trying to [accommodate everyone]. And I end up having to work it [myself] (Jane, Focus group).

In attempting to accommodate her staff who are ‘working mothers’ Jane ends up having to work herself at Christmas, even though she too is a ‘working mother’, and as Jane is parenting alone, this is particularly difficult. Jane is not only ‘carrying the load’ at home, supporting herself and her child, but she is also ‘carrying the load’ at work, where she is manager of the department and tries to accommodate her colleague’s requests for time off. The strict work time culture, the nature of the work and the requirements of her role as manager, mean Jane receives none of the flexibility she extends to others. As a woman in a management role, Jane supports the organization and her colleagues by facilitating flexibility, but cannot avail of it herself. As Jane is parenting alone and fully responsible for providing economically for her child, she has little option but to accept the hegemonic culture at work for herself, but tries to limit its impact on her female ‘working mother’ staff.
While Jane acknowledged granting flexibility to her staff resulted in greater productivity, her employer will not engage with Jane’s desire for reduced hours because of her managerial status.

They [the company] are not willing to give me anything, any leeway with regard to time … I just feel that the time would be worth so much, they’d get so much more out of me if they gave me that (Jane, Interview).

This suggests that if the organization allows women into managerial roles, they must behave like ideal workers, i.e. men, who can demonstrate ideal worker flexibility by being always available during trading hours. As Jane notes, women who work part time and partnered women who work full time experience less time pressure, whereas she is working full time and parenting alone and is extremely time poor.

Those women seem to be happier and more content, and I just think there’s more of a balance there. Whereas maybe the people who are full time and there’s a husband and wife, or partner, they would be ok too, but it’s the ones who are on their own, are the ones who are kind of stretched, big time (Jane, Interview).

The different approaches of Faye and Jane to flexible working reveal differences between the women. There are occupational and class differences. Faye is a director of her organization, and benefits from the organization’s economic performance, whereas Jane is on a salary regardless of how the organization performs. There are also differences in marital status. Faye has a partner with whom to share the caring and rearing of children. Faye’s husband works four days and cares for their children on the fifth to facilitate her full time contribution to work, whereas Jane is parenting alone. It is visible to Jane that she experiences inequality relative to her part time, or partnered colleagues. Faye, however, does not see her own privilege. MacLean (2009) notes, the workings of privilege are often invisible to the privileged, so while Faye does acknowledge the positive difference her husband’s reduced hours make to her family life, she considers this her private solution, not that she is privileged. Faye suggests her colleague should also find a private solution which involves ‘things you can do outside working hours’ (Faye, Focus group).

The difference in their marital status demonstrates that Jane experiences greater inequality as a working mother than Faye does. Interestingly, their different statuses clearly influence their approaches to flexibility. Jane has no time flexibility at home or at
work where she is fully responsible for both her job and her child. She appreciates women’s desire for time flexibility because of their children, and where possible, she extends this flexibility to other women. Faye has considerable support at home and does not require time flexibility herself; therefore she does not consider it necessary to extend flexibility to her colleague. Both women demonstrate their commercial, private sector, organizations operate dominant work-time cultures and Faye has become a gatekeeper of the hegemonic work culture and has organized her life to fit with work time expectations.

However, many women reported availing of time flexibility, contingent on their occupation, and employing organizations. Freya demonstrated that the nature of the work she does makes it possible for her to have time flexibility.

[I]’m not in a situation where people are directly dependant on me. In the sense that I’m in Finance so nothing’s life or death there, whatever it is can wait until tomorrow generally, or else I’d go back in in the evening or at night, if I had to, when my husband is at home. If I had to take time off for a sick baby, I’d go back in, so, you know, pop back in for an hour or two (Freya, Focus group).

Freya works full time, but clearly can avail of unstructured flexibility on occasions and it was evident in many women’s accounts of availing of flexibility, that women repaid the time and work, like Freya, by returning to work in the evening, at nights and weekends to catch up and meet targets. Jean and Colleen both work reduced hours, and both claim to achieve full time work output in shorter hours for which they are paid. Colleen claims ‘the company sees it as a saving’ (Colleen, Focus group). However, as they are grateful for the opportunity to work reduced hours, both women described extremely busy work days, compressing full time jobs into fewer hours. ‘I still have to do everything I’m expected to do, but in a shorter time. I don’t take any breaks’ (Colleen, Focus group), while Jean has considerable responsibility in her position and describes her efforts to fulfill her work obligations in less time.

Reduced hours. I don’t job share, nobody else does my work while I’m not there. And I’m supposed to work nine thirty to three, generally I’m in like twenty minutes early, leave twenty minutes late and when needs be bring work home. I can log in from home, or occasionally I will go back to work in the evening or at the weekend if I have to… work though lunch, don’t take coffee breaks. So generally I think I do ninety percent of the hours that I would probably be doing if I worked full time…I think you’re very focused because your day is shorter and more compressed, so you have to fit in a lot more (Jean, Interview).
Colleen and Jean suggest that organizations facilitate their reduced working hours as a means of facilitating women’s desire to conform to gendered caring roles, however these women increase their productivity, by producing more work in less time. It has been demonstrated that granting employees time flexibility leads to greater productivity (Best Place to Work Institute, 2008; CIPD, 2009); however, this flexibility creates inequalities for these women. When women avail of reduced hours, they reduce their income thereby increasing their economic dependence in the family and they limit their career prospects, ensuring their subordination in the workplace. However, women’s gratitude for this flexibility ensures they increase their productivity and are compliant and motivated employees. Reduced hours reinforces gender roles and women’s economic dependence and greater domestic responsibility in the family, while setting defined limits to their career opportunities at work. This pattern maintains women in subordinate positions both in the workplace and in the home, thus under the guise of flexibility, discourses of motherhood create intersecting inequalities for ‘working mothers’ in the workplace.

Regardless of the workings of the formal organization in relation to affording employees flexibility, Sabine experienced resentment from her colleagues.

They [colleagues] don’t like the fact that I get that kind of flexibility and they don’t have to ask for it, because they don’t have children. And, you see, that’s the kind of pressure I have to deal with, even though the boss is grand. I am the only mother you see, so they don’t understand the pressure (Sabine, Focus group).

The resentment by her female colleagues of the flexibility Sabine enjoyed because of her maternity is evidence of the instrumental value attached to time in the workplace by employees themselves. Work time is regarded as a neutral, quantitative resource, even though different temporal requirements are expected of different employees, at different levels and occupations. Sabine’s colleagues, whom she describes as young women, are acting against their own interests by resenting flexibility for ‘working mothers’. Colleen also described her organization culture as expecting childless employees to work extremely long hours.

[I] see how long some of those …young people work. And it’s not fair, just because they don’t have to go home, and because they don’t have kids to look after, they do stay on till (. ) ten-hour, twelve-hour days some of them are doing (Colleen, Focus group).
Colleen suggests having ‘kids to look after’ is the only acceptable reason in her workplace not to work ten or twelve hour days, and it is an essential criterion for promotion and career advancement, which is typical of the strong ‘work time’ culture in many organizations. Sabine and Colleen perceive they are privileged in relation to their childless colleagues, even though this privilege can be resented. In the longer term, this privilege works against those who avail of it by limiting their career prospects and creating marginalized workers. This benefit is gendered, and neither Sabine nor Colleen would require or avail of flexibility if they were not mothers.

Occupations have a bearing on the availability of reduced hours or unstructured flexibility to different women. Freya and Jean are accountants and the work lends itself to being done flexibly, as Jean notes, she can ‘log in from home’, while Sabine and Colleen are administrators which means they can postpone or delay some work tasks without compromising their roles. With the exception of Sabine, all these women work in multinational, manufacturing companies.

Apart altogether from the issue of unstructured flexibility, or structured reduced working hours, which are available at employers’ discretion and dependant on employee’s occupations, there is a statutory entitlement to maternity leave for mothers and parental leave for both parents (Appendix A). Kate spoke about the work-time culture in her organization to the extent that she declined her statutory entitlement to maternity leave, in order to demonstrate to her employers that she prioritized work-time over all other times.

Well, when I had my first three children, my immediate boss was very unsupportive and as a result I didn’t take any maternity leave on my first three children. And then I went with my fourth and asked for maternity leave I was told it was going to very disadvantageous for my colleagues and [sigh] but I had to for health reasons, I had to take leave. But it was very uncomfortable and very stressful… I induced my third child for work reasons (.) I came out of hospital, and three days after she was born I went back to work, dropped her over to my mother (Kate, Focus group).

Kate did not take maternity leave for her first three children and returned to work three days after giving birth to her third child. While other women in that focus group discussion were appalled that Kate could leave a three day old baby with her mother in order to go to work, Kate claimed that it was simply expected in her profession that work time be prioritized over all other areas of life. This demonstrates the hegemonic work-
time culture of the organization which requires that employees are flexible and available to the extent that the statutory entitlement to maternity leave was regarded as discretionary. Discourses of individualism suggest the ‘ideal worker’ is an absolutely flexible and employable employee, who manages their life as an entrepreneur and chooses their friends, hobbies and partners to maximize their status with future employers (Treanor, 2007). Kate described taking maternity leave for her fourth child as ‘very uncomfortable and very stressful’, describing her distress at being absent from work. In interview, Kate described her commitment to work

> [o]nce you’ve gotten into this habit of spending so much time on your work, you’ve made yourself, I won’t say indispensable, but I find it hard to say no to work (Kate, Interview).

Kate does see herself as ‘indispensable’ and this is a consequence of being always available to work. By taking the maternity leave to which she was statutorily entitled, Kate perceives she would have damaged her promotion prospects and she claimed it is her profession, not just her organization that promotes this culture.

> It’s also the culture. I suppose in the career that I have, that I think, I remember reading a study, that showed that seventy per cent of women in the career that I’m in, don’t take leave^{19}. So, the culture was working against me anyway (Kate, Focus group).

Kate did not take responsibility for her decision in the focus group discussion, but justified declining maternity leave by claiming it is her career and the culture that forced her not to take maternity leave and it is common practice. Seventy per cent of women in similar careers to Kate do not take maternity leave. Unfortunately, for women with high levels of career commitment, motherhood requires absences from work, at the very least for maternity leave, and this is perceived to harm their careers, however, the dominance of motherhood discourses makes it imperative for women to be also always available to their children. In our interview a year later, Kate acknowledged this difficulty

> [y]ou get caught up in things and you think ‘God, I’m not spending enough time with the children’ but not quite sure how to disentangle yourself from work (Kate, Interview).

Declining her statutory entitlement to maternity leave is stark evidence of Kate’s inability to ‘disentangle’ herself from work. Neo-liberalism and individualism discourses are deployed to justify Kate declining the statutory entitlement to maternity leave because the

hegemonic organization culture requires full time commitment to work. Kate is privileged by being allowed to behave as an ‘ideal worker’ i.e. man. However, by allowing some women this dubious privilege, organizational cultures do not have to accommodate the flexibility requirements of their employees, long hours cultures are embraced by women themselves and this creates enduring inequalities for all employees with family responsibilities.

Women’s experience of parental leave also reveals the value attached to work time in different organizations. Parental leave is fourteen weeks for each child until their eighth birthday, is unpaid and is available at employers’ discretion. Both Audrey and Amelia were working as nurses at the time they availed of parental leave, and because both worked in the public sector, it was readily available to them. However, Eithne was declined parental leave ‘the personnel department say “oh yea, our company’s very progressive, that would be no problem” but your direct boss has to agree to it’ (Eithne, Focus group) and Eithne’s boss declined her request. Jane was also declined parental leave, even though she accommodates requests for parental leave in her own department, without the organization providing her with replacement staff ‘the onus is very much on the employer and they’re not accepting that responsibility at all. They’re just reaping the benefits and leaving the empty seats’ (Jane, Interview).

Similarly, Sabine found she was able to take parental leave in her previous job but her employer maintained her full workload.

You see, I tried to take my parental leave one day a week so I would have four days but I was still given a workload for five days and they made it impossible to do that. Even though they had to give me my parental leave, they made it impossible, really (Sabine, Focus group).

While women welcomed the opportunity to take parental leave, it was reported that organizations do not replace employees who avail of it, leading to greater pressure on their remaining colleagues, which leads to the resentment experienced by Sabine and Jane. As women move in ever increasing numbers into the dominant world of paid employment, they face norms and practices in work time that seem to conflict with the responsibilities associated with the unbounded, more subjective sense of time which applies to motherhood (see Daly, 1996). As Hewitt (1993) found, this clock-based, objective way of organizing working time no longer fits all men, and it certainly does not
fit women. From it has emerged a pattern of work practices and work norms that create barriers to women's careers and difficulties for both men and women to integrate their work lives with their personal lives.

Examining women’s experiences of maternity and parental leave reveals differences between the women. Kate voluntarily relinquished her statutory entitlement to maternity leave; Jane and Eithne were declined parental leave which is available at employer’s discretion and Sabine’s previous employer refused to reduce her workload in line with her reduced hours. Audrey and Amelia availed of parental leave and at the time both were nurses in the public sector, which cannot refuse to grant a statutory entitlement. This demonstrates that organization cultures, the nature of the work and the occupations of women themselves can be more or less conducive to taking maternity and parental leave. Employing organizations and their occupations clearly have a bearing on the inequalities or privileges women experience. Working in the private sector is a disadvantage as Jane and Eithne were declined parental leave, while working in the public sector ensured Audrey and Amelia were able to avail of it. Occupations also have a bearing, as Kate works in the public sector, but because of her profession, she declined her maternity leave and never considered taking parental leave. Sabine also works in the public sector, but experienced resentment when she did avail of parental leave.

