

**WORKING MOTHERS, CHILD CARE AND THE ORGANISATION:
AN ECOSYSTEMIC EXPLORATION**

by

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
	ii
	vii
1	1
2	7
	7
	8
	9
	14
	17
	18
	19
	21
	24
	25
	26
	26
	28
	29
	30
	32
	32
	37
	40

CHAPTER		Page
3	Ecosystemic Epistemology	41
	Introduction	41
	Description of ecosystemic thinking	42
	Description of social constructionist thinking	42
	Foundations of ecosystemic epistemology	43
	Context	45
	Holism	46
	Double description	48
	Recursion	49
	Self-referentiality	52
	Multiple realities	53
	Problem and solution	55
	Conclusion	57
4	The Research Process	59
	Introduction	59
	Positivistic and naturalistic inquiry	60
	The qualitative research design	62
	Natural setting	62
	Process versus outcomes	63
	Inductive data analysis, emergent design and grounded theory	64
	Random and purposive sampling	65
	Descriptive research	65
	Legitimation	66
	The influence of ecosystemic and social constructionist principles	
	naturalistic inquiry	66

CHAPTER		Page
	Focus and design of the present study	67
	Choosing the observer and the observed	69
	Finding the observer and the observed	70
	Interviewing the observer and the observed	71
	Inductive data analysis	71
	Limitations of the study	71
	Conclusion	72
5	Case Illustrations: Perceptions of Three Working Mothers	73
	Introduction	73
	Case illustrations	73
	Relevant background information	73
	Sam and the perfect childcare center	73
	Mpho and the expensive childcare center	75
	Emma and the stimulating childcare center	76
	Presentation of themes and meanings	77
	Women in the work force	77
	Childcare arrangements	86
	Employer-supported childcare programs	90
	Conclusion	95
6	Discussion	96
	Introduction	96
	The emerging design and self-referentiality	96
	Recursive interactions in the unstructured interviews	98
	Presentation and discussion of shared meanings	100
	Meanings around problems	101
	Meanings around motherhood	104

CHAPTER		Page
	Meanings around employment	105
	Meanings around work productivity	107
	Meanings around employee satisfaction	108
	Meanings around the childcare context	110
	Meanings around solutions	112
	Grounded theory	115
	Multiple realities	116
	Alternative family benefits	117
	Recursive interactions	118
	Conclusion	119
7	Conclusion	120
	Introduction	120
	Reflection on the research process	121
	New meanings and perceptions	122
	Recommendations	125
	Conclusion	125
	References	126

SUMMARY

In this study an ecosystemic and social constructionist approach is used to understand the meanings and perceptions held by working mothers in relation to their experiences with the childcare and organisation settings. These meanings are described in terms of the influence of wider social discourses, personal epistemological assumptions, tacit knowledge, past experiences and current contexts. The working mothers, together with the researcher, form a linguistic system in which meanings about motherhood, employer-support and childcare arrangements are co-constructed and shared. The relationships between the working mothers and the researcher are not only observed within a linguistic context, but also within the ecosystemic view of mutual reciprocity, self-referentiality and double description. A qualitative and naturalistic research methodology is followed to describe the emergent design and the grounded theory. Based on the qualitative paradigm, the conclusions drawn at the end of the study are idiographic and reflective.

KEY TERMS

Working mothers; Childcare; Employer-support; On-site childcare programs; Ecosystemic epistemology; Social constructionism; Social Discourses; Naturalistic Inquiry

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be
finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration,
nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet.*

But let us begin.

(J. F. Kennedy)

This dissertation is primarily concerned with finding descriptions and ideas on which to base later preventative studies about meanings, problems and solutions that exist within the lives of working mothers, children and employer systems. These meanings are reviewed within the ecosystemic and social constructionist perspectives. Ecosystemic thinking, which forms the epistemological grounding of this dissertation places emphasis on relationships within particular contexts and considers the meanings regarding the interrelations between working mothers, work situations, childcare systems and their respective families (L'Abate, Ganahl & Hansen, 1986; O'Connor & Lubin, 1984). It emphasises the recursion between actions and meanings as well as the notion that meanings are not uniform but multiple. Since multiple meanings are co-created within a specific context and at a specific time, this dissertation will focus on the meaning systems of three working mothers regarding issues of motherhood, childcare arrangements and employer-support.

In terms of social constructionist thinking, all parts within a system are viewed as acting on one another through a process of dialogue (Hoffman, 1992; Osbeck, 1993; Ratner, 1989). It is within this process that knowledge and meanings about the world are created, maintained and evolved. When specific meanings are upheld by a majority of people then wider social discourses are generated (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen, 1985). Some of the familial, cultural, contextual and historical discourses pertinent to the research focus of this

study, and that inform or guide the choices of human beings will be discussed and related to the issue of working mothers with preschool children.

The dissertation will also consider meanings regarding problems and solutions that exist in the interactions between the working mother, childcare and employer systems. It is assumed that problems and solutions do not arise intrapsychically but rather in a co-created manner through a process of dialogue (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). It is also assumed that mothers' decisions and choices are informed by the meanings they hold regarding specific issues and situations (Bateson, 1972; Bateson, 1979; Gergen, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that while all women work, the term "working mother" will be used in this dissertation to refer to mothers who are employed outside the home context.

The dissertation focuses on the following issues. Firstly, it describes the difficulties working mothers of preschool children face when having to deal with the dual role of being mothers and employees (Tingey, Kiger & Riley, 1996). It deals primarily with their roles as working mothers within a family, work and community system, as well as available childcare arrangements. According to Browne Miller (1990), childcare is a complex issue in that it cannot be separated from the social environment in which it functions. Instead, childcare "exist[s] amidst the tangled interactions of their parents, their families, their communities, the economy or "market", the public sector...and society as a whole" (p. 2). The complexity of the dilemma facing many mothers today is one which deals with the need to stay at home and provide the child with his or her every need, as was done in the past, or to enter the work force because of financial necessities and personal preferences. Since the bond between a mother and a child was accentuated in the past as a vital requirement for successful child rearing (Hojat, 1990), the decision to leave the child with someone else for most part of the day would previously have been unthinkable (Browne Miller, 1990). However, with basic changes occurring in economic and social discourses, such a requirement has abated due to several reasons. Firstly, increasing financial demands have been placed on many households. It appears that only one salary is no longer sufficient to deal with the financial demands facing families today (Goldsmith, 1990). Secondly, an increase in single-parent families has forced many women to earn a living Lemmer, 1989). Thirdly, because of an increase in the social

discourses amongst feminist voices, the need for self-actualisation and the desire to work in order to fulfil personal needs has also provided added work opportunities for many mothers (Hagen, 1973; Maslow, 1968; Roby, 1973; Scarr, 1990).

Secondly, in order to understand this dilemma in terms of the situations it creates for many families, this dissertation examines some past and current American, European and South African literature findings. The findings describe the reasons for increased employment rates amongst women (Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Muscari & Morrone, 1989), the need for high quality preschool childcare (Auerbach, 1988; Kossek, 1991; Louw, 1991), alternative childcare arrangements (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995) and employer-supported programs. These issues are viewed within the context of wider social discourses. Other discourses that will be referred to include those that discourage mothers from entering the employment field (Booth, 1992; Bowlby, 1973a) and those belonging to feminist voices (Hagen, 1973; Scarr, 1990). A preventative measure, which has been co-created between working mothers and employers to aid with the stress and burdens encountered in the work and home context is also discussed in the second chapter. This measure takes into consideration the role of the employer within the larger macro-system by considering his or her position within the organisation as circularly connected with the working mother and the child. (Auerbach, 1990; Ruderman, 1968; Verzaro-O'Brien, LeBlanc & Hennon, 1986). The researcher's assumption is that if employers try to help working mothers with the conflicts they encounter at home and at work, working mothers may, in turn, be of greater benefit to the company and the employer (Browne Miller, 1990). As this takes place, working mothers may begin to enter the home context feeling less pressured, burdened and stressed, and this may lead to an enhancement of relationships with family members (Auerbach, 1988; Browne Miller, 1990; Fernandez, 1986). Furthermore, if high quality childcare is available and chosen, then mothers may feel less guilty when opting to enter the work force (Hagen, 1973; Scarr, 1990).