Examining the ways women avail of flexibility and statutory maternity and parental leave reveals that employing organizations either benefit from women’s greater productivity by their gratitude for flexibility, or they resent parental and maternity leave and make availing of these statutory entitlements difficult for women. Professional middle class women demonstrate that careers require full time commitment. Women’s positioning within dominant motherhood and individualism discourses is evident in their take up or refusal of time flexibility at work. Women who avail of flexibility are maintained in subordinate positions both at home and at work, or women who succeed in their careers and maintain full time commitment experience conflict and time pressure in their attempts to combine motherhood with ‘work’ time in the caringscape.
Caring in Work-Time
Despite women’s increased participation in paid work, attending to necessary household labour continues to be women’s responsibility and the boundaries between paid work; unpaid work and free time are more permeable for women than for men. In Giddens’ (1979) discussion of interaction within locales he implies that interaction within a locale can be mediated by other methods of communication. While care for young children tends to be provided in the same time and space, Silk (1998) argues that some care can be provided ‘at a distance’, through for example telephone or email messages. Many women spoke about texting and telephoning their childminders and their children while at work, while Jean described e-mailing her husband from work, as part of her continuing management of the home. ‘If I want my husband to do a chore, I send him an e-mail. If I keep sending him e-mails, you know, he’ll eventually do it because he wants me to go away from him at work and leave him alone’ (Jean, Focus group). The spaces and times of care are more complex and fluid and can be carried out in a multiplicity of times and spaces and many women, because they retain responsibility for the management of the home, use time at work to provide care at a distance.

Thus, in strong work time cultures, some women use their lunch times for domestic tasks. Colette describes ‘spending your lunch doing chores, like collecting dry cleaning, or doing shopping’ (Colette, Focus group), and Gina spends her lunch break collecting her daughter from school and dropping her to her childminder. ‘I spend the whole [lunch] hour coming from work, dropping, collecting, and I might have a banana [for lunch] or something’ (Gina, Focus group). Likewise, Tamsin tries to keep home out of work ‘if it was parent-teacher meetings or whatever, I’d do them in my lunch time and I’d still make it within the hour’ (Tamsin, Focus group). This demonstrates that women retain responsibility for home even while in work, they are disadvantaged in relation to their colleagues by foregoing lunch to care for their families and because they use their lunch times, they are maintaining work time cultures by doing domestic chores in an invisible way which does not bring them into work.

Women’s sequestering time from work during the working day reflects the increased pace and pressures on women’s lives with general movements towards
individualization in modernity whereby space has become compressed, with women performing more functions over several spaces, and time has accelerated whereby women are performing these functions at a much faster pace. The separation of spheres and the commoditization of time in the dominant economic arena, leads to a sense of scarcity of time. This scarcity of time is gendered, and many women reported that it is only the ‘working mothers’ who experience this pressure.

I actually find at work, there’s other women, they seem to be all on my level, they also have kids, but we are all so busy. We don’t even have time for conversations, we are all running to meetings or thinking of what’s the next thing to do, and that’s hard as well like because there’s literally no time to do anything (Collette, Focus group).

Collette identifies with her busy colleagues, who are also using their lunch times to run errands and manage their homes from a distance. This creates inequalities with their colleagues who are available to socialize or work during lunch times.

Despite reporting extensive working hours, Kate nevertheless makes efforts to collect her children from school one day a week, for visibility at the school and to assuage her guilt.

[T]hen I try and take one day a week where I collect the kids from school, usually Friday. Now inevitably I’ll be on the phone half the afternoon (Kate, Interview).

In Kate’s account, despite her taking some hours away from work to care for her children, work encroaches on this personal time and she is always available for work, demonstrating the primacy of work time in her life. Hochschild noted that e-mail and cell phones increase employee’s availability to their employers, and this constant requirement for access to employees generates the notion that employees are indispensable to their employing organizations. Clearly Kate can sequester time from work despite her reported commitment to her career, which demonstrates that she has some discretion over the time spent physically at work. This discretion is a privilege Kate enjoys because of her profession. While reporting extensive time commitment to her employment, Kate has some discretion over the actual hours she will be present at work, and she can bring work home in order to spend time with her children. But, while taking time from work to be physically with her children, Kate experiences pressure because she is not actually available to her children when she is on the phone taking calls for work. Thus in the
caringcape, Kate reveals a complex timescape incorporating polychromic timescapes of work in several times and places.

All women reported being very busy at work and busy at home which was sustainable as long as there were no flash points, interruptions or unplanned events. Children’s illness was mentioned by every mother as a significant flash point which caused much concern for ‘working mothers’, not least because it was always the mother who was expected to care for the sick child.

I think if your child gets sick, I think that’s the one thing, anytime any one of them gets sick I have to go out. I have often been at work, physically sick myself, you know, but I’ll suffer on because I know I’ll need to probably go out during the year, if they’re sick, because they are still small. There’s never really a question of if I’ll take the day off (Brona, Focus group).

Brona demonstrates the gendered expectation that she, as mother, will take time off work when her children are sick, and also the difficulty of maintaining a commitment to paid work because of this gendered expectation. There are restrictions and penalties for absences due to illness in Brona’s workplace, which results in Brona working when she herself is unwell, because she needs to keep her illness absences for her children’s illness.

Likewise Jane described that she retains annual leave days for her child’s illness, because the culture in her organization, and her position as manager, means she cannot take time off, except annual leave, when her child is sick. ‘I find sickness is terrible. I find I’m keeping aside five or six day’s holidays every year just for those days’ (Jane, Focus group). However, Jane is sympathetic to the women who report to her and does not deduct days from their annual holiday entitlement when they take time for their children’s illness.

I have people working for me and they have children, and, if they ever ring me and say their child is sick, I never take a holiday off them, ever. Because, as a manager you can do that. I’d be fired now if they heard me, but you know, I would just put them down as sick, and that’s it. But, I can’t do that for myself (Jane, interview).

Examining the ways women manage caring in work time reveals that some organizations do not tolerate home coming into the workplace. Holidays and lunch times are used to care for sick children and carry out household chores, attend schools or transport children from school. Collette, Tamsin, Gina, Jean and Brona are all partnered,
which suggests they experience gendered inequality in the family where they undertake the management of the home and maintain responsibility for childcare.

Some workplaces clearly do not countenance home coming into work and therefore employees are required to make arrangements in the legitimate times out of work – holidays and lunch times – to manage whatever household or family matters that need attention. This is a feature of strong work time cultures, when women use holidays and lunch times out of work to manage caring from a distance, they reinforce the notion of an ‘ideal worker’ unencumbered by care responsibilities. However, even when some women take time out of work for caring, they still create separate ‘working time’ opportunities, as Kate does by taking ‘phone calls for half the afternoon’. This demonstrates the way work time invades the private sphere and women’s take up of liberal-individualist attitudes regarding work, which consequently creates pressure for some women in their efforts to combine motherhood with paid work.

**Caring Time**

‘Care is a multi-faceted term that can combine feelings of concern and anxiety for others alongside the provision of practical labour and tasks that attend to a person’s needs’ (Cancian and Oliker, 2000:2). The notion of ‘home’ obscures the diversity of places and times that are implicated in caring work and obscures the real work that goes into childcare, eldercare, marriages and housework and the multiplicity of times and spaces over which this work is performed. Davies (1990) argues that cyclical time is more reflective of women’s lives.

It is assumed that people pace the events of their lives according to local and natural rhythms and that the future is a perpetual recapitulation of the present. A precise time measurement is superfluous. On a day to day level, people are not subject then to clock time, but rather to a time that is task or process oriented (Davies, 1990:19).

Process or task time is not the same as clock time. Tasks, as defined in a particular context, have their own rhythms and cycles within that situation. In contrast to scheduled, structured work time, which dominates in the public economic sphere, task time dominates the private sphere, in what Nowotny (1975) has called natural or social time.
and Davies (1990) and Jurczyk (1998) call feminine or process time. This is a conception of time that is subjective, rather than objective; geared to events rather than to the clock, cyclical, rather than linear, and anchored in logic of care. It differs from work time by not being commoditized or quantified, not seen as a resource to hand out, waste, control, or sell (Adam, 1990). It is unbounded time (Henry, 1965); responsive to and constitutive of the tasks and interactions with which one is currently involved. It is integrally linked to activities, not abstracted from them (Adam, 1990). It conceives of time as more personal, more expansive, more responsive, more socially and situationally defined than ‘“public time” which is occupied, measured, and allotted’ (Fabian, 1983:144).

Hagerstrand (1978:122) claims ‘it is an activity of artisanal rather than industrial character to rear a new individual’. Ribbens (1994) research on motherhood found that ‘caring for children’ was defined in terms of mother’s availability to their children. ‘Part of the belief about time then, seemed to centre not just on ‘spending time’ with and on children, but on ‘being there’ so that mothers are available when their children need them’ (1994:170/1). However, the rhythms and spaces of childcare, play, school and home, which themselves change over the life course, are not easily reconciled with the rigid time-space boundaries of most paid work.

The interaction between the private, the space in which caring for the very young is located, and the public, where paid work and caring for older children is located, involves a complex system of physical manoeuvres, most obviously linked by processes of ‘getting to work on time’ and ‘leaving work in time to pick the kids up’ or ‘making time’ to check up on the frail elderly parent. This process of thinking and dealing with different places and journeys throughout the day and week can be thought of as a system of spatial reference. These everyday realities are informed by past experiences and future anticipation of caring (McKie, Gregory and Bowlby, 2004:2)

The dominant notion of mothering in the middle-class area of the study is associated with full time care, which creates problems for women who try to combine paid work with motherhood. Sabine describes the traditional career trajectory for ‘working mothers’ in the local area ‘most of our friends are not working, the mothers. They gave up or reduced to part time and then gave up’ (Sabine, Interview). It is difficult for women to reconcile their positions as ‘working mothers’ with the norm that middle
class mothers are full time in the home. There is also a perceived status afforded to women in the local area who mother full time and many women observed that it has now become fashionable for women in the area of the study to have large families.

You can see generally, it is the wealthy women, or who are in wealthy situations who aren’t working, at all, generally, like. I know that is a generalization, but from what I can see, of the, kind of, full time mums, they can afford not to work, and they have the mornings to themselves and you know, they have a nice lifestyle going on, once their kids are certain ages… It’s almost like a snob thing now that I can afford to stay at home, and not work and have four kids (Freya, Focus group).

All mothers compared their time spent caring for children with full-time stay at home mothers in the local area. Normative shifts in parenting standards have altered such that being a good parent today requires greater amounts of time and mothers are expected to cultivate children’s intellectual and socio-emotional development with abundant time (Hays, 1996; Daly, 2001; Lareau, 2002). This is particularly evident in the middle-class area of the study. Giddens (1984) notes it is important to consider the power relations through which the time and space of particular social practices are mediated within a given locale. Dyck (1989) and Holloway (1999) have shown how notions of mothering are learned and modified over time in particular local neighbourhoods. Ehrenreich (1990) observed middle-class mothers are required to produce children who will be disciplined enough to devote the first twenty or thirty years of their lives to scaling the educational and social obstacles to a middle-class career. Dominant notions of good mothering persist (see Chapter 4) and particularly in the middle-class area studied, mothers are as much concerned with the care of children as with passing on the family’s social capital. Children’s education and social activities are sites where women’s social positions as mothers are publicly scrutinized.

In this research, participants demonstrated that the local is a key element in the construction of meaning and identity and many went to considerable efforts to socialize their children into their local communities and in particular to reproduce their middle class position through their children’s participation in extra curricular activities in order to acquire social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) and to prepare their children to become ‘exemplary capitalist winners’ (Warner, 2006). The local area in which the schools are located has a particular middle class status and some women went to
considerable effort to ensure their children’s attendance at these schools, which were outside their own local parishes. Gina spends her lunch time travelling from one suburb to another to ensure her daughter attends a particular school. It is also important for Gina to be visible at the school to facilitate her daughter’s social activity with other children, so Gina collects her daughter from school during her lunch break. This puts significant time pressure on Gina to leave work every day, attend school, drop her daughter to her childminder, and return to work through two busy suburbs, while having her lunch in the car.

Florence observed that it is good for children to develop interests and friendships outside of school. However, as Florence observed, class is evident in the efforts of some mothers to ensure their children make particular friendships and acquire particular skills.

You could run yourself ragged then five days a week, there’s plenty of people out there who do it five days a week…Social climbing, you know, comes into it as well (Florence, Focus group).

Gina does not live in the area of the study and makes considerable effort to socialize her children with other children at the school and in the local area of the study, while Florence describes other mothers cultivating their children’s friendships with her children, which she finds excessive. Nevertheless, Benn (1998) found the requirement to be visible in schools and sporting and social activities transcends material differences between women and regardless of their circumstances, all women are likely to be the parent responsible for dropping and collecting and the managing of children’s activities.

Most women attempt to be visible both at the schools and in the community, to facilitate their children’s participation in school and sporting activities, and ensure their children’s’ academic progress by their direct involvement in homework. Halpenny, Nixon and Watson (2010) found that in Ireland, 82 per cent of parents are concerned about their children’s educational outcomes. All participants in this research described pressure to ensure children’s homework is done properly in order to monitor their academic progress and to meet the school’s expectation of parental involvement. Jean and Colleen both claimed to reduce their hours in paid work in order to ensure their involvement in their children’s homework and Jean and Anna admitted to finding homework a particular pressure in their days as both have three children.
Brona also has three children and described experiencing guilt and time pressure because one son needed extra help with his homework, which she felt her husband would not provide.

David, he was really struggling with his homework, but when I was at work I was worrying, I was saying he needs extra time. Do you know, the guilt of that? And ringing home at six o’clock in the evening, ‘Joe make sure you do the reading, make sure you do the reading’. ‘Did your Dad do the reading?’ ‘He did it, only one page’. And then the child is nearly asleep and I’m saying ‘come on, do this page’ (Brona, Interview). This is gendered time pressure as well as guilt. Brona uses the structured break at six o’clock in her twelve hour shift to contact home to remind her husband to spend time doing her son’s homework. When Brona arrives home she checks that the homework has been done, invariably it has been done but not to the required standard, so Brona does the child’s homework again.

Many women spoke of the difficulties they experience because of the school’s expectation that there is a full time mother in the home, with lack of notice for school closures, half-days, in-service days, and the expectation that mothers will be available to attend the school during the school day. For women who are unable to conform to these expectations, this can be distressing.

I mean yesterday, I was to attend the parent-teacher meeting, but the teacher was sick, so she had to cancel it. So the secretary tried to contact me, and she said to my son, who’s nine ‘it would be easier to contact Bertie Ahern than your mum’, he told me when he came home, he thought this was really funny. I found that … very disappointing. Yea. But I was disappointed that she felt I couldn’t be contacted. No, I didn’t like that, because I felt I should have been able to, you know, it was my son. She wanted to contact me, if my son needed me, I should have been contactable…Well I felt it was quite a bit unfair I felt, actually. I was a bit disappointed. Like, that was not a fair comment to make (Audrey, Interview).

Audrey’s distress that the school considered her uncontactable was considerable. She felt it was ‘not a fair’ comment to make about her mothering. Even though Audrey describes herself as having the ‘career’ in her family, she believes she should also be always available to her children ‘if my son needed me, I should have been contactable’, demonstrating the difficulty of reconciling the process nature of caring with the structured scheduled nature of work time. Halpenny, Nixon and Watson (2010) found over three-quarters of Irish parents feel that their working responsibilities impact
substantially on bringing up their children. All women in this research were frustrated at the schools expectation that mothers are full time in the home and consequently provide very little notice for unexpected school closures, or requirements for parents (mothers) to attend the school during the school day. The persistence of this expectation and the schools lack of accommodation for ‘working mothers’ creates physical and emotional difficulties and women do reduce their working hours because of schools’ expectations. Many women worked full time when their children were babies, but reduced their working hours as the children got older and went to school. Angela observed that the pressure to reduce working hours does not come from children when they go to school.

And it’s funny, that’s the time that they [children] are getting used to you not being at home and that they are just establishing themselves and you’re getting so sick of it and its just a point where the two of ye meet…Their needs are being met and you’re so sick of the juggling (Angela, Focus group).

Women become ‘so sick’ of the juggling because of the impossibility of attempting to reconcile the rigid times and spaces of the workplace with the many times and spaces involved in caring for children and the persistent middle class expectation that women with children do not, and should not, engage in paid work. The difficulty of merging working time and caring time results in many women reducing their hours of work. Exactly half the participants in this study work reduced hours either by job-sharing, working part-time, or doing the same job in reduced hours. Half all participants maintained their full time contribution to paid work, and experienced extreme time poverty and pressure. Florence, Jean and Anna all reduced their hours of work, but all have three children which results in these women undertaking considerable juggling to ensure their children’s education and socializing. Brona and Audrey work full time and also have three children, and experience greater practical and emotional difficulties, as these women also endeavour to ensure their three children’s homework and social activities are sufficient to develop social capital in the area of the local study.

Women in this study make considerable efforts to ensure their children participate in extra curricular and cultural activities on a par with women who mother full time in the area. Full-time homemaking mothers are visible at the schools and at children’s extra curricular and cultural activities, which is perceived to contribute to pressure on
participants who do not have the same amount of available time for these pursuits, thus it is possible to see the power relations implicit in the way mothers ensure reproduction of class position. Brona experiences pressure because of her inability to facilitate her children conforming to the same cultural practices as their friends and neighbours. ‘There’s kids on our road now that have, every single evening they have, an activity for an hour or whatever, be it scouts, this thing, that thing, drama’ (Brona, Interview). Brona’s work schedule and available financial resources do not facilitate her children engaging in the same level of activity and this induces guilt ‘I actually feel like I’m a bad mother sometimes now when I hear these kids are doing this thing, that thing’ (Brona, Interview). Brona’s experience of time poverty which prohibits her children participating in activities causes pressure for Brona because she experiences responsibility to develop her children, yet is powerless to facilitate their development because of her time and material poverty. This powerless responsibility is a source of extreme pressure for Brona. Class intersects with gender to ensure women’s reduced ability to facilitate their children’s participation in extra-curricular activities by virtue of unavailable time and unavailable material resources, thus class creates inequalities for children as well.

Gina also identified with this pressure because of the difficulty of reconciling children’s activities with the rigid time-space structures of paid work and the school’s expectation that mothers are always available by being full time in the home.

Something that really annoyed me this year was the Suzuki violin. The mother has to come, once a week, twice a week for half an hour. So it’s the elitist who don’t have to work that do it (Gina, Focus group).

Gina was particularly distressed about the violin lessons, and mentioned it again to me in interview a year later. Her concern was that full time mothers in the area of the study can develop their children’s cultural capital and reproduce their class position through violin lessons from which her daughter is excluded. Gina perceives she is treated unequally by being unable to facilitate her daughters’ acquisition of cultural capital with violin lessons. Gina also perceives this inequity on behalf of her daughter who expressed a desire to play the violin. This is an inequality with the children of mothers who work full time in the home. Brona also was concerned that her children could not participate in activities to the same extent as neighbours’ children; however Brona’s inequality came not just from unavailable time, but also economic constraints. Because expectations have accelerated
that parents should devote copious amounts of time to cultivating their children’s development (Hays, 1996; Coltrane, 2000), Gina and Brona demonstrate frustration in the caringscape with their inability to conform to the dominant local practice of ensuring children’s acquisition of social and cultural capital through activities.

The local has significant meaning and importance to women and as Bennett (2000:63) suggests the ‘local’ is not a fixed spatial area, but ‘a series of discourses which involve picturing the local and one’s relation to it’. Aisling demonstrates that ‘the family’ is both a relationship and a series of interlocking locations brought together through time and space, the management of which tends to be the responsibility of mothers, who undertake the regular and routine planning, anticipating, monitoring and rectifying that allow other family members to undertake a range of activities (McKie, Gregory and Bowlby, 2002: 918).

You know, today now we’ll say, I came home, collected the two older guys, came back here for half an hour, they did homework and I brought the second guy to music, the first guy to tennis, went down and collected the small guy and came back here, and then Tony came back here and then I had to go again to collect from …tennis, Tony collected from music, and then there was somebody else going out to football at six o’clock, so dinner had to be in between (Aisling, Interview).

Morgan (1996: 138) has identified spatial time as ‘the allocation of times in relation to specific spaces or locales’. Aisling’s scheduling of children’s activities in spatially disparate locations means that children are subject to strict time discipline and an accelerated tempo which ensures that, even at a young age, children also have the experience of having ‘no time’ (Buchner, 1990). Aisling also demonstrates the pressure she experiences because the scheduling and management of her four children’s activities falls to her. Similarly, on a forthcoming public holiday falling on a Thursday, Faye spoke of her plans.

I think when you have a window of time, I find, I’ll be thinking even a week ahead, now, like there’s a couple of days coming up, and I’m thinking, what I’ll fit into nearly every minute of that time. I can tell you now exactly what I’ll be doing from Wednesday night through to Friday morning when I go back to work (Faye, Focus group). It is interesting to note the hegemonic work-time language Faye uses ‘a window of time’, as in a little gap in work time in which to engage in non-work activities, demonstrating
Faye’s commitment to structured, scheduled work time and her application of it to family life. For many women, ‘clock’ time invades the home sphere and time out of work is subject to the same discipline as work time, with routines and schedules to be observed. Although as O’Connor (2008c) claims there is a paucity of hard evidence, there is a widespread popular perception that children’s lives to-day are much more institutionalized in the sense that organized activity for children with other children now exists in a wide variety of child oriented activities (Devine, NicGhiolla Phádraig and Deegan, 2004). Since the economic sphere provides the dominant temporal mode, women manage their responsibilities to children’s development by applying scheduled and structured work time to the private sphere. Women in this study are subjecting children to strict time lines and routines, which helps develop the discipline necessary to ensure their academic and social progress, but which creates more time pressure for ‘working mothers’.

Examining the ways women devote time to their children’s development reveals individual differences between women, as well as differences between participants and women who mother full time in the area of the local study. Gina and Aisling demonstrate the process nature of the time and tasks involved in ensuring their children’s development, which demands time and creates pressure for these women. Gina and Aisling have regular, shorter working days which facilitates Gina’s daughter attending a particular school and Aisling’s children’s involvement in social and cultural activities, but these women experience time pressure themselves as a consequence. When women perceive they fail to adequately meet children’s developmental needs, they experience emotional difficulties. Brona claimed to feel guilt that her children could not participate in activities to the same extent as their friends and neighbours, while Audrey was distressed that her son’s school considered her uncontactable. Both Brona and Audrey work longer hours in roles that require full time commitment.

Many of the women in this study subscribe to the view that their better management of time is critical to combining motherhood with paid work which maintains their time poverty and pressure as their own private issue to resolve. Women describe being time poor, rushed and busy because they attempt to provide the same level of care for their children as full time stay at home mothers in the area. However, women who
work outside the home do not have the same available time and experience an inequality with stay-at-home women, who have more time to devote to their children’s development. Some women do not have the same economic resources to devote to their children’s development and thus class and gender intersect to create inequalities for these mothers and their children.

Women draw on discourses of neo-liberalism in terms of their participation in paid work and their efforts to develop children who will be productive, flexible and have well-developed interpersonal skills (Ehrenreich 1990, Rubin, 1994), women also draw on discourses of new-capitalist motherhood to explain their efforts in developing children’s skills and social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1984). Women draw on traditional discourses of motherhood in relation to their children’s care, and ‘being available’ when their children need them (Ribbens, 1994). Motherhood discourses also promote caring for children as the route to self fulfillment for women and present women’s lifetime devotion to their children as normal and inevitable (Oakley, 1974). The power of motherhood discourses is evident in the decisions of women who compromise their contribution to paid work in order to prioritize their families. Many women reduce their hours of work, work shifts, job share or work part time in order to care for their children and to facilitate their children’s social and cultural development. Women do not see this privilege perpetrates gender inequalities for themselves by limiting their earning power, career prospects and maintaining them in a subordinate position in the workplace. Women who continue to work full time experience more emotional and practical difficulties because of their lack of time to devote to children’s development. No woman questioned the expectation that mothers should expend considerable effort in developing their children and it was evident in women’s accounts that facilitating children’s activities has become an accepted aspect of motherhood in contemporary Ireland.

Women are positioned by discourses of individualism to want to participate in public life, develop careers and exercise autonomy. Discourses of motherhood position women as totally responsible for their children’s care and development. A pattern which emerges from the conflict between discourses of individualism and motherhood is ‘the mother war’ (Buxton, 1998) which results in women who work outside the home and
women who mother full time blaming and criticizing each other for different ways of parenting, not recognizing the power operating through discourses which sets clear expectations on women’s use of time when they are mothers, and sets defined limits to women’s ability to combine motherhood with paid work.

**Housework**

Time-use data show that a traditional division of labour persists within the household, with women, even those in full time employment, spending more time on caring and household work than men (McGinnity and Russell, 2008). Despite their increased involvement in paid work, mothers remain responsible for doing an ‘acceptable’ amount of unpaid domestic work, because its performance is integral to being a ‘good’ wife and mother (Thompson and Walker, 1995; Riggs, 1997). Women’s time at home is spent performing physical and emotional labour in process time for children, partners and parents as well as housework.

Davies (1990) illustrates how women’s experiences of time when working in the home are bound up with the times of family members and others through which ‘clock and process time weave complicated patterns’ (1990:131). As Yolanda describes time in her day ‘It’s all go from the minute I get up in the morning, go go go. I go to work and I come home and it’s all go go go again’ (Yolanda, Interview).

Yolanda describes how busy she is at home, before and after her day in paid work, suggesting the fixed nature of clock time associated with paid work and the fluid, processual nature of time spent at home. Yolanda is taking parental leave one day a week, and compares her time in work favourably to her time at home ‘Like I’m sitting down every day in work, whereas on a Wednesday [when Yolanda is at home all day] I don’t sit down at all (Yolanda, Interview). Thus Yolanda demonstrates the relational nature of caring for others, doing housework and collecting and dropping family members which means her time is fractured, relational and task focused while she is caring and working in the home.
Amelia did not take extended maternity leave for her third child, even though she had done so for her first two, because of the tedious, repetitive, thankless nature of caring for small children at home.

On my last one I ran back to work in July because I just had to get out of the house for sanity reasons really. … I don’t know, with three children, I just found them so demanding at home, and they were all so close together, and I just had to get out of the house. And I just loved going to work to just to come home and somebody else would have all the bottles done and all the nappies done and the dinner made (Amelia, Interview).

Time spent caring for small children is repetitive and restricted in terms of space. Land (1999) suggests the different values afforded to working and caring, are determined not just by who does ‘work’ and who does ‘care’, but also by the location. As Sirianni and Negrey (2000:64) found ‘The economic status of women in society and their role and position in the household are formally linked by the value of time’. Being ‘at home’ is not valued by some participants as their work caring for children is regarded as invisible, even by themselves; ‘somebody else’ could do the dinners, bottles and nappies.

Scott (1999) notes even where men and women in dual earner households devote the same amount of time to their paid work, women undertake around nine hours per week more housework than men and Delphy and Leonard (1992) observe that what male partners do is described as ‘helping’ with the housework when their wives are in paid employment. Thus, increased female employment has not led to a renegotiation of the allocation of paid and unpaid work between women and men. Women remain time-poor in comparison to men because of the disproportionate level of household tasks they undertake (Sullivan, 2000; McGinnity et al., 2005). McGinnity and Russell (2008) found that Irish women spend more time on the physical care and supervision of children while men spend a much greater proportion of their time on social childcare such as playing. As Jackson and Scott (2002:151) found ‘while men do more in the home than they did in the past, women continue to do most of the domestic work and to take responsibility for organizing it’.

Jean has reduced her working hours to thirty hours a week, and describes her husband’s expectation that she will be the manager and organizer of their home.
My husband says I’m the logistics manager in our house. You know if somebody has to go to a party, or somebody has to go here (.), I mean, if I say to him ‘will you take Jill to the party?’, he’ll say fine, but you know, you have to figure it all out, and you have to give him the instruction then and he’ll carry it all out and he wouldn’t quibble with it. But, I have to work out whose collecting there, who needs to be dropped where, what clothes do they need to bring with them, who needs to bring a hurley, who needs to bring ballet clothes, whatever it is. And then he’ll go off and he’ll do it, but you have to do the figuring out (Jean, Interview).

This suggests the gendered power structure whereby her husband bestows upon Jean the title of ‘logistics manager’, conferring all responsibility on Jean to continually do the managing. Reducing their working hours reinforces gendered attitudes towards women’s domestic responsibilities. Often men deal only with the non-routine aspects of childcare, while mothers are left to do the housework and routine childcare (feeding, dressing and washing) while men play with children and take them out. Employed women end up working very long days at the least favoured aspects of household work ‘even when they have good husbands’ (Delphy and Leonard, 1992:240). Chira (1998) observes that most ‘working mothers’ carry the double load of paid work and housework, even if male partners help. ‘My husband would do most of the things that I ask him to, he wouldn’t think of doing it but he’d do it if I asked him’ (Sabine, Focus group). Other husbands do not ‘help’. Regardless of Kate’s commitment to full time work and with four children, her husband refuses to have anything to do with the management of the home.