Finally, these issues are reexamined within the ecosystemic and social constructionist frameworks. Ecosystemic thinking refers to a broader epistemology about human beings and systems, while the social constructionist theory has been chosen to elucidate the process whereby meanings and belief systems are created and generated (Becvar & Becvar, 1988;

Hoffman, 1992). The latter perspective has also been chosen to demonstrate the relationship between actions and meanings. In terms of social constructionist thinking, actions arise and follow from meanings that are held about specific situations and issues. These actions give rise to new meanings in a reciprocal manner, and continue to do so in an endless manner (Bateson, 1972, Bateson, 1979; O'Connor & Lubin, 1984). The ecosystemic and social constructionist perspectives are deemed viable for the dissertation topic because they provide a framework in which the interrelatedness of systems is viewed both within a micro- and macro-level (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Keeney, 1983). It is within these systems that individuals interact with one another by co-creating beliefs and meanings about specific issues. This co-construction of social discourses and belief systems is essential for perceiving, acting and living, particularly since they accentuate the recursive link between actions and meanings (Gergen, 1985).

In order to highlight the above interconnectedness, the researcher will interview three South African working mothers with preschool children. Although the theoretical basis for the dissertation is grounded in recursive interactions and social discourses, the dissertation will not include the voices and perceptions of employers, children, childcare workers, fathers and other family members in a direct manner. Such extensive research would be unfeasible for the limited scope of the dissertation and as such, the focus will be on the perceptions and meanings of working mothers. It is deemed that the mothers' perceptions of the childcare issue will provide some understanding of the discourses inherent in other systems.

A naturalistic research paradigm using case studies will then be followed in terms of the research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981). The working mothers will be approached telephonically at first, and if they agree to converse with the researcher, an initial meeting will be arranged. The interviews will take the form of a conversation between the mothers and the researcher. According to Braten (cited in Goolishian & Anderson, 1987), such a dialogical approach is preferred above the monological conversation of standardised questionnaires and attitude scales. By conversing with the working mother in a dialogical, unstructured and co-evolutionary manner, the researcher is then able to join as another member in the mother's particular system (Hoffman, 1990;

Osbeck, 1993; Owen, 1992). The interviews will be recorded for practical reasons and the sources of data will include recordings, brief notes, observations and nonverbal cues about the mother and her context. If other family or work members come into the room during the interviewing process, then they too will be taken into account. The recordings will be transcribed and a process of inductive analysis will follow (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Ultimately, it is aimed to interpret the interviews within the qualitative, ecosystemic and social constructionist approaches so that meanings and belief systems held by the working mothers and the researcher are discussed.

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Firstly, Chapter 2 provides a brief historical account of the increased rate at which women have entered the work force, particularly in North America and Europe. Issues that working mothers experience in terms of childcare services are provided, followed by a discussion of childcare arrangements (Browne Miller, 1990; Fernandez, 1986). One such childcare arrangement, namely employersupport, will be discussed extensively in terms of its definition, its role, and its advantages and disadvantages. The issue of childcare is then considered by discussing high quality childcare in terms of the child's developmental needs (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995). This section considers the important psychological, cognitive, social, physical and emotional factors that form part of his or her personal development. This is then followed by a discussion of two sets of social discourses namely, one that dissuades mothers from entering the work force (Bowlby, 1973b; Louw, 1991; Repetti & Wood, 1997), and the other that advocates the entry of mothers into the work force (Booth, 1992; Goldsmith, 1990). The chapter concludes with a brief description of the South African historical context in terms of the issues mentioned above.

In Chapter 3 the ecosystemic epistemology and social constructionist theory is discussed as a basis for the interviews that will be conducted. Emphasis is placed on the process of recursive relationships and the co-creation of meanings amongst working mothers, children, employers, families and the researcher through the processes of language (Cecchin, 1992; Hoffman, 1992; Gergen, 1985).

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology that has been chosen for the dissertation. This includes a discussion of qualitative and naturalistic concepts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some characteristics of this type of inquiry are also discussed, as are their relationships to the ecosystemic and social constructionist approach. The focus of the study and the research process concludes the chapter.

In Chapter 5 the perceptions and meanings held by the three women are given in verbatim form. This allows the reader to punctuate the conversations self-referentially and to infer personal distinctions and meanings (Atkinson & Heath, 1987). Chapter 6 presents the researcher's meta-perspective of the meanings elicited in the conversations with the working mothers. In this chapter, the key themes, the consensual meanings, the multiple realities and the emerging ideas that arose in the interviews are discussed according to the researcher's own perceptions and distinctions (Keeney, 1983). Further hypotheses that were confirmed and/or altered regarding the issue are also discussed.

The above discussions will then be used in the formulation of the grounded theory, which is discussed in Chapter 7. Here a synthesis of the dissertation in its entirety is given by highlighting the main issues that arose in the literature, theory and research chapters.

CHAPTER 2

**WORKING MOTHERS, CHILDCARE AND
EMPLOYER-SUPPORT**

James James

Morrison Morrison

Weatherby George Dupree

Took great

Care of his Mother

Though he was only three.

James James

Said to his mother

'Mother,' he said, said he;

'You must never go down to the end of the town, if you don't go down with me.'

(A. A. Milne)

Introduction

As discussed in the preceding chapter, this dissertation is concerned with describing social and personal discourses or meanings about the working mother, childcare and employer-support issue from an ecosystemic and social constructionist perspective. This chapter will discuss issues pertinent to working mothers, childcare and employer-supported contexts as well as to the problems, solutions, benefits, disadvantages and experiences that exist within each subsystem and context. Wider social discourses that influence the creation and maintenance of specific views and meanings are provided and also discussed within the South African context. Before discussing these issues theoretically, however, it is first necessary to describe the term social discourse, as well as its implication for this dissertation.

Social Discourses and Meanings

Lax (1992) describes discourse as a process of conversation that takes place amongst individuals, groups, communities and larger networks regarding specific issues and subjects. Since “we continually live in discourse” (Lax, 1992, p. 74), conversing with others inevitably creates, maintains and evolves specific meanings and beliefs inherent in our daily experiences. These discourses do not, however, mirror reality but rather describe interactions between people within certain contexts and during specific moments in time. Discoursing with others is then assumed to form part of a social process. McNamee (1992) describes discourses as forms of social conversation taking place between individuals or systems (in mutual interaction with each other) such that beliefs and meaning systems are generated. Such differing discourses are informed by various subjects namely history, economics, politics, gender, religion, psychology and others. Within these various discourses particular forms of experience are generated, upheld or discarded. These social discourses provide a framework for lived experience that may occur at different moments and in different contexts (Epston, White, & Murray, 1992; Sluzki, 1992).

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1988), social discourses are created primarily because human systems are seen as “sociocultural systems organised according to role and structure, and as characterised by stability, hierarchy, power, and control” (p. 375). Human systems thus exist only in the “domain of meaning or intersubjective linguistic reality” (p. 377), which implies that systems gain meaning by being in conversation with one another. As such, shared ecologies of meanings are co-constructed amongst people so that an intersubjectively, co-constructed and negotiated reality is created to give people’s lives personal meaning. Such a linguistic domain involves interactions in language, particularly as people continuously engage in dialogue and conversation with each other (Hoffman, 1990; Hoffman, 1992; Osbeck, 1993). Words become part of communication and, in turn, lead to a co-created sense of meaning and understanding. Such generated meaning and understanding becomes primary as people live, work and think with one another (Gergen, 1985). This process of constructing meaning systems through social discourse is termed social constructionism and is concerned with understanding the processes and ways by which people

“come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266).

It is by means of these assumptions that the dissertation will focus on wider social discourses regarding the roles of working mothers, the need for high quality childcare and the growing alternative to childcare arrangements, namely employer-supported programs. The focus will not only pertain to present day discourses but also to the meanings that have naturally evolved out of historical and societal changes (Gergen, 1985).