To this day he wouldn’t do housework…He just doesn’t want to do it. Wasn’t brought up to do it. Just doesn’t want to do it.. I have somebody who comes in once a week now, only since, since about a year ago, but up to then, it was my responsibility, I used to do it at the weekend (Kate, Focus group).

Housework reveals differences between women depending on the support of their partners. McKie, Gregory and Bowlby (2002) identify a juxtaposition in terms of gender: for fathers who only occasionally participate in caring work, the spaces and times involved can be relatively fixed; thus those who do not or cannot participate in caring may not readily appreciate the fluidity of time and space for mothers (McKay, 1998). As Davies (1990:41) notes, ‘housework is quite simply not answerable to male time’. Sabine reported that when her husband cares for the children, he just cares for the
children. ‘He will do one thing at a time. He will mind the children and the house will be like a bomb hit it’ (Sabine, Focus group).

Housework is gendered and women do more housework than men and retain responsibility for organizing it. Jean is the manager in her home, but her husband will ‘do his share’. Jean attributes her husband’s expectation that she should do the majority of work in the home to her reduced working hours. Kate however works full time, as does her husband, yet she is the only one who does, or organizes someone to do, housework. Kate, however, has the material resources to buy in domestic support; nevertheless management of the home is clearly Kate’s responsibility. Many women find housework tedious and thankless and Yolanda and Amelia compared their structured time spent in work favourably to the ‘process’ time spent on housework. Both work reduced hours, but both stated they would not give up paid work to stay at home.

Although everyone has twenty-four hours in a day, Davies (1990), Berk (1985) and Hochschild (1989) argue that time is not distributed equally between men and women because women’s domestic responsibilities define women’s time as a collective household resource subject to the demands of husbands and children whereas men’s time is more of an individual resource. Thus men’s time is perceived as having more value because more of it focuses on ‘productive’ labor (Adam, 1990; Davies, 1990). Hence, men are entitled both to ‘free time’ and to the provision of household goods and services by women. In essence, men have more control over the use of their time but also some of women’s time, even if ‘working mothers’ also spend time on productive labour. McGinnity and Russell (2008) found in dual earner couples in Ireland, women do more unpaid work and have a higher total workload than their male partner.

Sayer (2007) argues that the time demands on parents have ratcheted upward. The growth of dual earner families means that the majority of mothers and fathers are spending time engaged in both paid work and unpaid work. Further, time pressures have expanded in both domains. Sayer, Cohen and Casper (2004) found that cultural attitudes have shifted to the point where most women and men desire and expect shared breadwinning and caregiving. Data from the International Social Survey Programme (2002) bears this out (see Table 2, Chapter 1), in 2002, 69 per cent of people agreed that both partners should contribute to household income, while only 18 per cent agreed that a
man’s job is to earn money: a woman’s job is to look after home and family. However, in this research, the desire and expectation of shared breadwinning and caregiving led to disappointment in reality for many women who reported being far more time poor and experiencing more time pressure than their partners.

All women, whether working full- or part-time, or reduced hours maintained responsibility for the management of home, and experienced gendered assumptions that they would. Unpaid work is not a gender-neutral bundle of chores that women perform but instead is a key aspect of the social production and reproduction of unequal power relations between women and men (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Brines, 1994; Folbre and Nelson, 2000). Women’s partners were significant in the way women managed their time in the home. Some partners were involved in domestic arrangements and their partners’ involvement did reduce pressure on women in terms of some household chores or some time caring for children. Partners’ involvement did not lessen any woman’s responsibility for managing the home.

**Time for Me**

McGinnity and Russell (2008) found parenthood brings a reallocation of time for both men and women, leaving a more traditional division of labour in couples with children and this is consistent with international gendered trends (Bianchi et al., 2000; Pacholok and Gauthier, 2004; Craig, 2006). In essence, children are a ‘gendered time constraint’ (McGinnity and Russell, 2008:72), and having children increases women’s unpaid workload far more than men’s, regardless of women’s paid working hours, with women in Ireland having one extra month of committed time per year (McGinnity and Russell, 2008:71). Consequently, women have most committed time and less free time, which leads to greater time pressure, and lower life satisfaction.

I think there is no time though, there is no time…Time for me doesn’t exist. Time for me is time for everybody. I think it is impossible to get time, because I even think when did I try and get time, I’m thinking about them [the family], so I don’t know if there is time for me. Do you know?

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20 McGinnity and Russell (2008:71) found women do 39 extra minutes paid/unpaid work per average day, which amounts to 14,235 minutes per year, or 237 more hours committed time than men per year.
I don’t know do you just give up on that and it’s maybe it’s easier just to give up on it than to actually try to work it in (Avril, Focus group).

Many women, like Avril, complained of having no personal time to themselves. Forman (1989) offers a critique of the philosophical relationship between being and time, and notes that ‘women do not only live in time (from birth to death), they also give time and that act makes a radical difference to being-in-the-world’ (1989:7 added emphasis). Clearly Avril gives all her time to her husband and children, ‘time for me is time for everybody’.

Even though Jasmine, Audrey and Fay are the main earners in their marriages, they are still conferred with the responsibility of managing the home. These women described themselves as having the ‘careers’ in their homes, nevertheless they still retained responsibility for the management of the home and not having the same access to personal time as their partners. Jasmine reported that she is the one responsible for homework and cooking the dinners, and Audrey claimed that the roles are reversed at the weekends when she is not at work.

I mean he would let everything to me on Saturdays and Sundays and he would just [leave it to me] and he does [leave it to me] .) He would take time out, I mean, he has personal time. He would take personal time (Audrey, Focus group).

Audrey claims she does not have the same access to personal time as her husband. ‘I suppose I put everything I have into my family and then have very little time for outside it, for outside the family’ (Audrey, Interview). This is not a matter of choice, however, because Audrey’s husband leaves ‘everything’ to Audrey at the weekends, reverting to traditional gender roles, even though she has the career Monday to Friday.

However, with discourses of individualism, and their participation in paid work, women, like men, have an expectation of personal time, while motherhood is predominantly concerned with relational time and giving time to others. It is the difficulty of integrating these times that makes women's lives so difficult.

It’s my whole life…there’s nothing else. That it’s just complete, because by the time I’ve done my days’ work and come home, I’m just so exhausted. I don’t really feel that I have any time for anything else (Jane, Interview).

Most women, like Avril and Jane, gave up on attempting to create time for themselves, while time doing housework is considered personal time by Florence.
You just don’t ever get time for you, so that’s why I’m up till two in the morning, doing my ironing and watching telly, this is time out now, this is grand (Florence, Focus group).

Florence refers to time alone as time out, and she enjoys ironing at two in the morning, because it is the only time she has peace and quiet. Even if she is giving time to housework, she has time to herself where she is not tending to her children, her partner or her job.

Delphy and Leonard (1992) and Maushart (2001) suggest that women perform less ‘wifework’ after the arrival of children. Many of the women in this study felt under pressure to fulfill their roles of mother and paid worker to the best of their ability which meant their relationships with their partners suffered.

Well, at the end of the day, you have the kids, you have to go to work, you have to do the housework and then whatever time you have left for each other is very small. I end up falling asleep most nights, you’re sitting down to watch the news and like half an hour later you’re asleep, I’ve missed whatever I wanted to watch, and that’s the time of the day you have to spend on each other like. We don’t even have a conversation, you know. It’s just the last bit of the barrel that’s left (Jean, Focus group).

Jean describes her responsibilities as devoting time to the children, their cooking, cleaning, homework, caring in a processual way, she has to go to work where time is measured by the clock, she performs a full time job in condensed hours, time has to be given to housework and whatever is left over is ‘very small’ whatever is left over is time for her relationship with her partner. Relationship with their partners suffered because of women’s time poverty and this was also was a concern for women because, as Duncombe and Marsden (2002) and Gatrell (2005) found, women felt responsible for the emotional stability of their marriages and were anxious to retain their marriages and partnerships at the same time as caring for their children and keeping up at work. Many women reported their concern that the relationship with their partners suffers because of the time poverty and pressure women experience combining motherhood with paid work.

The worst is definitely, I think, you do compromise your relationships with your family, with your husband and with your children. Especially the relationship with your husband as well, because you’re just squeezing it in. Monday to Friday, you’re just squeezing it in, you know, just a quick few words, sometimes I wonder do we talk at all (Audrey, Focus group).
In addition to childcare and housework, women also experience gendered expectations regarding caring for, as well as about, elderly parents. Both Anna and Jean visit their elderly mothers daily, as well as caring for their children, partners and doing housework.

My mother is there on her own, so you’re conscious that you have to call to her every day, I mean, because my father died about three years ago and she hasn’t picked up outside that (Anna, Interview). Anna and Jean both work reduced hours, which Jean reckons is necessary in order for her to fulfill her obligations to her mother, as well as her children. As Jean describes her role between the dependant generations ‘you are caught between parents and kids and you’re in the middle trying to push, well not push, but support both sides of the sandwich’ (Jean, Interview). Supporting both their parents and their children is an emotional as well as a practical demand on women’s time. Women demonstrate they care about being available for their parents and they are concerned that their relationship with their partners suffers because of their time poverty. However, women’s participation in paid work under strict ‘work’ time, and the relational, processual nature of time at home, caring for dependant children, and doing housework means women have less time to spend on these relationships. This lack of time creates stress, pressure, emotional and practical difficulties for women. The pressure to care for parents is gendered and women did not report their partners making the same efforts in relation to their own parents, but as daughters-in-law, some women reported that they were expected to support their partners’ parents as well as their own. There are individual differences, of course. Some women’s parents are a source of support, while other parents are more dependent and this creates an additional time pressure on those women.

Colleen is separated and parents alone, she spoke about prioritizing her son’s needs over her own while he is young.

It doesn’t matter what marital circumstance you’re in, you will make that decision [to prioritize her child’s needs]. His [needs] rather than mine anyway…That’s the whole thing, it’s not forever, they’re only little for a very very short period of time. They only really need us for a very short period of time, thirteen, fifteen, seventeen years, like if you think about it, it’s not very long (Colleen, Interview). However, some prison sentences are shorter than the length of time Colleen believes her son really needs her. She is prepared to suspend her need for individual time and
prioritize her son’s needs over her own for seventeen years, and, as she is parenting alone, and working thirty-two hours a week, this is particularly acute.

Time at home is given to childcare, housework and family relationships and many women manage time out of work with the same strict discipline of clock time at work. ‘Working mothers’ time poverty ensures they have very little personal time and far less time for themselves than their partners.

That many women work a second shift while their husbands work only one is deeply unfair. Our indignation obscures the fact that the difference between men and women is not that men work one shift and women two, but that women with jobs usually do not have the flexibility to decide what to do with that second shift, which is already committed (Bateson, 1989:167/8).

Discussions of the ‘second shift’ suggest that women’s greater involvement in employment has simply added to their household work, however, Hochschild (1990) coined the phrase ‘second shift’ to describe the gender strategies in ten dual earner households. However, in reality, as McGinnity and Russell (2008:4) noted ‘it is predominantly women who deal with Hochschild’s third shift – noticing, understanding and coping with the emotional consequences of the compressed second shift’. Thus, ‘working mothers’ do not have the same access to personal time as their partners. However, there are differences between women depending on the number of children, whether women work full or part-time and the level of support from partners. Women who parent alone and work full time like Jane and Colleen have no expectation of having time for themselves in the present or in the near future.

**Conclusion**

All women in this research experienced degrees of time pressure and time poverty. Many women found it impossible to reconcile gendered expectations both at work and at home and many women failed to combine motherhood with paid work in a satisfying way. Their individual coping strategies include better management, cutting back on employment demands through reduced working hours, multi-tasking and outsourcing housework. These strategies are not optimal, however, because they maintain the gendered order of caring. Women who reduced their hours in paid work
claimed to have achieved better balance between caring and working time, but at the expense of greater domestic responsibility and career compromise.

There is no absolute lack of time per se, it is the way time is socially constructed and ordered to fit gendered concepts of what motherhood and employment is and ought to be that influences the way women and men spend their time. ‘Working mothers’” time pressure and time poverty is caused by and causes multiple intersecting inequalities for ‘working mothers’ at the intersection of gender and class with family, workplace and society. There are gendered pressures on women in paid work to spend time performing like ‘ideal workers’ unencumbered by caring responsibilities. There are gendered pressures on women in family to spend time caring for children, doing housework and spending time with their elderly parents and their partners. Consequently, all women experienced gendered inequalities in relation to demands on their time. There are obvious differences in the life chances of participants, the ways women differentially use their time and differentially value time. Women with partners, women with professions and women with greater economic resources are privileged in that they have more choice in the ways they manage time. Benn (1998) suggests material resources can ameliorate some of the difficulties of combining motherhood with paid work, however, material conditions did not reduce participants’ frustration and exhaustion which came from attempting to spend time working and caring, in situations governed by quite different temporal values. A culture of time that values speed and efficiency combined with an intensifying work ethic that places higher priority on paid work than family means women’s time budgets are stretched to the maximum, women sacrifice expectations of personal time, and women’s individual solutions alone are unable to remedy their time poverty.

The time-impoverishment of ‘working mothers’ has implications for individual wellbeing because it increases women’s stress. Some of the time people try to shape their paths through time and space so as to realize particular aims and goals. But, for many, their mothering activities are taken for granted or restricted by the availability of time, resources and income, for others, their working activities are restricted by their domestic responsibilities.
Nilsen and Brannen (2002) suggest that life chances underpin the choices available to individuals, and stress the importance of class in terms of economic and political resources and prestige. However, gender is probably the significant factor in determining one’s life chances. Gender inequality is a system of oppression in its own right, however, as intersectionality theory has demonstrated, gender relations are intertwined in complex ways with other forms of social inequality (Ferree, 2009).

As Nowotny (1992) notes empirical studies of time in relation to gender have superseded those of time in respect of social class. However, in this research, both class and gender influence the ways women merge and manage caring and working time. This intersectional approach reveals the intersecting temporal inequalities women experience because of gender and class and these are causative and mutually dependent. Class interacts with family, workplace and society and the classed inequalities women experience in the workplace such as limited employment options are mirrored in society with limited options regarding children’s educational progress, socialization and participation in activities. It is evident from this study that class and gender interact with family and society to create a particular set of intersecting temporal inequalities for women in their caringscapes. Material conditions affect women’s options in all social systems; these are acute in the middle-class area of the study. The middle class values dominant in the area of the study create a very particular pressure for women who attempt to promote middle class values and aspirations in their children. Walby (1997:15) notes it is important to retain the notion of causal impact of gender and class as social phenomena, rather than adopt a view of interconnections so complex that causation is irrelevant. Gender is a social fact and caring for children and ensuring their development is the gendered responsibility of mothers. Class is also a social fact and women who are unable to care for or develop their children experience gendered and classed inequalities, because they perceive that their children are also disadvantaged.

Although changes in families and workplaces are similar across industrialized countries, and there is legislation granting ‘equality’ and promoting work-life balance, generally individuals handle work and family time pressures without significant social and institutional support. While changes in the polity make provision for maternity and parental leave as statutory entitlements, some organizations resent and resist these
entitlements and some women are penalized if they avail of them and there is a further penalty for remaining workers, as those on leave are not replaced. There is resentment by organizations, colleagues and supervisors to maternal flexibility, even though individual women are grateful and perceive flexibility as a privilege, rather than a right.

Society remains gendered and it is evident that childcare and children’s development are considered the responsibility of women. The schools are particularly resistant to social change and while changes have occurred with women’s participation in paid work, there is no corresponding effort to accommodate these mothers or these children by changing the organization of the school system. These are gender inequalities because it is only women who experience this pressure. Women who reduce their hours in paid work are privileged by being available to their children, by having more time to devote to reproduction of class position and to foster children’s development. There is also an expectation that women who reduce their hours in paid work will undertake a greater share of domestic responsibility at home.

The pattern of personal responsibility for their decisions, which emerged in relation to each woman’s choice regarding combining motherhood with paid work and regarding women’s childcare arrangements also pertains to women’s time poverty and women consider their constant busyness and time pressure to be their own individual problem as a consequence of their own individual choices. By maintaining their participation in paid work as their ‘choice’ to combine with motherhood, women blame themselves when their lives are too busy and too stressed, not appreciating the gendered and classed inequalities which set defined limits to women’s freedom to make choices.
Chapter 7: Conclusions, Reflections and Recommendations.

This chapter draws conclusions from the data chapters, summarizes the inequalities and privileges experienced by ‘working mothers’ and reveals how these are anchored in the social structural systems of family, workplace and society. Regimes and configurations of inequality are outlined, which reveal the operation of patriarchal power in Irish society. I reflect on the research, and outline unexpected and thought provoking findings and identify the contribution this research makes to knowledge. Finally, I suggest recommendations which will improve the situation for women, mothers and carers in Irish society and identify areas for future research.

Conclusions
The focus of this study was women’s practices of combining motherhood with paid work through the concepts of choice, care and time which reveal that ‘having it all’ means ‘doing it all’ and that ‘working mothers’ really are on a treadmill. The combination of intersectionality and standpoint enabled an uncovering of the underlying reasons for women’s experience of inequalities and the complex operation of power in Irish society, families, and workplaces. The way power operates is to silence women who are led to believe their situation is the outcome of their own ‘freely’ made choices, which is why women appear to accept a situation which is patently unfair.

‘Working mothers’ occupy troubled subject positions (Wetherall, 1998) at the intersection of multiple intersecting inequalities. As Oakley (2002) argues, power operating through social values, customs and relations is experienced as the constant fracturing of personal identity by those who are powerless. Women experience powerless responsibility, and because they are seduced by the illusion of choice, they do not focus on the operation of power, but accept their inequalities as personal troubles. These troubles are ‘ignored, redescribed as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved, or inevitable’ (Jaggar, 1983:56), even by women themselves.

This research reveals just how difficult combining paid work with motherhood actually is for middle-class women in contemporary Ireland because women with children who engage in paid work have so many choices to make and have no time or
spaces to share their experiences and consequently blame themselves for the outcome of their choices. Many women’s decisions amount to no more than a series of unsatisfactory trade-offs, masquerading as individual choice.

**Inequalities and Privileges**

This research reveals that the intersection of ‘worker’ and ‘mother’, with family, workplace and society, creates new and complex forms of inequality and privilege for individual women. There is diversity and difference within the group of women consequent on their marital status, occupation and class, leading to different forms of penalty and privilege; however inequalities are experienced by all women because of gendered obligations to care. Women perceive a moral imperative to do care work that does not apply equally to men. Many women experience guilt because they perceive they are not properly satisfying moral obligations to their children. This is a gendered inequality because combining paid work with fatherhood does not carry the same moral obligations as combining motherhood with paid work does for women.

Class was particularly evident in women’s childcare arrangements and the treatment of childminders. Choosing childcare is arguably the most significant practical choice women make when combining motherhood with paid work. The most appalling inequality experienced by some ‘working mothers’ is that their children were in unsafe conditions. Some women did not regard the women they engaged to care for their children as providing a valuable service, and some ‘working mothers’ regard childminding as not valuable and treated their childminders in an instrumental way. Some private childminders do not enjoy the benefit of contractual employment because their care work is invisible, unrecognized and undervalued. Indeed, many childminders operate in the informal economy, claiming welfare benefit to supplement their income from childminding. These women who supplement childminding wages with welfare benefit earn less and have no employment protection at all.

The women in this study experience time pressure and time poverty. In the middle-class area of the study there are particular classed and gendered demands on women to spend considerable time facilitating their children’s development, managing their homes as well as participating in paid work, thus all the women experienced greater
or lesser demands on their time in the caringscape. Of course there are differences between women, consequent on their marital status, education, occupation, family size and the amount of time women spend in paid work and this affects the temporal inequalities or privileges women experience.

Women without partners experienced most inequality in terms of domestic organization because they retained full responsibility for caring for children and management of the home. Some women’s partners were not at all involved in management of the home, for other women, partners’ involvement with children did reduce some pressure on women. However, all the women maintained responsibility for the management of the home, and gendered expectations regarding the mothers’ role were experienced by all women. Women who parent alone experience greater pressure in terms of the obligation to participate in paid work; however there is no lessening of their responsibility for children.

Some women perceived a moral obligation to generate family income, and this limited their choices regarding the way they would combine motherhood with paid work. Whether parenting with partner or alone, women who worked for economic reasons felt they were working to provide for their children, but experienced guilt because they were unavailable to their children as a consequence. The intersection of class with gender reveals limits to women’s ability to facilitate their children’s acquisition of social and cultural capitals by virtue of unavailable time and unavailable material resources. Women experience pressure to reproduce their children’s class position on a par with women who do not work outside the home. By privileging women who mother full-time-in-the-home in the area of the local study, ‘working mothers’ collude in the promotion of the social and sexual divisions in which they are ultimately subordinate.

Each woman regarded combining her participation in paid work with motherhood as her own individual problem. The time poverty of many ‘working mothers’, combined with their ignorance of the ways other women combine motherhood with paid work contributes to pressure, a sense of isolation and heightened individual responsibility.

Social Structural Systems
The experience of inequalities and privileges does not explain them, and locating women’s gendered and classed inequalities in the structural social system, reveals gender
regimes operating in families, workplaces and society, which maintain ‘ideal mothers’ as full-time-in-the-home, and ‘ideal workers’ as unencumbered by care responsibilities. It is evident in the inequalities and privileges experienced by women, that gender and class intersect with polity and society and the relationships are mutually causative, the form and degree of gender inequality structures the class relations and vice versa. According to Walby (2009), gender, class and other social relations interact with the institutions of society and each system is a separate regime of inequality.

Regimes of inequality exist at the intersection of gender with paid work where women are either maintained in a subordinate position by reducing their commitment to paid work, or are required to behave as ‘ideal workers’. While changes in the polity make provision for maternity and parental leave as statutory entitlements, organizations resent and resist these entitlements. There is resentment by organizations, colleagues and supervisors to maternal flexibility, so that individual women are made to feel grateful and perceive flexibility as a privilege, rather than a right, which increases their productivity. Women in this study who maintain careers while attempting to fulfill their gendered obligations to motherhood are criticized by colleagues who promote the view that women cease to be committed employees once they become mothers and cease to be committed mothers if they continue to participate in paid work. Furthermore, a regime of inequality exists at the intersection of gender with household work, where women demonstrate they undertake a greater proportion of domestic work than their partners, and retain responsibility for the management of the home, regardless of their time contribution to paid work.

At the intersection of gender with culture, there is a regime of inequality with the persistence of the gendered order of caring, and this is maintained at the intersection of gender with the state where women are charged with caring as a personal and social duty. This regime is maintained and reinforced through the state’s tax and welfare systems and promoted in society, particularly by the schools. Women are obliged to make choices regarding the ways they will combine motherhood with paid work, which suggests women have freedom to make this choice, but, there is vigorous public scrutiny and commentary on mothers, which marks some choices as more acceptable than others in different circumstances.
The promotion of women’s entry into the world of work, while maintaining expectations of women’s responsibility for caring, have created a new, complex inequality for care workers, who experience far greater inequalities than the women whose children they mind. Women’s choices in relation to childcare are gendered, in that women arrange and pay for childcare, and women are always engaged as childminders, whether they are family members, crèche staff or private childminders. The failure of the state to regulate childminders has serious consequences in terms of the inequalities experienced by ‘working mothers’, by childminders and by children. ‘Working mothers’ and paid childcare workers are situated in a symbiotic relationship to each other, with ‘working mothers’ sometimes exploiting, and always being responsible for, the poor conditions of care workers in Irish society. The state legitimizes exploitation of childminders in tax and welfare systems and when some ‘working mothers’ participate in the public sphere, they adopt the state’s neo-liberal, individualist attitudes towards care work and care workers. The treatment of care and care workers demonstrates the systemic mechanisms of domination which reinforce the gendered and classed regime of inequality for care workers in Irish society.

Class intersects with paid work to reveal women’s limited employment options and limited discretion over time spent in paid work. At the intersection of class with household work, women with fewer resources were less able to buy in domestic supports, and because these women also had less discretion over their time spent in paid work, they experienced more powerless responsibility, time pressure and guilt than other ‘working mothers’. Class and culture intersect to produce a regime of inequality whereby women were unable to ensure their children’s acquisition of cultural capital in the area of the study, thus producing a regime of inequality for children as well.

Complexity theory
According to Walby (2007a), complexity theory has the conceptual tools necessary to locate inequalities at the level of the individual and explain them with reference to the social structure; to locate inequalities and structures in an overall social system; theorizing the nature and form of intersectionality, and its impact on social systems, locally and globally. Applying complexity theory in this research, demonstrates that
women are constrained by family, workplace and society in a myriad of complicated and conflicting ways. Women’s increased participation in the labour force has changed the patterns of inequality between the genders, but in complex ways, not simply for better or worse. In complexity theory, systems are self-producing, may be self-organizing and self-defining. The system produces its components and in turn is produced by its components. Each system is interdependent and as one system changes, the others with which it interacts also change.

In Irish society, legislation has been enacted to provide employment equality, but as is evident in women’s accounts, workplaces have not changed their shape or organization to accommodate ‘working mothers’ and continue to promote hegemonic, ‘ideal worker’, long hours cultures which make combining paid work with motherhood very difficult. According to Walby (2007a), as one system evolves, it changes the landscape for others. In Ireland changes in the polity via equality legislation have caused little corresponding change in employing organizations. Workplaces have increasing numbers of women and mothers working at all levels, yet women experienced gender-neutral pressure to conform to ‘ideal worker’ norms. Thus, the system produces women as ‘ideal workers’, who behave as ‘ideal workers’, i.e. men, adopting liberal-individualist attitudes, which perpetrate the gender order, and position other women in structures of disadvantage. To facilitate the women who are produced as ‘ideal workers’, the system also produces childcare workers in hierarchical relationships to ‘working mothers’, which maintains gender regimes and regimes of gender inequality.

In complexity theory, systems are complex and adaptive, as one system changes, the others with which it interacts also change, as does its landscape. The concept of path dependency demonstrates the sequencing of complex changes, with changes that happen at one time in one system having consequences at other times in other systems. Changes in society arising from women’s participation in paid work have a weak path dependency on the organization of family. Most women retain responsibility for organizing all caring work and management of the home regardless of their participation in paid work. Society remains gendered, evident particularly in schools’ expectations of full-time-in-the-home mothers. Dominant notions of good mothering persist and in the middle class area are as
much concerned with the care of children as with passing on the family’s social and cultural capital.

The childcare landscape has not co-evolved to facilitate women’s employment and, as is evident from participant’s accounts, there are persistent gendered assumptions about women’s place in the home with women performing more care and housework than men, even when they are engaged in paid work outside the home. The persistent gendered assumption by the state of the provision of care, primarily by women, in households or through the private market place has not changed because of women’s participation in paid work. Government policy encourages women to participate in the labour market; however formal norms and gendered assumptions in workplaces, family and society, as well as government social policy penalize women when they do. The lack of state intervention to support parenting and care work has reinforced women’s disadvantaged position in society because the state persistently regards care work as predominantly a private concern and a female responsibility. The state resists measures which will facilitate provision of adequate, affordable, accessible childcare, demonstrating that women’s participation in paid work has generated no corresponding change in the childcare landscape, and, regardless of the desirability of women’s participation in the formal economy, the state nevertheless maintains caring work as women’s private responsibility. Failing to regulate and protect childminders and the refusal to publish the National Carers Strategy confirms the deeply patriarchal values of the Irish state in relation to women’s caring work and women’s employment. Thus the state legitimizes gendered exploitation, maintains the black market in childminding and reinforces the gendered and undervalued order of caring.

Applying complexity theory to the inequalities and privileges women experience reveals that despite women’s participation in employment, the landscapes of workplace, society and family are slow to respond to this change which reflects the strength of attachment in Irish society to deeply patriarchal, traditional gendered roles for women and mothers.

Discourse and Power
Ferree (2009) developed the term ‘interactive intersectionality’ to describe the ways dimensions of inequality themselves are dynamic and exist in changing, mutually
constituted relationships with each other from which they cannot be disentangled. This is a more dynamic and institutional understanding of intersectionality and Ferree (2009) adds an emphasis on ‘structuration’ as an ongoing multi-level process from which agency cannot be erased (Giddens, 1990). Ferree (2009) also adds an emphasis on discourse as the political process by which the co-creation of inequality between processes (race, class, gender) and domains (family, society, work) occurs, and she identifies discourse as a crucial arena of political activity (Foucault, 1977).