Women in the Work Force: A Brief Historical Review

According to Fernandez (1986), women have always played an important role in the economy. A review of the types of work women have performed in the past show that they have been able to perform far more than servile tasks suited for the home. For example, before the industrial revolution, which took place in the 19th century, middle class women were employed to carry out laborious and fatiguing tasks similar to those performed by men. This was particularly true in the agricultural field where little differentiation existed between a man and a woman's work (Fernandez, 1986; Roberts, 1992). According to Matthaei (cited in Lemmer, 1989), women also worked in the family unit by caring for family members and the household, by making clothes and by helping the husband in the agricultural field for the production of food.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the inherent social and psychological changes during this period, more women and children began to enter the industrial field and became exposed to longer working hours, more work, lower wages and limited time at home (Roberts, 1992). A decline in agricultural labour took place as female participation rates in textile factories increased (More, 1989). According to Fernandez (1986),

women and children as young as age 6 were forced to work fourteen-hour days, seven days a week in factories, sweatshops and mines, for less than subsistence wages. Heating, lighting and ventilation were inadequate, if not totally lacking. Anyone who missed a day's work for illness or any other reason was automatically fired. (p. 6)

With the hardships experienced by women in the labour force during this period, the child and the systems responsible for his or her care were not considered. Little, if any, emphasis was given at this stage to the effect working mothers had on their children's emotional, cognitive and physical development, principally because wider social discourses still regarded children as small adults. A need for adequate childcare services was therefore not endorsed (Fernandez, 1986). Furthermore, since the modern notion of childhood and motherhood had not developed, the community system did not deem the establishment of such services significant. As a result, children were taken out of the home and forced into the work environment. According to Roberts (1992), children began working as "swineherds, birdscarers, gleaners, maids-of-all-work, crossing-sweepers, prostitutes and casual drudges in Europe" (p. 689). Roberts explains that due to the financial crisis at the time, many parents were forced to send their children to work in order to earn some form of income for the family. Children who were unprotected by their families were subjected to harsh conditions, unreasonable hours and an unsatisfactory nature of work. With such conditions the structure of the family and its natural process of caring for children was endangered (Roberts, 1992). It was only in 1850, with the creation of new social discourses, that laws were implemented to protect women and children in mines and factories.

At this point, changes within socio-economic and political discourses took place regarding meanings about childhood and motherhood. Negotiated understandings amongst the middle class arose as more people started to pay attention to the previously ignored needs of children (Fernandez, 1986). New ways of understanding the world were thus set in motion amongst the discourses of society and community members. Soon the perception that men should be employed and be sole supporters of the family became the standard (Emsley, Marwick, Purdue & Aldgate, 1990). This co-creation of new belief systems by members in a particular society reinforced the idea that mothers were to stay at home to nurture, feed and care for their husbands and children. Furthermore, it was believed that in doing this mothers would be contributing to the development of their children, not only physically but psychologically too (Fernandez, 1986). For those women who followed the age-old adage that "a woman's place is in the home", staying at home to bring up psychologically well balanced children became essential (Fernandez, 1986; Hewison & Dowswell, 1994).

With the beginning of World War II in 1939 a complete change in previously held beliefs came to pass (Gergen, 1985; Young & Jackson, 1973). New co-created belief systems emerged during this period as many women were asked to enter the work force because of increased male conscription into the armed forces. In order to help the economy, the government began hiring female workers to fill empty work positions (Emsley et al., 1990; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). According to Lewenhak (cited in Lemmer, 1989), women who had previously stayed at home to care for the family now began entering into the labour force to perform work positions that were previously restricted to men. Childcare discourses were also created during this time with the establishment of preschool education programs (Young & Jackson, 1973). According to these authors, "the day care sector expanded rapidly during the war, but again receded as the national emergency subsided" (Young & Jackson, 1973, p. 3). Once the war was over and the men began returning home, women were then encouraged to return to the family to continue working in the household (Emsley et al., 1990; Fernandez, 1986).

New perceptions of women in the workforce had, however, already been established. With the work being done by women, a stronger sense of independence and selfworth began to grow amongst many of them. Together with such feelings came the experience of being accustomed to higher income levels, higher standards of living and a second salary. These experiences naturally resulted in an increase in the number of working mothers (Greenstein, 1995; Hong & White-Means, 1993; Young & Jackson, 1973). In particular, an increase of mothers with preschool children in the work force became noticeable (Auerbach, 1988; Fernandez, 1986; Hewison & Dowswell, 1994; Hong & White-Means, 1993; Kossek, 1991; Levitan & Alderman, 1975).

This surge was not taken lightly as public sentiment began to run strongly against working mothers (Zigler & Gordon, 1982). Beliefs such as these were also based on social discourses that had developed during the early years of the 20th Century. For example, Freud and Spock's theories on the development of childhood personality became widely discoursed amongst psychologists, sociologists and educators. Beliefs around the importance of the social environment (child's parents) and the first three to five years of life as foundations for healthy personality development were upheld by many people (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen,

1989). According to Freud's oral stage, it was believed that the mother was a crucial figure in the baby's development. This was particularly true during the process of feeding when the child was being weaned. Substitute objects for the mother's breast would not provide the same amount of satisfaction to the child. Not having the mother around could thus lead to serious psychological problems at a later stage (Freud, 1953; 1961). Other stages that required the involvement of parents included the anal stage (toilet training), the phallic stage (the development of the superego) and the latent stage. According to Freud (1953; 1961), the first six years were vital for the formation of a child's personality. Important emphasis was thus placed on how parents handled the child's psychosexual problems, since their behaviour would determine whether the child would grow up to be normal or not (Meyer et al., 1989). The dominant social discourse was based on the belief that what happened in childhood would later affect one's future. Perhaps a reason why many mothers continued to enter the work force in spite of the above dangers was because Freud was not able to provide clear guidelines as to how parents should educate their children during the preschool years. Ways in which parents should educate their children remained vague and entirely up to the parents' discretion. It must be mentioned that not all women at the time were reading Freud, Spock and other developmental theorists' literary works. Rather, a wider social climate advocating these principles informed the mother through other mediums, including that of magazines, radio programs, and informal talk with other women.

Other psychological discourses that placed importance on the role of the parents in the development of the child's personality included those created in language by theorists such as Jung, Adler, Horney, Sullivan and Erikson (Meyer et al., 1989). Sullivan (1956), for example, believed in the personifications of the "good" and the "bad" mother. The "good mother" was someone who fed, fondled and cared for the child. The "bad" mother was someone who exhibited a sense of anxiety and anger. A possible social discourse would then rest on the belief that feelings of tension and pressure experienced at work would be transmitted to the child in a negative form, thus affecting his or her behaviour in later years (Sullivan, 1956)

Another theorist who believed in the importance of early interpersonal relationships for the development of personality was Erik Erikson, who focused primarily on the encounter between the individual and the social world, as well as the relationships with parents and other

people (Crain, 1992; Erikson, 1964; Maier, 1969). His definition of preschool developmental stages saw the mother as an important influence in the child's growth. For example, in the first stage (basic trust versus mistrust), the baby was seen as needing to encounter a consistency in the actions of the mother, who nourished, cleaned and eased the child when cold, wet or in pain and physical discomfort (Erikson, 1964). A sense of trust would then be created as the child saw the parent in a reliable and dependable way (Crain, 1992). By gaining a sense of trust the child would be able to separate easily from the parent without feeling anxious or nervous (Erikson, 1964). The parent's role was also seen as important during the second stage (autonomy versus shame and doubt). Here the parent would play a vital role in helping the child exercise autonomy by dealing with his or her failures in a sensitive manner so that the growth of self-confidence could take place (Meyer & Van Ede, 1991). For Erikson, a good balance during these stages would be instrumental in the avoidance of future developmental problems (Erikson, 1964; Maier, 1969).

Despite these social discourses many women still decided to venture forth and choose the work place above the home context. Because government involvement did not provide high quality childcare services, these women were forced to leave their children in the care of private centers, baby-sitters or relatives (Zigler & Gordon, 1982). Only in the 1960s did major changes begin to occur in the field of childcare arrangements, particularly in the United States and Europe. When larger social discourses were modified to create the belief that compensatory education for children was essential, then only were childcare services established to break the "poverty cycle through early intervention in the child's life" (Young & Jackson, 1973, p. 3). With the establishment of better childcare programs and the creation of more work opportunities, entering into the work force became more accessible to mothers with preschool and school-aged children.

For Gergen (1985), "the degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes" (p. 268). Such vicissitudes include process of communication, negotiation, discussion and criticism or conflict. In other words, if society had not created new beliefs and perceptions about motherhood and childcare after the end of World War II, mothers might still today have been at home with the children.

However, new ways of describing and explaining the world led to new meanings regarding these issues. It was in this way that the women's movement began to gain momentum during the 50s, 60s and 70s in the United States and in Europe (Goff, Mount & Jamison, 1990). Within these larger discourses, belief systems began to place emphasis on the need to work, the right to seek fulfillment or self-actualisation, and the responsibility of day care as a vital service to women and children regardless of their economic status. These changes in the belief systems of the people allowed mothers to acquire a stronger freedom to choose between the home and the work force (Zigler & Gordon, 1982). Today, in the late 1990s, the freedom to enter the work force continues to exist as new co-constructions of belief systems are created, evolved and modified amongst people through the process of language.

Reasons for Entering the Work Force

The decision regarding work force participation by a woman is rarely a self-contained and autonomous process. Such a decision is based on prevailing socio-economic and historical discourses regarding work participation and childcare issues, and includes her personal circumstances, her family, her community, and her perceptions about the world.

Two prevailing social discourses underlying women's choices to enter the work force are based on two broad sets of needs, namely emotional and practical ones (Goff et al., 1990; Young & Jackson, 1973). The former refers to the increased independence women experience when employed. According to Maslow (1968), people want to achieve a certain amount of success by realising their true potential. Such success does not arise through luck alone but is based on the actualisation of basic needs, values, goals and the influence of the environment. Self-actualisation is thus a process of making full use of one's abilities, talents and potential, and thus overcoming the restrictions of the environment by coping with the many challenges of life (Maslow, 1968; 1970). According to Marshall and Paulin (cited in Lemmer, 1989), it is this strong sense of independence, personal satisfaction and self-actualisation that has been an overriding reason for many women choosing to enter the work force. The second set of needs includes practical and financial necessities. Due to the many economic and social changes facing society over the last few years, many women have had to enter the work force in order

to contribute more towards the family income. This has been the case for many unmarried, divorced, single and widowed women, who have found entering the work force a fundamental need (Goff et al., 1990; Goldsmith, 1990; Scarr, 1990).

Other reasons why women have entered the work force have included the following. Firstly, many families have felt the need for a *higher standard of living* (Hewison & Dowswell, 1994). Mothers, who do not have to work but who want their families to have the things other children and families have, may decide to enter the work force. This desire is created out of consensual beliefs advocating financial comfort and the ability to acquire better consumer goods (Fernandez, 1986; Gergen, 1985; Hewison & Dowswell, 1994). Secondly, women have begun to enter the work force because of the many changes occurring in *family composition and economic status* (Low & Spindler, 1968). The belief that the family has to consist of a mother and a father is no longer a universal truth. This has occurred because of the increasing rates of divorce, separation and single parenthood that have led to the co-creation of other belief systems, which view this as natural and acceptable (Low & Spindler, 1968; Muscari & Morrone, 1989, Reed, 1970). Thirdly, the continuous rise in *educational levels*, specifically within the more advantaged communities, has contributed to many women taking advantage of their abilities or strengths and utilising them in the work force (Maslow, 1968; 1970; Ruderman, 1968). The current consensual belief is that acquiring an education is a privilege and, as such, women should pursue careers at a tertiary level in order to use these in the work environment (Ruderman, 1968). This rise in educational and work-related fields has also gone hand in hand with the feminist movement, which has irrevocably changed belief systems. Discourses within the feminist movement have accentuated the role of the woman as an individual with choices of her own (Hagen, 1973; Scarr, 1990).

A fourth reason involves *early and delayed child bearing*. In the past the consensual belief was that mothers who had children at an early age should occupy their time with something else besides home-related tasks when the child entered secondary school (Ruderman, 1968). These beliefs were further supported by the innovations taking place in the technology field with the production of washing machines, vacuum cleaners and other household modifications. Such advancements allowed women to avoid spending excessive time on household chores by occupying themselves with other activities (Fernandez, 1986).

Also, with improved health standards and decreases in heavy, time-consuming work, women found themselves younger, healthier and far less tied to the home environment (Ruderman, 1968). They also began to use the surplus amount of time on their hands and unused mental energy to enter work-related fields.

Today, the situation is somewhat different as many women are choosing to delay childbearing into their late 20s and early 30s (Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Muscari & Morrone, 1989). Such discourses have been created parallel to innovative and changing medical techniques that have increased one's standard of health (Muscari & Morrone, 1989). By delaying childbirth, many women will have accumulated a considerable amount of work experience and commitment to the idea of having a career and a salary before the arrival of the children. For many women, returning to work to pursue personal and financial needs is regarded as a necessity (Muscari & Morrone, 1989). A fifth reason for female participation in the work place involves the creation of more *part-time work* (Heck, 1992; Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Seyler, Monroe & Garand, 1995). This is particularly beneficial for mothers who wish to rear their children at home for some part of the day and still continue to earn a salary while gaining independence and self-worth (Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Maslow, 1970).

Although the above discourses have been instrumental for many mothers in their decisions to work, an important discourse that has evolved conjointly with the above beliefs involves the role of the child. Since mother and child cannot be separated into isolated parts, it becomes essential to understand the increased need for childcare services in conjunction with the increase in female work participation rates (Booth, 1992; Kossek, 1991). One social discourse which also impacts on the discussion of this dissertation, but which is too vast to be included in its limited scope, involves the discussion of quality versus quantity time issues in the relationship between mother and child. Such a discourse is relevant for future discussion and could create further valuable research and debate amongst interested persons.

Childcare Arrangements

According to Levitan and Alderman (1975), various childcare arrangements have been implemented in order to provide a wider variety of choices for working families. Such childcare arrangements have arisen out of the social discourses presented by parents, psychologists and childcare specialists regarding the issue of appropriate childcare. By languaging their concerns, beliefs and needs with each other, appropriate childcare services have been created and developed for the fulfillment of such needs.

In the past it was acceptable for family members and neighbourhood friends to care for the children. However, when families became more geographically mobile and moved away in search of better living conditions, many parents were forced to seek alternative childcare services. These included the hiring of baby-sitters, housekeepers, domestic workers and childcare services (Levitan & Alderman, 1975). Today, parents are faced with numerous options in childcare services ranging from informal systems (family members, relatives, baby-sitters, day mothers, housekeepers and neighbours) to more formal childcare centers (nursery schools, crèches, kindergartens and preschool facilities) (Bone, 1977; Kamerman, 1986; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). Parents' choices for such services are based on the center's location, cost, number of hours open, curriculum, working staff, physical space and family-school relations (Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Low & Spindler, 1968; Thomas, 1986).

Although services may vary in nature, size and structure, the following are available in most Westernised countries. *Full-time or part-time programs*, which exist outside the home and, which include children grouped according to different ages. These children are cared for in non-residential areas for all or part of the day. Some centers are nonprofit (sponsored and independent) while others are profit based (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; Muscari & Morrone, 1989). *Nursery schools* with children between the ages of 3 to 5 years of age. Nursery schools are usually constructed outside the home setting and offer part-time help. The aim of a nursery school is to establish a program that provides developmental enrichment for children, creative play and social skill development (Bone, 1977; Doherty-Derkowski, 1995). *Kindergartens* that provide care outside the home by preparing 5-year olds for entry into the formal school setting (Kamerman, 1989; Whitebook, 1984). *Specialized part-time programs*

that care for children attending school and with no means of care during after-hours (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995). *Family day care* which exists in a caregiver's home with a small group of children, including the caregiver's own children. *Home-based childcare* which is provided by a non-relative (nanny or housekeeper) who comes into the family home (Bone, 1977; Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; Muscari & Morrone, 1989). *Relative care*, which exists inside the child or relative's home and is usually provided by a family member, and finally, *non-supplemental care* which involves care on an irregular basis (Muscari & Morrone, 1989; Roby, 1973).