The dominant discourses of neo-liberalism, motherhood, feminism and individualism have been explored as the political processes which create and maintain ‘working mothers’ intersecting inequalities in Irish society. Women are positioned by discourses of neo-liberalism to engage with the market, be economically self-sufficient and contribute to the formal economy. Individualism discourses suggest women, like men, are responsible for reflexively creating their own biographies and exercise autonomous choice in order to maximize their success and happiness. Feminist discourses also produce the desire to achieve economic independence, while women are positioned by discourses of motherhood to be responsible for the physical, emotional, psychological and educational well-being of their children. These discourses give different meanings to ‘worker’ and ‘mother’ for different women, in their families, in their workplaces and in society.

Though domination is central to the organization of social difference, power is also productive in that it generates, constitutes and governs relations of difference. At an individual level women demonstrate they incorporate the self-regulative elements outlined by Foucault (1977; 1982; 1988) and Rose (1989; 1999b) and also the elements of self-care and self-mastery assumed by discourses of individualism in their navigating between ‘ideal workers’ and ‘ideal mother’ subject positions (Skeggs 1997). The techniques of the self – for self-knowledge, self-reflection, self-examination – ultimately become a form of self-surveillance and the panoptical gaze of the ‘ideal mother’ and the ‘ideal worker’ enables disciplinary practices to be enacted upon themselves (Bartky 1990).

This research aimed to draw attention away from the different identities of ‘worker’ and ‘mother’ and focus more intently on the contextual processes and conditions
in which women’s representations of themselves as ‘mothers’ and ‘workers’ are allowed to be produced, governed and socially organized. Thus gender and class are processes which take on different meanings for individuals in different locations, and discourse is the political process which gives meaning to ‘mother’ and ‘worker’ in different institutions and social locations.

This research also considered the discursive and political construction of the social institutions of family, workplace and society. The dominant discourses of neoliberalism, motherhood, feminism and individualism are productive as well as dominating and are interdependent and work together to create and maintain intersecting inequalities and privileges for ‘working mothers’. The inequalities women experience because of their motherhood partially constitute the inequalities women experience as workers and vice versa. Current ideas about ‘ideal mothers’ and ‘ideal workers,’ promoted in social institutions, are force fields operating to oppress women. These ideas are promoted in dominant discourses, taken up by institutions and by women themselves, revealing the depth and extent of the opposition to women’s progress.

**Configurations of Inequality**
Ferree (2009) argues intersectionality and discourse are more effectively produced through an examination of the configurations or patterns that are created by the intersection and interdependence of these discourses and inequalities with each other. This research revealed a number of patterns, which confirm that ‘ideal workers’ and ‘ideal mothers’ are produced so that neither exists without the other, in the same way as professional women and childminders are also produced in a symbiotic way.

The illusion of choice is an intersectional pattern, and the ways new patterns of inequality are maintained is through each individual woman’s illusion of ‘choice’. Choosing between morally inscribed motherhood and atomistic rational economic employment is neither free choice nor morally sound. Women are obliged to make the best choices that lead to the greatest satisfaction, therefore women engage in reflexive gendered moral reasoning in making decisions to combine motherhood with paid work. However, while women’s moral reasoning involves the exercise of agency, it conceals the stark reality that women make choices under duress, which do not promote their well-
being, and the inequalities or privileges a woman experiences as a consequence of her choice are constructed as her own fault, or her own achievement.

Women’s choices are determined at an individual level by the social relations of gender, class and marital status because political, material and social inequality leads to class and gender differences in outcomes. Women who have professions and are partnered are privileged on the basis of class and therefore have more options, and therefore may be able to make better choices. This leads to inequalities between women, which result in resentment between women, ‘the mother war’, and conceals the deeply patriarchal social structures which put clear and effective limits on the choices women are free to make.

A further pattern emerges which maintains the inequalities women experience as each woman’s private trouble. However, these private troubles are in fact public issues but are maintained as private troubles through each woman’s illusion of choice. One result of experiencing inequalities and privileges and blaming herself for them is that women experience unremitting emotional distress caused by the doubts and insecurities of making impossible choices under structural conditions beyond their control.

Caring is work of low value, undertaken by women and maintained as women’s private problem and this conceals the systemic gendered and classed constraints that make different childcare choices available to different women. There is a symbiotic relationship between poor/welfare dependant women and caring work which maintains poverty and gendered inequality. ‘Working mothers’ sometimes engage in, and always are held responsible for, the poor conditions of childcare workers in Irish society. Thus women blame themselves and other women when their childcare arrangements and choices are unsatisfactory. This is a pattern between intersectionality and discourse which ultimately involves women colluding in and maintaining the social and sexual divisions in which they are ultimately subordinate.

These configurations of inequality reveal the power operating through dominant discourses which demonstrate the ways intersecting inequalities depend upon and mutually construct each other and work together to shape outcomes for women in the composite category ‘working mother’. These intersecting inequalities are maintained by dividing and conquering women because women blame their own and other women’s
Reflections
Following my MA research which confirmed Compton and Harris’ (1999) theory that women with children who engage in paid work outside the home consciously make sacrifices in one sphere or the other, the key questions driving this research were: What are the underlying reasons women make these choices? Why do ‘working mothers’ appear to accept the situation? And, what role does inequality play?

By exploring the lived experiences of ‘working mothers’ as these are mediated through the concepts of choice, care and time, it became evident that women have little option but to make sacrifices, because ‘ideal mothers’ and ‘ideal workers’ are constructed as polarized in Irish society. Women’s moral reasoning and the personal responsibility women take for the outcome of their choices, mean that women not only accept the situation, but blame themselves when their choices result in negative outcomes. Exploring the complex whole of ‘working mothers’ lived experiences through an intersectional lens, reveals inequalities and privileges for individual women dependant on their individual circumstances, that inequalities are anchored in structural social systems, and the way discourse is a political process which creates and sustains these inequalities. Patterns between inequality and discourse conceal the way power operates to divide and conquer women in Irish society.

One issue which is starkly revealed by this research is the extent of women’s isolation and their ignorance of the ways other women combine motherhood with paid work in Ireland. The focus group discussions revealed women’s attachment to dominant discourses and considerable tension emerged in some discussions when women were confronted with alternative ways of combining motherhood with paid work. When I subsequently met participants for interview, women had reflected on other ways of combining motherhood with paid work and were anxious to know if there was a ‘right’ way of being a ‘working mother’. There is no ‘right’ way, and the question revealed to me how much personal responsibility women take for their situations, even while they do exercise agency in making choices. The heroic efforts women make in combining
motherhood with paid work as if they are ‘ideal workers’ in the workplace, and full-time-in-the-home mothers, revealed to me the difficulty and futility of such efforts, because motherhood and employment are irreconcilable as currently constructed in Irish society. Personally, I settled for a ‘good enough’ result, and accepted that there are only twenty four hours in a day, and no matter how effort one makes, the elusive ‘right way’ of combining motherhood with paid work will not be realized. This knowledge was liberating for me, and I hope will be liberating for participant ‘working mothers’.

Exploring the role of inequality in this research revealed that women experience privileges as well as inequalities both at an individual level and in society. Conducting this research with thirty participant ‘working mothers’ made me uncomfortably aware of the privileges I experience, which were very similar to those of the participants. Following MacLean (2009), I was aware of my oppression, but my privileges were invisible to me. Being educated, having the ability to earn a salary, and purchase the activities which ensure my son’s acquisition of cultural capital is a significant privilege. Middle class status is also a privilege, as is being white, heterosexual and able bodied.

That ‘working mothers’ participate in perpetrating gender inequalities through their treatment of care and care workers was a significant but uncomfortable finding, which demonstrates the effectiveness of patriarchal power by silencing and making invisible all those who engage in caring work. This finding makes disseminating the research findings difficult, because the privileges of participants may be invisible to them (as mine were to me). However, awareness is the start of the process of moving forwards, and I will make this, and all the research findings, known to participants in a further focus group discussion.

**Theoretical / methodological contribution to knowledge**

Standing on the shoulders of giants is how this research makes a theoretical contribution to knowledge. I took the ground breaking and insightful work of critical race theorists, and the later work of McCall (2000), Walby (2007) and Ferree (2009) and developed a concept of intersectionality which reveals the complex whole of lived experience, by revealing inequalities and privileges at the level of the individual, anchored in social
structural systems and the way discourse is the political process which creates and maintains configurations of inequality.

As Crenshaw (1989) originally articulated, intersectionality explained the ways black women workers experienced new and complex forms of inequality because they were invisible to race- or gender-only concepts of discrimination—hence ‘all the blacks are men and all the women are white’. Crenshaw demonstrated that systems of oppression converge to create new and complex forms of inequality which differ from any one form of oppression viewed in isolation. Intersectionality theory emerged from feminist studies of gender inequality and demonstrated that when gender is combined with other grounds, such as race or class, it creates new complex forms of inequality.

As already noted (p.228), in the context of this study, gender is probably the most significant factor in determining these women’s life chances. Gender inequality is a system of oppression in its own right, however, as intersectionality theory has demonstrated, gender relations are intertwined in complex ways with other forms of social inequality. An intersectional analysis makes plain that gender and class simultaneously affect the perceptions, experiences and opportunities of everyone living in a society stratified along these dimensions. To understand any one of these dimensions, we must address them in combination. Gender, combined with motherhood and employment in this research, demonstrates new complex forms of inequality for ‘working mothers’.

This concept of intersectionality theory offers a way to explore complex inequality at the intersection of gender with many other categories, and reveals not only that inequalities and privileges exist, and that they are anchored in social systems, but also how they are promoted and maintained through discourse. This reveals the operation of power at multiple levels, which makes resistance to power possible.

Applying Cole’s (2009) reconceptualization of the meaning of categories was important in analyzing the composite category ‘working mother’, because it helped identify the inequalities and privileges women experience ‘downstream’ as a result of their behaviour deriving from their positioning within dominant discourses, and locate the causes of these inequalities and privileges ‘upstream’ in the structural social system. Cole’s (2009) analysis was significant in revealing the diversity and difference within the
group of ‘working mothers’, which led to different degrees of privilege and inequality, and also revealed the ways that intersecting inequalities depend upon and mutually construct each other and work together to shape outcomes.

I applied a feminist methodology and a feminist standpoint to highlight how ‘working mothers’ are positioned within unjust power relations and to reveal the complexity of the intersecting inequalities and privileges women experience and how they are produced and resisted everyday in women’s lives. Employing the qualitative methods of focus groups to identify dominant discourses and individual interviews to identify women’s positioning within the discourses and women’s relationships with the institutions of society revealed the complex whole of women’s lived experiences at an individual, institutional and discursive level.

By developing an intersectional standpoint, this research reveals the ways discourses of motherhood, feminism, individualism and neo-liberalism are ‘oriented to produce certain political outcomes’ (Rose, 1999a:52). These outcomes are the multiple, complex inequalities ‘working mothers’ experience and the way these inequalities are maintained as women’s own individual problems to address in their own individual ways.

This methodology facilitated identifying complex inequality at the level of individual women, locating these inequalities and privileges in structural social systems, and explaining how these inequalities and privileges are created and sustained. Furthermore it enabled me to identify patterns between intersectionality and discourse which reveal the complex ways patterns of inequality have symbiotic relationships and reveal the operation of power.

**Sociological Contribution**

The specificity of this middle class population, and the insights that my research contributes, are important in revealing the patriarchal nature of Irish society in a local study in early 21st century Ireland. This research demonstrates the way changes in the orders of discourse have led to social changes for women; but still maintain women in positions of disadvantage.

This research reveals that changes in orders of discourse from catholic corporatist to neo-liberal and individualist, and the consequent changes in Irish society, have
facilitated some women’s move to a more public gender regime. However, there is resistance to women’s progress, evident in an anti-feminist backlash and intensive mothering discourses, deriving from traditional Irish Catholic values. These competing and conflicting discourses are evidence of a collision culture in Irish society, in which traditional conservative and modern neo-liberal values collide and which are experienced by women as pressure to conform either to ‘ideal mother’ or ‘ideal worker’ norms. As such, this research is important in revealing the changing nature of Irish society, the changing position of women from a private to a more public patriarchy, and in revealing the way power operates to maintain women’s subordinate position in both spheres.

However, women’s participation in this study is, in and of itself, a political act. These women consider themselves pioneers, being the first generation with the ‘choice’ to engage in paid work following motherhood. As equality legislation dates from the early 1970s, and was implemented as a pre-condition to EU membership, it is arguable that had Ireland not joined the EU, there would be no move to a public gender regime in Ireland. As Walby (1990) and Connolly (2003) have argued, Irish women experienced more rigorous restrictions on their mobility from the private to the public domain than women in other modern European democracies. Women are still experiencing restrictions on their mobility from the private to the public sphere, which is reflected in the weak path dependency of family, workplace and society to women’s participation in employment.

The women who took part in this study appreciated and acknowledged their ignorance of the ways other women combine motherhood with paid work, and were interested in acquiring information, sharing experiences and contributing to knowledge about the ways in which women combine motherhood with paid work in Irish society. By making significant efforts to sustain motherhood with paid work, women demonstrate they are acutely aware of the limitations on their freedom to be ‘workers’ and ‘mothers’ and many women resist and transform these categories in their daily enactment. These women are challenging traditional gender roles and all women describe their participation in paid work as well as their motherhood as important components of their reflexive biographies.
This research reveals that power operates in Irish society to divide and conquer women. The patterns of inequality which were revealed derive from the illusion of choice, which is experienced by all women. Moral reasoning is a pattern of inequality and all of the women made moral choices to combine motherhood with paid work, blaming themselves when their choices resulted in negative outcomes, and considering these negative outcomes as a private trouble. Women who make different choices in relation to combining motherhood with paid work criticize and condemn other women’s choices and join in and perpetrate the ‘mother war’. The ‘mother war’ is evidence of how women are subordinated by being divided and conquered. This research reveals the extent of the opposition in Ireland to women’s progress. Women are divided and conquered, they are silenced and ignored. The inequalities women experience are constructed as private troubles, and their privileges are constructed as the outcome of their freely made choices. By privileging some women sometimes, enduring inequalities are created for all women.