Although all arrangements have care and supervision as a common thread, most of them maintain their own particular philosophy and approach to the work they do with children. Some involve an element of assisting children with basic needs such as eating, dressing and physical supervision, while others include programs with a greater awareness on education, personal and social skill development (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995). The former is termed custodial and the latter is termed educational. These latter programs arise from the consensual belief that high quality childcare is essential for all preschool children. This will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter.

Working Women and Childcare Issues

Despite the development of high quality childcare facilities, the moral debate concerning the advantages and disadvantages of entering the work force still continues to exist (Hewison & Dowswell, 1994). This debate focuses on what situation is most suitable for the child's cognitive, psychological, emotional, and social development as well as what context will benefit the child the most in the satisfaction of such developmental needs (Belsky, 1989; Greenstein, 1995). Although research on this issue has been carried out, it continues to remain unresolved and contentious (Auerbach, 1988; Bowlby, 1973a; Goldsmith, 1990; Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Roby, 1973; Scarr, 1990; Smith & Swain, 1988). In fact, different studies have brought to light issues supportive of both sides. One discourse rests on the belief that a negative situation may evolve for the child if the mother goes to work. Here, negative developmental consequences may befall the child if the mother is not playing an active and consistent role in the child's life in terms of his or her developmental needs (Hofferth, 1992). This is particularly true when wider social discourses place emphasis on the mother's role in

her child's cognitive, emotional, physical and social development. The opposing view, however, deals with the belief that the mother may be sacrificing her personal or financial needs by staying at home with the child (Roby, 1973; Scarr, 1990). Here it is questioned whether the boredom and frustration the mother faces at home will contribute negatively towards the relationship with her child (Auerbach, 1988; Goldsmith, 1990; Greenstein, 1995; Heck, 1992).

These discourses have been created through processes of language amongst psychologists, sociologists, educators, feminists, families and the broader community. They have evolved in conjunction with the many changes taking place in history and societal structures and play an important role in the decisions of working mothers and family members. These two opposing socially constructed viewpoints will be discussed next.

Criticism towards Working Mothers

Criticism against working mothers outside the home context has arisen out of the fear that continuous daily separation between the mother and the child can lead to adverse effects in the preschool child's emotional security and development (Greenstein, 1995; Kendall, 1989; Louw, 1991). For years it has been assumed that mothers who work will rear children with psychological and intellectual deficits (Greenstein, 1995; Hong & White-Means, 1993; Levitan & Alderman, 1975). Several reasons for claiming that 'harmful' effects may occur are usually based on the belief that the family is a sacred abode and should not be tampered with (Nelson & Krashinsky, 1973). Since the family is seen as a social system that determines the development of the child's personality, growing up in it becomes essential (Freud, 1953; Louw, 1991). It is also assumed that the family is the only social system capable of developing the child's personality. For this reason efforts should be made to keep it protected and intact (Auerbach, 1988).

Together with this idealised belief comes the view that the mother is the only stable base in the child's development. It is therefore unacceptable that there be other people who will provide for the child emotionally, cognitively and physically (Belsky, 1989; Bowlby, 1973a). Such social discourses have been based on the beliefs of certain theorists, particularly

Bowlby, who advocates the need for attachment between mother and child. According to Bowman (1992), the most prominent rationale for mothers staying at home during the first six years of the child's life is based on Bowlby's attachment theory. This involves the belief that emotional and social skills begin with one of the most intense relationships the child will ever experience in his or her life. This is the relationship with the mother which characterises a significant bond or attachment (Bowlby, 1973a). As such, the attachment or the emotional tie between mother and infant should not be endangered. It is through positive attachment that the mother will be contributing to her child's development by allowing him or her to gain a sense of the world as a predictable and secure place. It aids the child to develop his or her own sense of self either alone or in relation with others and to be more loving and responsive (Belsky, 1989; Smith & Swain, 1988).

The concern is then that childcare outside of the home may hinder the creation of positive attachments (Hojat, 1990; Zigler & Gordon, 1982). It is assumed that mothers at home are able to provide the child with love, care, interpersonal enjoyment, attention, time and stimulation (through play) (Louw, 1991). Zigler and Gordon (1982) state that if the child has prolonged daily separations from his or her parents, and if various adults are responsible for their care, then the attachment process may be impaired. Attachments will be less secure and less effective in bringing about feelings of ease, protection, security and the development of a sound sense of self. According to Bowlby (1973b), children who appear disturbed or anxious are children who have either never had any type of figure with whom they could identify, or have experienced a large amount of repeated and prolonged separations.

A further reason against mothers' work participation lies in the belief that many mothers are not immune to the effects of daily stress at work and will thus carry these over onto the relationships with their children (Tingey et al., 1996). According to various researchers in Repetti and Wood's (1997) article concerning the effect of daily stress, many mothers who are exposed to chronic stress in the work and home front, may experience more dysfunctional families or parent-child dyads. If the mothers' needs and interests are not satisfied, if expectations are not met, if the work is unsatisfying, and if relationships with employees and employers are unsatisfactory, then mothers may experience considerable work stress (Louw, 1991; Tingey et al., 1996). The assumption is then that this kind of stress may

not be conducive to the well-being of mothers or children when both meet at home at the end of the day. According to Repetti and Wood (1997), mothers may withdraw more on days when stress is the greatest in order to rest and recover from the difficulties encountered at work. Bonding with the child, dealing with his or her immense energy and caring for the child's emotional needs may be tiresome and arduous tasks to perform. Furthermore, mothers may not always have the time and energy to deal with their children when faced with household chores, obligations to the husband or extra work from the work place (Tingey et al., 1996).

A final postulate against childcare outside the home involves the notion of multiple mothering (Yarrow, 1962). A general definition of multiple mothering is the performance of maternal functions by a number of different people. Through multiple mothering the child is exposed to various interactions with various caregivers. In these relationships there are different techniques and different responses presented to the child by the different mother figures. It is possible that inconsistent behaviour by the caregiver will be experienced by the child as he or she is recognised, rewarded and punished in different ways (Yarrow, 1962).

Such beliefs have, however, been challenged by other social discourses. These discourses relate to the voices of the feminist movement, which argue against the belief that mothers should stay at home with their preschool children.

The Feminist Approach

According to Ratner (1989), "the feminist demand for women to feel and act more assertively is nothing less than a demand for women to take on new social roles" (p. 212). The creation of these new social roles has also created new social discourses regarding work and childcare issues. For example, the women's liberation movement argues that women with young children should be free to choose between participation in the work force, or continuation in the family context (Levitan & Alderman, 1975). However, because of the many changes in economic and demographic fields, such a choice is no longer feasible for many women (Goff et al., 1990). According to Goldsmith (1990), "many mothers have to work to support their families. Providing financially for children is a form of caring" (p. 518).

As such, financial obligations are forcing many women to enter the work force in order to contribute financially to the household. With these economic and demographic changes, the feminist movement has turned towards society as being responsible for providing alternative childcare arrangements (Goldsmith, 1995; Jackson, 1973). By helping working women, the woman's liberation movement strengthens the belief that women have a basic right to develop and use their capacities, not only as homemakers, but also as contributors to society (Provence, Naylor & Patterson, 1977). It is then up to social services to make it possible for women to gain a sense of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968; 1970). It is also believed that every individual has the basic human right to work or study. If this is the case, then women may develop their skills, increase their financial situation and develop their status both within and outside the family context (Roby, 1973).

The crux, according to Hagen (1973), for the women's liberation movement is the idea that mothers no longer need to be confined to the home and to their children. Just as children need to develop within a social setting, so too do mothers need work and outside contacts. Furthermore, because traditional motherhood is seen by some as stifling and rigid, the obvious result is to find a more stimulating and educational environment for women and their children (Scarr, 1990). Ultimately, the right of the mother to work outside the home is seen to be as important as the right of the father to do the same (Goldsmith, 1990; Hagen, 1973). According to Scarr (1990), positive benefits can also arise for the family if the mother works.

No one seems to consider the many positive effects of mothers' employment on the family. Working mothers contribute significantly to family income, whose earnings keep many families out of poverty...workplaces [also] afford women (and men) adult companionship, rewards for good work, some financial independence, and a paycheck that says they are real adults in this society...Finally, working mothers are also role models of competent women for both their sons and daughters. (pp. 508-509)

Another point of discussion involves the "obligatory" relationship between mother and child. According to Scarr (1990) and Booth (1992), the development of a trusting relationship between a caregiver and child is not disputed. What is disputed is the view that the loving and attentive caregiver must exclusively be the mother. As Scarr (1990) has stated "we disagree

that the loving, attentive caregiver must be mother 24 hours per day. What about father? Nanny? That wonderful warm day care teacher?" (p. 507). Other relationships can thus be as valuable, supporting and nurturing as the one between mother and child. According to Smith and Swain (1988), various reviewers have shown that children in childcare services do not necessarily have stronger links with their caregivers as compared to their parents. Instead, many children still go to their familial members (mothers or fathers) for comfort, rather than to other people in the childcare center. According to MacDonald (cited in Harris & Liebert, 1992), children who have experienced childcare are attached to their mothers in much the same way as those who are reared at home. This questions Bowlby's theory, which states that separation during the child's first three years will contribute to detachment between mother, child and significant others. According to feminist authors, the child will always retain the bond with the mother and what he or she receives in childcare services is simply advanced communication and social skills (Goldsmith, 1990; Scarr, 1990). If this is true, then mothers may find it easier to enter the work force without fearing that they may damage the bond with their children.

Scarr (1990) also argues that certain people do not take important factors into account such as the family's financial circumstances, the parents' mental health, and the need for social contact between children. To bring up children in poorly facilitated environments is a disadvantage and a drawback to the child. Placing children in proper childcare services may be more beneficial than keeping them in the home environment where physical needs are met but little is done in terms of cognitive, emotional and social development (Greenstein, 1995; Goldsmith, 1990). A further consideration is that mothers may also be happier if they are employed. Staying at home and not fulfilling their needs and interests may be like home confinement while the ability to self-actualise, particularly in the Western world, is not made possible (Goldsmith, 1990; Scarr, 1990). It is further believed that a mother's participation in the labour force may serve in the enhancement of self-esteem, mental health, status and resources (Boase, 1996; Tingey et al., 1996). The feminist assumption is that if the mother is satisfied with her work, then she will have a positive effect on her child's development and individual abilities. If a mother's state of mind is able to influence her child, and if she is happy at work, then it is probable that the child will be content and satisfied (Louw, 1991).

Despite the differing discourses and beliefs, however, balancing family life and work requirements remains a difficult task to accomplish for some mothers. Feelings of guilt, tension and dissatisfaction in juggling multiple roles can occur amongst some working mothers and their respective families (Tingey et al., 1996). According to Tingey et al., one body of research views working mothers as principally responsible for domestic labour. As such, fulfilling this responsibility together with work requirements can lead to a sense of "role overload and an inability to balance obligations at home and at work" (p. 184). Not only do some mothers face these multiple roles but they also face emotional difficulties, including feelings of guilt for not providing for their children during the day (Hart, 1997). In this way work-family conflicts, role overload, pressure and stress, and a decrease in work productivity levels are experienced (Seyler et al., 1995; Tingey et al., 1996).

One way in which this balance can be achieved and in which prevention of problems can occur for mothers who wish to work is through the creation of appropriate childcare arrangements. Here a social effort is made by society to meet the demands and needs of parents and childcare specialists by creating specific childcare arrangements that suit parents' needs in terms of their marital status, their level of education, and their occupations (Bone, 1977; Kossek, 1991; Young & Krashinsky, 1973). One solution that is currently being created by the community to act as a preventive measure for the difficulties encountered by working mothers and children involves a solution provided by the work place itself. Such a measure comes in the form of employer-supported childcare programs which not only benefit the mother who needs to decide on appropriate childcare, but also the employer and the family as a whole (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Browne Miller, 1990; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988; Phillips, 1989).

Employer-supported Childcare

According to the Governor's Advisory Committee in the United States, employer-supported childcare refers to a situation in which "an employer, group of employers or a labour union takes some initiative in meeting employees' childcare needs and bears some or all of the cost" (Auerbach, 1988, p. 4). It is a type of childcare that recognises and attends to the dual obligations of most working mothers, while improving labour force opportunities that

increase efficiency and productivity in the work place (Arnett, 1989; Phillips, 1989). According to Galinsky (1991), corporations are able to help employees deal with the stress of work and home by helping them with time and cost issues. Employer-supported childcare also helps employees find high quality childcare services and helps them when children are ill, on holiday or at after-school (Galinsky, 1991; Kendall, 1989). Finally, employer-supported childcare involves initiatives that stimulate the development of childcare and parent support policies (Browne Miller, 1990). By keeping in mind that the problems parents face in the work place may affect the company's goals, employers are carefully creating programs that deal with the needs of working parents such that high profits and capital productivity are maintained (LaVorgna, 1986).

A Brief Review of Employer-supported Programs

During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, organisations did not place substantial emphasis on childcare issues simply because men formed the bulk of employee numbers (Arnett, 1989). Since many women were not involved in business, employers did not deem it necessary to consider the childcare issue as serious business compensations. According to Kamerman (cited in Seyler et al., 1995), business and industry were slow to adapt to the changes occurring in the labour force because many organisations lacked a substantial amount of women employees. Social discourses affirming the belief that women were responsible for caring for the children further contributed to this situation. Even when women began to enter the work place, their power to influence employers to attain substantial family benefits was not radical enough to bring about more changes (Goff et al., 1990; Kossek, 1990). According to Fernandez (1986), the wider social perceptions that women were not permanent and serious members of the work force created a situation in which company-supported childcare remained limited and unknown.

Today, however, the situation is somewhat different. Changes in wider social discourses have occurred because of the increasing number of women in the work force and a stronger commitment to careers and employment. Furthermore, the fact that many of them lead stressful and burdened lives, and the notion that children are being disadvantaged by maternal employment have also evolved previously held meanings and beliefs (Adolf & Rose,

1988, Greenstein, 1995). New initiatives and policies regarding family responsibilities and needs have thus been introduced by many organisations and employers into the work context. In this climate of evolution many corporations, particularly those in the United States and Europe, have reformulated and evolved their perceptions and programs to fit the changes taking place in society.

Reasons for Employer-supported Childcare

Employers are beginning to recognise that working mothers face increased pressure and stress during the preschool years of the child's life (Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). This is primarily due to the fact that preschool children are so dependent on parents and caregivers for their survival and because a public school system does not exist for children of this age (Browne Miller, 1990; Lindon & Lindon, 1993). Mothers then have to find alternative day care arrangements for their children - some of which are not always satisfactory or adequate. Problems may include inadequate training of caregivers, poor and limited resources, lack of adequate funding, and pressure in fulfilling home and work responsibilities (Greenman & Fuqua, 1984; Young & Jackson, 1973).

Another reason rests on the needs of the female employee who has to manage numerous tasks both at home and at work (Tingey et al., 1996). To help the mother deal with these responsibilities, many companies have decided to implement family benefits without incurring major cost penalties for the company itself. By implementing family benefits, companies aim to reap the benefits of greater productivity and worker morale, increased work performance, and reductions in absenteeism and tardiness levels (Goff et al., 1990; LaVorgna, 1986; Seyler et al., 1995).

Types of Employer-supported Childcare

There are two types of care-giving systems within the organisation's program. These consist of "individual and small group care" which are home-based and "group care" services which are home or center-based (Verzaro-O'Brien et al., 1986, p. 42). Non-profit organisations, government policies or individuals usually sponsor such programs (Greenman

& Fuqua, 1984). According to Browne Miller (1990) and Auerbach (1990), other services provided by employers include the following. *Direct services* which provide space (on- or off-site) for day care centers, consortium centers, family day care programs, after-school services, school programs and summer camps. These are usually developed according to the employee's needs, the company's goals and the community's resources (Adolf & Rose, 1988). *Information and skills* which include the provision of individual advice, employee assistance, workshops or seminars, resource or referral services and education for parents and guardians (Browne Miller, 1990). This is the simplest and most economical means of support to employees and can also be added to by information in brochures, pamphlets, seminars, childcare referral services and discussions with experts in the field. *Financial assistance* which consists of financial aid in the form of vouchers, flexible benefits, program discounts and corporate contributions to childcare facilities, services and programs (Auerbach, 1990).