**Recommendations**

As Collins (2000) noted, intersectionality complicates our understanding of social relations in a way that is more reflective of socio-political realities, and applying this concept of intersectionality theory to the experiences of ‘working mothers’ reveals privileges as well as inequalities, their anchoring in the social structural system, and the ways discourse is the political process which creates and maintains ‘working mothers’ in a subordinate position in Irish society. This is not to accept that the situation cannot be changed, and there is much that can be done to improve the situation of women with children who engage in paid work.

At an institutional level, it is imperative that the recommendations of the Expert Working Group on Childcare (PPF, 2000) be implemented. These measures include; tax relief for working parents; extra allowances to pay for child care for women living below the poverty line to help them into employment; tax allowances for childminders; support for providers and child care personnel; and a national and local coordination network to develop child care at all levels. The State should also publish the National Carers’ Strategy, and implement the strategy’s recommendations to enable carers to combine paid work with caring work. By not publishing the strategy, business is made a priority over
human needs and neo-liberal and individualist attitudes are perpetuated so that little or no value is placed on caring work and on those who do the caring.

At an individual level, womens’ awareness of the way power operates through discourses, institutions and women themselves is the start of moving forward. Following Letherby (2002), participants demonstrate that power operates through dominant discourses and shapes women’s ‘choices’ regarding combining motherhood with paid work, and in terms of the explanations and meanings they give to ‘mother’, ‘worker’ and ‘working mother’ and to their experiences. Women

[use aspects of them, reject some, and play a part in framing them, thus assisting in the development and change of discourse. Women are both within and outside discourse at the same time (Letherby, 2002:286).

In one sense, by combining motherhood with paid work women are simultaneously taking up and refusing the subject positions of ‘mother’ and ‘worker’, because these are constructed as polarized in Irish society. These are provisional categories I impose on these women, which they use very differently to produce their own subjectivities. Their performances of subjectivity always occur in and through power relations, which position women differently in relation to their value to society. These valuations are evident in public narratives of what it means to be a ‘worker’ and a ‘mother’ and a ‘working mother’ evident in workplaces, families and wider societal contexts.

By understanding the way power operates to create inequalities for ‘working mothers’, new forms of resistance can emerge. In the 1960’s feminists started consciousness-raising groups to create spaces where women could come together, share their experiences and organize against their oppression. Consciousness-raising was an effective strategy because it primarily destroyed women’s isolation. I believe the isolation experienced by ‘working mothers’ contributes hugely to the reasons women believe they are responsible for the outcome of their choices. I see the dissemination of the findings of this research to participants in a further focus group discussion as a political intervention, which hopefully will have a transformative effect in terms of at least eliminating some of the isolation women experience. Creating spaces for women to talk, share and compare experiences and even to realize there is ‘no right way’ can be
very liberating and the start of moving forward towards improving the situation of ‘working mothers’ in Ireland.

Areas for future research
The feminist intersectional theoretical framework and methodological approach adopted in this study could usefully be applied to many areas where women experience inequalities at the intersection of gender with multiple categories such as sexuality, age, marital status, disability or ethnicity. The women who took part in this research perform considerable emotional as well as material labour in maintaining the stability of their working and mothering lives as well as their marriages and caring for their elderly parents. A study of the relationship between emotional and material labour and its physical and psychological impact on these women could be a topic for further study. Furthermore, many women spoke about the emotional stability of their marriages and their efforts in this regard, so it would be interesting to study these women’s partners to determine their concerns and the emotional and material efforts they make to support their wives in combining motherhood with paid work. A related area is the extent to which women and some men are challenging gender roles. There is some evidence of men becoming more actively involved in the care of their own children, which may suggest men are challenging and valuing care, but this matter requires further empirical investigation.

This research aimed to draw attention away from the different identities of ‘worker’ and ‘mother’ and focus more on the contextual processes and conditions in which women’s representations of themselves as ‘mothers’ and ‘workers’ are allowed to be simultaneously and separately produced, governed and socially organized. However, it might be revealing to focus on their subjectivities and identities specifically as ‘mothers’ or as ‘workers’ separately.

A comparative longitudinal study of these ‘working mothers’ might reveal changes to the structural social systems of family, workplace and society as more mothers enter employment. It would be interesting to see if structural social systems co-evolve as more mothers combine motherhood with paid work, if different discourses become
dominant at different times, and if different inequalities and privileges are experienced by women over time.

A similar research project in a working-class Irish suburb would determine the different inequalities and privileges experienced by a demographically different group of ‘working mothers’ and a comparative analysis with this study of middle-class Irish ‘working mothers’ would reveal much about the workings of class as it intersects with gender in this context.

In the US there is less legislative and employer support for ‘working mothers’ in terms of maternity and parental leave, while in the Scandinavian countries and the UK there is more. Applying this research methodology to different groups of ‘working mothers’ in the US, Scandinavia and the UK would determine if women draw on different discourses in different societies and the extent to which different social structures and cultures contribute to different inequalities and privileges and would reveal the extent to which the patterns emerging in this study are uniquely Irish.

**Conclusion**
This application of a new concept of intersectionality theory to ‘working mothers’ experience reveals the inequalities and privileges women encounter by combining paid work with motherhood in contemporary Ireland. Even though mothers experience gendered inequalities, and many women workers experience inequalities, this approach reveals that ‘working mothers’ experience new complex forms of inequality rather than motherhood, or women’s employment viewed in isolation.

Thomson and Holland (2002:349) note that ‘far from disappearing, gender is central in providing resources and constraints for imagining the future’. For ‘working mothers’, a bright future would involve combining working and mothering without being impossibly torn between two conflicting and competing worlds, and experiencing multiple intersecting inequalities, which they identify as their own private troubles, for which they blame themselves.

As already noted, gender is probably the most significant factor in determining one’s life chances. Intersectionality theory emerged from studies of gender inequality that revealed how gender relations are intertwined in complex ways with other forms of social
inequality. Gendered inequalities exist in Irish society for everyone in the category ‘woman’, but this intersectional research reveals the way gender interacts with motherhood and employment to create new complex inequalities for ‘working mothers’. This intersectional standpoint provides a privileged, yet mediated, view of gendered power structures in Irish society and reveals that the inequalities women experience as mothers contribute to those they experience as workers, and vice versa, and these inequalities are maintained through each woman’s illusion of choice.

However, women are challenging traditional gender roles and despite the difficulties, dilemmas and compromises women encounter, all of the women in this study describe their participation in paid work, as well as their motherhood, as central components in their reflexive biographies. This research demonstrates clearly the way power operates at individual, institutional and discursive levels. By identifying some of the causes of the problem, this thesis can be seen as an important step in finding solutions.
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Appendices

Appendix A  Employment /Equality Legislation

Appendix B  University of Limerick Ethics Committee Application

Appendix C  Participant Information Letters

Appendix D  Biographical Questionnaire

Appendix E  Focus Group Topic Guide

Appendix F  Participant Informed Consent Form

Appendix G  Interview Guide

Appendix H  Participant’s Time Commitment to Paid Work

Appendix I  Participant’s Childcare Arrangements.

Appendix J  Participant’s Occupational Details
Appendix A.

Employment / Equality Legislation.

- 1973: The Civil Service (Employment and Married Women) Act 1973 was passed, which removed the Marriage Ban in the Civil Service, Local Authorities and Health Boards.

- 1974: The Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act was passed, which guaranteed ‘like pay’ for ‘like work’ by the same or an associated employer.

- 1977: The Employment Equality Act was passed which resulted in the establishment of the Employment Equality Agency.

- 1994, the Maternity Protection of Employees Act was introduced, granting women maternity leave to have their babies, then fourteen weeks, a guarantee of their position at the same level on return from leave and state benefit for the period of the leave. Improvements to the provisions were introduced in 2000, increasing the leave to eighteen weeks, and in 2006, increasing the leave period to twenty six weeks.

- 1981: The Unfair Dismissals Act 1977 was amended to include maternity as an automatically unfair ground for dismissal.

- 1998: The Parental Leave Act, 1998 was introduced, and entitles employees to avail of fourteen weeks’ unpaid leave from employment to enable them to take care of their children aged less than 8 years. Under the Parental Leave Act, provision was also made for Force Majeure leave, which is three days paid leave in a five year period to enable employees to have leave from work to deal with deal with family emergencies resulting from the injury or illness of certain family members.

- 1998: The Employment Equality Act, 1998 was introduced and prevents discrimination in selection, promotion or training on the grounds of: gender, marital status, age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, family status or membership of the traveling community. The provisions of the Act were improved and extended with the introduction of the Equal Status Acts, 1998 and 2004.
2000: The National Minimum Wage Act was introduced, which guaranteed a minimum wage of €7.00 per hour. The provisions of the act were increased in 2005 to €7.65 per hour, and the rate was increased to €8.30 from 1st January, 2007, and is currently €8.65.

2001: The Carer’s Leave Act 2001 was introduced; granting 13 weeks leave to employees to provide full time care for one relative, with a carer’s benefit payable by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.
Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

[Image]

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DRAFT UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (ULREC)

APPLICATION FORM FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

[BUSINESS, HUMANITIES, EDUCATION]

1. Title of Project:
   “An exploration of the ways in which women with young children who engage in paid employment negotiate their maternal identities”

1.1 Period for which approval is sought:
   This research began in April 2004. Empirical research will commence on receipt of approval from UL Research Ethics Committee.

2. Investigators:
   Research Supervisor21: Signature:  Date:
   Pat O’Connor

   Contact address:
   Prof. Pat O’Connor, Dean, College of Humanities, Professor Sociology and Social Policy, University of Limerick.
   Telephone No:  (061) 202329  Fax No:  (061)338170  Email: pat.oconnor@ul.ie

   Research Supervisor22: Signature:  Date:
   Breda Gray

   Contact address:
   Dr. Breda Gray, Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick, Ireland.
   Telephone No:  (061) 234207  Fax No:  Email: breda.gray@ul.ie

   Other Investigators:
   Principal Investigator
   Name  Qualification  Signature
   Clare O’Hagan  MCIPD, M.Sc, M.A.  

   Head of Department23: Signature:  Date:
   Brian Keary

21 The Research Supervisor is deemed responsible for the accuracy of the information contained within this application. Where the Research Supervisor is not a permanent employee of the University, the responsibility for accuracy of information and submission of Report Form will lie with the relevant Head of Department.

22 The Research Supervisor is deemed responsible for the accuracy of the information contained within this application. Where the Research Supervisor is not a permanent employee of the University, the responsibility for accuracy of information and submission of Report Form will lie with the relevant Head of Department.

23 The Head(s) of Department(s) within which the investigation is to be carried out. Departmental Heads authorise the work to be undertaken within their Department.
3. **Study Descriptors**

3.a) **Who is being studied?**
Competent volunteers are being studied in this local study. The research population is adult women who engage in paid work, who have young (primary school-going) children, and who live in Cork.

3.b) **Methodology and Study design**
A feminist, inductive, research methodology will be employed in this research because it seeks to produce qualitative and inductive knowledge that demonstrates the ways in which women with children who engage in paid work perceive themselves as mothers.

3.c) **Data Collection Methods**
The qualitative data collection methods of focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews will be used.
Four focus group discussions will be held with groups of 6 – 10 women in order to provide information regarding women’s normative assumptions of motherhood and their experiences of being ‘working mothers’ in contemporary Irish society (a topic guide is attached).

Individual qualitative in-depth interviews will be held with 30 women during which the information which arises during the focus group discussions will be further explored.

3.d) **Forms of recording**
Audio recording: the focus group discussions and individual interviews will be recorded on audio tape and transcribed to text.

Notes: Hand written notes may also be taken during the focus group discussions and the individual interviews.

3.e) **Funding**:
Identifying source and duration of funding
Higher Education Authority Grant (administered through Cork City Council) has been approved.
Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (Government of Ireland – IRCHSS) scholarship has been received.

3.f) **Ownership and publication rights?**
Ownership rights are shared between the University of Limerick and the Researcher.
4. **Study Design**

**a) Theoretical Background to the Study**

Over the last 10 years, there has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of married women and women lone parents in the labour force, suggesting that unprecedented numbers of women with children are engaged in paid employment in Ireland. Work that has been done on Irish motherhood has tended to focus on Irish concepts of motherhood and women’s subordinate position in public and private spheres because of their maternity. Some of this work is quantitative and relates to the structural positions of women and mothers in Irish society.

This study seeks to explore maternal subjectivities, and the meanings women derive from their maternal identities. In particular, this study seeks to explore the ways in which women, who are engaged in paid employment, negotiate their maternal identities. Theoretical frameworks include feminist and cultural theory as well as post-structuralism. Key concepts to be interrogated include Ideology; Identity; Guilt; Family; Work-Life balance; Caring and Power.

**b) Hypothesis or key research questions to be answered**

**Major:** How do women who engage in paid work negotiate their maternal identities?  
To what extent do ‘ideologies of motherhood’ influence women’s maternal subjectivities?

**Minor questions:** Which aspects of maternal identity are continued or discarded with shifts in the demands of paid work/career trajectories? Which issues most affect changing maternal identities in contemporary Irish society.

**c) Plan of investigation**

**YEAR 1**
- Review relevant literature
- Develop theoretical and conceptual Framework
- Develop methodological approach and research strategy
- Submit application to UL Research Ethics Committee and obtain approval.
- Complete literature review chapters – 1 Motherhood; 2 Irish Context.

**YEAR 2**
- Target research participants through participating Primary Schools in area of local study
- Obtain informed consent from research participants
- Conduct focus group discussions (4), individual interviews (30) and complete transcription.
- Complete methodology chapter
- Present national / international conference paper
- Commence data analysis.
- Draft first analysis (substantive) chapter.

**YEAR 3**
- Complete final analysis of data
- Draft two further analysis (substantive) chapters
- Present national / international conference paper
- First draft of thesis to be completed Q3 Year 3.
- It is expected that the final thesis will be completed by April 2007.

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24 A statement is required as to whether the hypothesis has been established previously in the published literature and/or research output.
d) procedures or investigations involving risks to participants’ well-being or safety
   (What, when, how often and risk(s) associated with all procedures)

Focus group discussions and interviews will not involve any kind of risk to participants’ well-being or safety.

e) Duration of study and duration of a subject’s or participant’s contribution

Study will take place during the three year period 2004 – 2007. Empirical research will be conducted during the calendar year 2005, commencing on receipt of approval from UL Research Ethics Committee. Participant contribution will involve participation in a focus group discussion, participation in individual interview or both. Length of focus group discussion = maximum 2 hours. Length of individual interview = maximum 2 hours. Focus group discussions and interviews will be held in suitable, confidential location, to be negotiated with participants. Participants will be asked to complete a Biographical Questionnaire (see attached) for analysis purposes only.

f) Location of the study

I have selected a suburb on the south side of Cork, where the school-going population is mixed in terms of socio-economic situation and class. The area is long-established, containing many large privately owned older houses, new local authority housing developments, some new private housing estates and a number of privately owned former local authority homes. In addition, access is provided to a wider community as pupils travel to primary schools in this area from other locations in Cork. The school-going population includes children from affluent homes whose parents are business and professional people and children from modest homes, whose parents are unemployed or unskilled workers. In the area, I have identified four same-sex, Roman Catholic National Schools.

It is hoped that targeting primary schools in such a large area, allows me to access a sufficient number of participants to conduct this research.

Participants will be invited to participate in this research by way of an invitation letter which will be sent home in the school bags of all children attending these four schools. A letter will be sent to each of the Principals of the four schools inviting them to participate in this research by facilitating the sending of the letters to mothers.

5. Selection of Subjects/participants

IMPORTANT - Please see Guidelines - No. 5

5.1 Please outline in detail how it is intended to select subjects/participants.

Purposive sampling techniques conducive to a qualitative approach to the research process will be employed. The focus will be on mothers of young children, who are engaged in paid work, and who live in the area of the local study.

Participants will self-select. Invitations to participate will be sent to the mothers of all children in the four selected schools.
5.2 **Details of sources and numbers of subjects/participants with brief inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Focus group discussions will be held with mothers from each of the four participating schools. Four focus group discussions will be held.

Individual interviews will be held with women from each of the four participating schools. It is hoped to conduct interviews with thirty individual women.

Selection criteria are that women are mothers of young children and engage in paid employment. Issues of marital status, class, occupation and numbers of children are expected to emerge, but these are not criteria in the selection of research participants, because these variables are not central to the research question.

5.3 **Confidentiality of Subjects Clause:**

*Statement required as to how all documentation/footage which may reveal the subjects’/participants’ identity e.g. video footage, visual documentation, case notes and records, surveys, questionnaires and records will be stored during the research process and for a period following the submission of thesis.*

All research participants will be provided with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. Any identifying details, such as references to employers, or family members will be altered so that participants will not be recognisable. All tapes, notes and identifying materials will be held in a secure location throughout the research process and post thesis submission date. The researcher will be the only person with complete access to all materials. From time to time research supervisors may require access. All material will be maintained securely for a period of five years post thesis submission date, and then destroyed.

6. **Indemnity**

**IMPORTANT - See Guidelines No. 8**

Is written confirmation enclosed with this application? **YES / NO**

If **NO**, give details of Indemnity arrangements

**NOTE:** Where there is more than one institution/organisation involved in the study, each institution/organisation is responsible for its own indemnity cover, and confirmation of such cover must be appended to the application.

7. **Financial Arrangements**

a) Are funds available for the successful completion of this study?

Funds are available for completion of this study. Higher Education Grant, administered by Cork City Council. Government of Ireland (IRCHSS) scholarship.
b) Details of payments or other rewards to subjects/participants.

Research participants will not receive any payment or reward for participation in this study.

8. Collaboration

Please confirm that the application has been discussed in detail with all staff involved and with any groups that might be affected by the project.

Supervisors (Prof. Pat O’Connor, and Dr. Breda Gray) have been involved at all stages of this project thus far, and have provided guidance and direction at all stages of the project.

9. Information Documents

Please note that failure to provide the necessary documentation may delay the consideration of the application. Please complete the checklist below (Highlight in bold as appropriate):

**IMPORTANT - See Guidelines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject /participant information leaflets enclosed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/carer information leaflets enclosed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed consent forms enclosed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires enclosed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample letters enclosed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Guides for Interviews</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REMEMBER**

When submitting please email the completed Application Form, including additional material, to: Sandra.Grehan@ul.ie. For distribution purposes please also forward 8 hardcopies of the full application, containing the original signatures, to:

The Secretary  
University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee  
C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar's Office  
University of Limerick
Appendix C

Participant Information Letters

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Researcher:
Clare O’Hagan
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick
Limerick
Tel: (021) 4359976 (home)
(087) 9007800 (mobile).
e-mail: clareohagan@ul.ie
clareohagan@eircom.net

01/01/05.

Dear Mother,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study of the ways in which women with young children who engage in paid work (of whatever nature) experience motherhood in Cork.

In particular, the greater Douglas area has been selected for this local study because it is an established suburb, yet it has seen rapid growth and change in the last number of years. One of the significant changes is the numbers of women with young children who are in paid employment.

Please read the attached information on the project, which should answer any questions you may have about the study.

If you are engaged in paid work of any kind and you would be interested in sharing your experiences in order to add to knowledge in this under-researched area by participating in a group discussion, and/or an interview, please give me a call and I will be happy to provide more information.

Yours sincerely,

Clare O’Hagan

'If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee

c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office
University of Limerick
Limerick
Tel: (061) 202022
Title of the study:

‘An exploration of the ways in which women with young children who are engaged in paid work, negotiate their maternal identities’

Never before in the history of the state have so many women been employed in Ireland. In particular the numbers of women with children who are part of the labour force have never been so great. Many reasons are offered for this increase in women’s employment: the lifting of the marriage bar, the cost of housing, the availability of work, and, importantly, shifting attitudes towards women in Irish society.

This research seeks to explore how women with young children who engage in paid work, (of whatever nature) perceive themselves as mothers and how these perceptions influence their behaviour as mothers and as workers.

I am writing to invite you to participate in this research and to share your experiences of being a working mother. There are two ways in which you can do this: by taking part in a group discussion with other participants and myself; and/or by participating in a one-to-one interview with me.

The group discussion will involve between 6 and 10 women, who all are ‘working mothers’, and who have children in primary school locally. The discussion will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and will take place in a convenient, quiet and suitable environment where your confidentiality and privacy can be respected. We will be discussing the issues that arise for you as mothers because you are in paid work. As well as taking part in the group discussion, I would like to invite you to take part in a one-to-one interview with me to discuss working motherhood in more detail.

Both the group discussions and the interviews will be conducted by myself, they will be recorded on audio tape, and I will transcribe the tapes into text. No one other than myself will have access to the tapes or the transcriptions. To respect your confidentiality and preserve your anonymity, you will be provided with a pseudonym that will be used in the transcription and writing up process. At no time will your identity or any identifying details, such as your place of work, or the names of your children, be visible within any
written reports. The tapes and transcriptions will be held confidentially by me until 5 years after submission of the thesis and then destroyed.

All participants will be asked to complete a short, biographical questionnaire providing information such as type of occupation, numbers and ages of children. Again, this information is only for my own use and no identifying details will be visible to anyone but myself. As a researcher, I will be working under the supervision of two senior members of staff in the University of Limerick, they will have access to written reports throughout the research process, but the only person that will have access to the true identity of any participant will be me.

There is no obligation on you to participate in this study. If, after our initial meeting, you do not wish to participate in the study you are free to withdraw. If you do decide to participate, you have the freedom to leave at any time and end your participation. There is no obligation on you to complete the research.

It is hoped that you may actually enjoy the opportunity, through taking part in this research to ‘think aloud’ about your position as a mother in paid employment. I hope that I can use this research to increase knowledge on the issues for ‘working mothers’ in Cork and draw attention to their situation.

The research will be written up in a Ph.D thesis and aspects of the findings will be used in academic publications.

You are free to contact me at any time to discuss the research and your participation in this study.

There is no pressure to be involved in this project, though any help, assistance or insight you can provide will be greatly appreciated. If you would like further information, or wish to participate in this study, please feel free to contact me at home 021) 4359976, or on my mobile phone (087) 9007800, or by e-mail: clareohagan@ul.ie, or clareohagan@eircom.net.

Once again, thank you for your interest in this research project.

______________________________

Clare O’Hagan

*If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office

University of Limerick
Limerick
Tel: (061) 202022.
### 1. PERSONAL DETAILS

#### In what age group are you?

- [ ] 20 – 25
- [ ] 26 – 30
- [ ] 31 – 35
- [ ] 36 – 40
- [ ] 41 – 45
- [ ] 46 – 50
- [ ] 51 – 55
- [ ] 56 or over

#### What is your marital status?

- [ ] Married
- [ ] Single
- [ ] Separated
- [ ] Divorced
- [ ] Widowed
- [ ] Co-Habiting
- [ ] Other (Describe)

#### How many children have you?

- [ ] 1 child
- [ ] 2 children
- [ ] 3 children
- [ ] 4 children
- [ ] 5 children
- [ ] 5 children or more

#### What ages are your children? (Please specify number of children of each age)

- [ ] 0 – 1 year
- [ ] 1 year
- [ ] 2 years
- [ ] 3 years
- [ ] 4 years
- [ ] 5 years
- [ ] 6 years
- [ ] 7 years
- [ ] 8 years
- [ ] 9 years
- [ ] 10 years
- [ ] 11 years
- [ ] 12 years
- [ ] 13 years
- [ ] 14 years
- [ ] 14 years or over
2. **EMPLOYMENT DETAILS**

What is your occupation?

Length of time in your current position? __________ Months __________ Years

Is your employment status?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Temporary</th>
<th>Contract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What are your current working arrangements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Shift Work</th>
<th>Job Sharing</th>
<th>Other flexible arrangements (describe)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How many hours a week do you spend in paid work?

3. **CHILDCARE**

Who takes care of your children when you are at work?

☐ Family members (please specify) __________________________

☐ Paid childcare: In child-minder’s home

☐ Child minder in your home

☐ Au Pair

☐ After-school club

☐ Other (please specify) _________________
Appendix E.

Topic Guide Focus Group Discussions

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

1. What are the practical issues that concern you as a working mother?
2. What remedies/solutions to these practical issues do you suggest?
3. Are there any other pressures relating to being a mother and a worker?
4. How do your family (immediate) / partner / mother / father / siblings see you as a mother?
5. Can you give examples?
6. What are your responses to these perceptions?
7. How do your parental responsibilities affect your work?
8. How do your work commitments affect your parenting?
9. In what ways does your ‘family’ situation at home support your paid working life?
10. In what ways does your ‘family’ situation at home hinder your paid working life?
11. What measures has your employer taken to facilitate mothers in the workplace?
12. In an ideal world how would you combine motherhood and paid work?
13. Best/Worst aspects of being a working mother?

’If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact
The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office

University of Limerick
Limerick

Tel: (061) 202022
Appendix F
Informed Consent Form for participation in Interview / Focus Group Discussion.

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

Clare O’Hagan
Department of Sociology
University of Limerick
Tel: (021) 4359976 (home)
(087) 9007800 (mobile).
e-mail: clareohagan@ul.ie
clareohagan@eircom.net

‘An exploration of the ways in which women with young children who are engaged in paid work, negotiate their maternal identities’
The purpose of this research project is to explore how women with young children and who are engaged in paid work perceive their roles as mothers, and as workers.

Before signing this sheet, you will have been provided with a written description of this research project.
The purpose of this form is to gain your consent to use information gathered from you; to acknowledge that you have been informed of the purpose and the aims of the research; that you understand the discussion and interview procedures involved and that you are aware of your rights as a research participant as outlined in the ‘Participant Information Leaflet’.

Giving your consent by signing this form confirms that you have read the information leaflet, but does not, in any way, mean that you are bound to participate in the research project. You may decline to take part or withdraw at any time.

It is my guarantee to you, that should you consent to be interviewed, or participate in a group discussion, your interview/discussion will be used by me, and by me alone, and that your name and any other identifiable features will be changed to protect your personal identity.

Participant: I agree to, and understand the terms of participation in this study

Participant_________________________ Date::________________________

Researcher: I agree to, and understand the terms of participation in this study

Researcher_________________________ Date::________________________

Participant Pseudonym:__________________________________________

'If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact
The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office

University of Limerick
Limerick
Tel: (061) 202022
Appendix G

Topic Guide Semi-Structured Interviews

1. Can you tell me what it is like for you to be a working mother?

2. Are there any moments when you feel particularly torn? What makes you feel this way? What do you do about it?

3. Is there someone you know who does ‘working mother’ really well? Someone you might admire?

4. Can you tell me what you think she gets right? What do you admire? And how does her situation compare to yours?

5. Who and/or what did you take into account in deciding how much time to spend in paid work?

6. Do you envisage changes in the future when your children are older? Perhaps when they are in secondary school?

7. What prompted you to participate in this study? Is there anything we haven’t talked about in relation to you being a working mother that you would like to talk about now?

*If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact*

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee  
c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office

University of Limerick  
Limerick  
Tel: (061) 202022
### Participant’s Time Commitment to Paid Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participant’s Description of Work Arrangement</th>
<th>Weekly Hours at Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>8-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ameila</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabine</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>Job Sharing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avril</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Reduced Hours</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Reduced Hours</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisling</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agatha</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>Reduced Hours</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eithne</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brona</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freya</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamsin</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>40+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>45</td>
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### Appendix I: Focus Group Participant’s Childcare Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>No. Children</th>
<th>Full- or Part-Time</th>
<th>Childcare Type</th>
<th>Childcare Arrangements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Husband and Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agatha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Husband and Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Husband and After School Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reduced Hours 5 days</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Parents 1 child. Childminder 2 children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 days</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Parents 2 days Childminder 2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Parents 2 days Childminder 3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder 4 days Husband 1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Neighbour [irregular hours]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Job Share</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avril</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brona</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder own Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisling</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reduced Hours 5 days</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamsin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Childminder’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eithne</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Creche and Family</td>
<td>Crèche and Husband (dependant on husband’s shift pattern)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freya</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>Combination of Minding</td>
<td>Crèche 1 child Au Pair 2 children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J.

Participant Occupational Details

Accountants x 2
Accounts Assistants x 3
Advertising Manager
Bank Official
Civil Servant (CSO)
Company Director
Director of Nursing
General Operator
Engineer
Lecturer
Market Researcher
Midwives x 2
Clinic Nurse Manager
Nurses x 3
Personal Carer
Physiotherapist
Respite Carer
Sales Consultant (Retail)
School Principal
Secretary
Shipping Clerk
Software Manager
Teacher
Travel Consultant