Other family benefits include various forms of *alternative work schedules*. For example, *flexi-time* programs allow employees to choose office arrival and departure times while working the normal number of hours to accommodate childcare needs (Browne Miller, 1990). *Part-time work* involves enabling women to spend more time with their families, although they are paid less in terms of earnings, and do not gain as many fringe benefits as they would if they were employed full time (Auerbach, 1988; Kamerman, 1989). *Job sharing* allows two or more employees to share one work position by working on split days, alternate days or weeks. Although such a situation may help parents spend more time with their families, earnings and benefits may be limited (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Browne Miller, 1990). *Home-based work* allows parents to stay at home while earning a living. The disadvantages in such an arrangement are firstly, that supervision of the work done is absent and complicated, and secondly that parents may find it difficult to work while at the same time trying to manage their children (Heck, 1992). Other options include *flexible leave policies* that allow parents to take leave in order to attend to important family needs and obligations, *temporary work*, *education of supervisors*, *sick care policies*, and *maternity or paternity leaves* (Graser, 1986).

Although a vast range of working benefits is available to employers and employees, the choice of any particular one will depend on who the employers are, in what kind of organisations they are involved, the profits or non-profits inherent in such setups, and the

needs of the employees. Furthermore, it is the desire of many organisations and employers to create successful childcare centers for their employees by acquiring long-range financial assistance, qualified and trained staff, and programs that emphasise education, safety and health (Greenman & Fuqua, 1984; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988; Spodek & Saracho, 1992; Willer, 1989). Since not all benefits will fit with most organisations, careful assessment and thought is required for the decision making process.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Employer-supported Childcare

One of the ways in which employers decide on employer-support is based on a process of reciprocal interaction. For example, employers and organisations base their decisions on the perceived advantages and disadvantages that such support will bring them in the short or long term (Browne Miller, 1990). Since industries, organisations and employers have the profit margin as their primary goal; policies regarding employee and family benefits will naturally depend on this factor. However, if employees are rewarded in terms of family and childcare benefits, then their productivity, dedication and morale levels may increase (Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988; Seyler et al., 1995). Absenteeism, work dissatisfaction, tardiness, and employee stress may also decrease, and as a result, working hours will be more effective (Fernandez, 1986; Goff et al., 1990; Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Seyler et al., 1995). It is also assumed that if employees and employers are more satisfied in the work force, then such satisfaction may be mutually experienced within the home setting. According to Doherty-Derkowski (1995), for example, a change in the interactions between parent and child may arise. Work satisfaction or dissatisfaction will not only have an impact on the employer's and employee's relationship but also on the well-being and personal growth of the family system to which they belong. Whatever occurs in one context will be filtered out into other contexts so that the experience of an individual in one context will create and shape the experiences of individuals in other contexts (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995). Thus, if the context of the organisation is a satisfactory and pleasant one, then it is assumed that other contexts will benefit from such conditions. The same applies if the organisational setting is unsatisfactory.

In order for the needs of employees and employers to be met, a holistic approach can be taken when understanding the complexities of such an issue. By considering the employer

and employee within the work and family context, employees' needs, company goals, company finances and community resources are considered accordingly (Adolf & Rose, 1988). According to Auerbach (1988), one popular benefit being offered by companies, in terms of its proximity to the work place, is the building of on-site childcare centers, which are fast becoming desirable and workable options for many parents (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Auerbach, 1988; Reece, 1986).

On-site Childcare Facilities

Based on conversations outside the research context with various working mothers, it was observed that many of them placed valuable meanings on the benefits of on-site childcare facilities. The researcher thus deemed it informative to discuss this benefit in more detail in this section.

A first benefit in the establishment of on-, off- and near-site facilities is that they allow for parents and children to be involved with one another in a more physical manner (Thomas, 1986). Children are able to spend more time with their parents by sharing lunch hours with them, by meeting colleagues and employers, by seeing parents in different roles, and by learning about different work positions in the work setting (Browne Miller, 1990; Hart, 1997; Thomas, 1986; Verzaro-O'Brien et al., 1986). A second benefit lies in the elimination of extra travelling to and from the work place, childcare facility and home. Time, travelling distances, petrol and energy resources are saved in this way (Thomas, 1986; Verzaro-O'Brien et al., 1986).

With these improved conditions, parents may also experience less pressure in having to balance work and home responsibilities, while simultaneously increasing company productivity levels (LaVorgna, 1986). For example, mothers who are not able to take leave when their children are ill or when childcare is not available may resort to staying at home (Grace, 1991). This means that working days and hours become negatively affected. Furthermore, parents who place their children in daycare may also find it necessary to phone their children occasionally in order to see that they are well. This brings about costly expenses for the companies' telephone services (Grace, 1991, Nelson & Krashinsky, 1973).

Although the above benefits seem strong enough to implement childcare facilities on or near the work place, certain disadvantages do exist. Firstly, setting up a childcare facility can be costly and time-consuming (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Fernandez, 1986; Galinsky, 1991). Secondly, if a company is not providing basic benefits such as better salaries, retirement and health benefits to the employee, then striving for the creation of childcare facilities becomes a secondary option (Verzaro-O'Brien et al., 1986). Thirdly, if work conditions are not satisfactory but rather a detriment to the child's well-being, then the implementation of childcare facilities is not welcomed. For example, driving to work and home on busy highways and roads during peak hours may create unsatisfactory and harsh conditions for the child and the parent. Also, if children are submitted to polluted and harsh environments in the work place, then setting up services of this nature is no longer viable (Verzaro-O'Brien et al., 1986).

In conclusion, it is important that employers consider the benefits and drawbacks in the implementation of employer-support in a careful manner. Whether or not they choose to implement employer-supported programs depends entirely on a need's assessment process of the company as a whole. It also depends on considering the needs of all systems not only within the company setting but also within the community context. Guidelines that take into consideration the constant interaction between these different systems will be discussed next.

Guidelines for the Implementation of Employer-supported Childcare

Before creating and maintaining employer-supported programs several guidelines need to be taken into consideration. This involves assessing the needs and goals of the company and its employees in a holistic manner. One guideline involves considering the number of female employees with preschool children (Seyler et al., 1995). Since wider social discourses have and continue to affirm a mother's responsibility for the care of her children, applying this guideline in a male-dominated company would be fruitless. Thus, if the number of women is less than the number of men in a company, then providing employersupport will only be a liability (Seyler et al., 1995). It must be mentioned that present social structures are changing and that many men, whether single, divorced or with families, are beginning to take care of children themselves. The assumption is that they too will see a benefit in the introduction of

such facilities. Further research on such an issue is required in order to get an indication of men's perceptions on this matter.

Secondly, the size of a company affects the scale of benefits offered to employees (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Fernandez, 1986; Seyler et al., 1995). If the company is large, it is in a better position to bare the extent of childcare costs. However, if the company is small, this may not be beneficial. Thirdly, companies will consider the age of employees when deciding on childcare benefits. If the bulk of female employees do not have preschool children, it is not necessary to implement childcare programs (Browne Miller, 1990; Seyler et al., 1995). If companies are in favour of employer-supported programs, then issues concerning space requirements, available sites, provision of salaries, costs of materials and equipment, and the operation of centers in terms of number of days and hours need to be considered. They also have to make choices about their contribution to the center, to parent's fees and the consultation of experts in the advising, facilitating and co-ordination of high quality programs (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Levin, 1991).

Finally, once the decision is made towards employer-supported programs, a process of continuous evaluation will have to take place. Such an evaluation of employer benefits involves taking into account production and performance results, tardiness and absenteeism levels, turnover rates and overall productivity and satisfaction levels (Browne Miller, 1990). Furthermore, it is also vital to assess whether the mother and the child are prospering in this new structure. An evaluation of a particular program will provide a company with meaningful information regarding its initial goals and actions (Adolf & Rose, 1988). If this is done holistically, then the program can be considered beneficial.

As seen in the above discussion of employer-supported programs, taking the interactions of the working mother, childcare and employer systems into consideration can add value to the process of observation. In order to complete the holistic picture, a discussion of childcare issues in terms of high quality care and developmental needs will be given in the next section. Such a discussion is necessary for families who choose to enter the work force but who wish to place their children's needs first (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; Greenman, 1984).

The Need for Quality Childcare

People who encountered problematic situations in the available childcare services created new social discourses that emphasised the need for quality childcare. These problems originated during the 1970s when many children were spending ten hours a day on their own without adult supervision (Auerbach, 1988; Doherty-Derkowski, 1995). Such a situation became unacceptable to many parents, psychologists and educational experts, and through the process of languaging and discoursing, conditions began to change towards better quality care.

Quality of Childcare

The term "high quality childcare" suggests something that is desirable or meets the most basic standards of childcare needs. Parents who choose to place their children in childcare centers seek the child's health and safety needs first. After all, young children are highly dependent on adults, especially parents, to have such basic needs met (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; Levitan & Alderman, 1975). For example, during the neonatal stage it is important that the infant's needs be met in terms of nutrition, temperature balance, body cleanliness, comfort and protection (Auerbach, 1988; Roby, 1973; Ruopp, Travers, Glantz & Coelen, 1979). As the baby grows, the caregiver needs to make provision not only for these needs but also for the child's developmental growth. Thus keeping the child in a closed and non-stimulating environment with very little space to move about will not be conducive to physical development. During the early childhood phase it is important that the caregiver enriches the physical environment for the toddler who is increasing in height, mass, muscles and bone structure. Physical and mental stimulation through toys, space and physical activities is also important (Botha, Van Ede & Piek, 1991; Craig, 1979; Flake-Hobson, Robinson & Skeen, 1983; Gardner, 1982; Harris & Liebert, 1992). Not only should physical stimulation focus on space but also on good lighting, heating, ventilation, cleanliness and well-repaired, safe equipment and materials (Greenman, 1984; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). In terms of custodial care, children should also have individual commodities such as personal space to keep belongings, separate areas for private and group play, mats and cots for sleeping, and a place of safety when ill (Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Patten, 1986).

High quality programs do not only provide custodial services. They also serve the parent's and child's needs in the developmental and educational fields (Greenman, 1984; Lindon & Lindon, 1993). These programs are designed to promote and encourage the development of the child's skills in essential areas, especially those relating to cognitive, physical, emotional and social development (Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988; Willer, 1989). For example, during infancy the child begins to think on a concrete level and perform a variety of actions that have been acquired in his or her interaction with the world (Craig, 1979; Flake-Hobson et al., 1983; Inhelder & Piaget, 1964). His or her ability to talk also improves rapidly even though it remains short, basic and elementary (Flake-Hobson et al., 1983). With such basic cognitive and language growth, it is essential that the caregiver develop these skills by speaking correctly in a way that the infant can follow and understand. The caregiver may also help by providing the child with activities and games that promote language acquisition and cognitive development (Harris & Liebert, 1992). Active involvement by the caregiver is thus important for the development of verbal communication.

In terms of emotional, psychological and social development, the infant establishes an intense relationship with the caregiver involving intimacy and personal contact (Louw & Louw, 1991; Patten, 1986). Bowlby (cited in Smith & Swain, 1988) refers to this as attachment which can be defined as a "reciprocal relationship between two people which is remembered across space and over time" (p. 31). For Bowlby, this process of attachment is vital for the child during the first six years of his or her life, and should consist of a close relationship between mother and child. Those who believe that other members can fulfil the caregiver role as successfully as the mother have disputed this view on attachment. According to Ainsworth and MacDonald (cited in Harris & Liebert, 1992), other caregivers can exist as long as the attachment they have with the child involves some form of intimacy, personal contact and personal development. The danger of forming poor attachments can also be avoided if the caregiver acts as a stable and reliable guide to the child, either at home or in the childcare facility (Louw, 1991). The caregiver needs to be actively involved in the child's life by nurturing the relationship and by showing interest in what the child is doing, thinking or saying.

High quality centers also take into consideration the child's social and emotional development. For this to occur it is important that the child play a more active role in the environment by entering into contact with other children. This goes hand in hand with the increased autonomy and initiative that occurs during the first two years of the child's life (Erikson, 1964). Socialising with other children becomes important as the child begins to undertake more exploratory searches and acts more independently when in the presence of others (Harris & Liebert, 1992; Louw & Louw, 1991). The child, in turn, learns behaviours, attitudes and skills that are necessary to succeed in society (Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988; Maynard & McGinnis, 1992; Prescott, 1984).

Although the above quality programs are essential for the infant (birth to two years of age), it is also important that high quality centers cater for the needs of the toddler. Centers need to provide specialised programs for children ranging from the ages of 3 to 6 years, particularly since cognitive and language development increases dramatically at this stage through the acquisition of knowledge and information via senses and activities (Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). Cognitive growth is further seen in memory improvement, creative thinking and language expansion. Because the child has a better understanding of grammar and a larger vocabulary, he or she is also able to ask more questions, express his or her own opinions and protest or inquire (Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Louw, 1991). Acquiring language also becomes a basic tool for the creation of meaning as seen in the social constructionist perspective. According to Cazden, Craig and Hoffman-Ginsberg (cited in Louw, 1991), cognitive and language development becomes a preparation for school entry. As such, it is important that caregivers pay attention to the growth of such skills by enhancing the child's language ability according to his or her age group (Louw, 1991). In this regard, caregivers need to encourage the child to speak as often as possible in slow, simple and audible ways. They need to encourage children to speak and ask questions, while listening to them in an attentive and interested style (Louw, 1991). With such skills being enhanced, the child accomplishes the ability to co-create shared meanings with others, and in doing this, he or she learns to interact with others through the process of language and social discourse, while simultaneously learning to co-operate and share (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

In terms of cognitive development, caregivers should also expose children to visual and auditory information by means of educational toys and television programs. They should help them memorise nursery rhymes, stories and songs (Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). Creative thinking should also be enhanced by having the caregiver respect the child's questions and ideas and by encouraging him or her to be aware of the surrounding environment. (Louw, 1991). Encouraging children to draw or paint pictures, followed by constructive responses, will be instrumental in the enhancement of cognitive development, self worth and emotional growth (Botha et al., 1991).

For healthy emotional development to take place, preschool children need to learn to express a wide array of emotions in a spontaneous manner (Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). During the preschool stage, the child becomes aware of personal traits, ideas of pride and shame, a sense of belonging, and a sense of personal property and self-expansion (Botha et al., 1991). In a high quality center, the child's emotional development is achieved in various ways. For example, the child is taught to express emotions through facial expressions, gestures, body movements, sounds, words and play activities (Hyson, 1994; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988; Sroufe, 1996). The impact of these factors on the emotional development of the child is thus crucial during the early childhood stage. In order for this impact to be beneficial and positive, caregivers need to allow children to experience diverse emotions in an open manner (Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). Emotions such as joy, fear, anger and sadness should not be suppressed but rather expressed in a safe environment. Furthermore, an awareness of their own emotions, together with the emotions of others, should be facilitated and developed (Flake-Hobson et al., 1983; Glachan & Light, 1982). This can occur when children are allowed to laugh and cry, when happy or upset, without having to feel guilty or embarrassed (Botha et al., 1991). This will allow them to approach a new situation or task with added confidence (Kogan, 1976).

As seen in the above actions, a child's emotional development is not enhanced in isolation. Instead, it is developed in unison with the emotions of people in their immediate environment, with changing cognitive processes and motor skills, and with exposure to family structures, family interactions, parents' attitudes and child rearing patterns (Botha et al., 1991;

Glachan & Light, 1982; Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Kogan, 1976). Taking into account the child's development in a holistic manner will thus provide one with a better understanding of such development (Becvar & Becvar, 1988). This holistic perspective, which forms part of the ecosystemic theory underlying the dissertation, is essential in describing the child's emotional development because of the family or childcare's influence on the child. Since the family and the center are continuously interacting with the child and the child with them in a circular and recursive manner, a context such as this will naturally shape the child's thoughts, actions and perceptions. In turn, the child's behaviour, thoughts and beliefs will shape the family or the center's particular structure, and this circular process of interaction will create an ecosystemic whole (Bateson, 1972; Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Keeney, 1983).

When viewing the child's social development, centers can provide high quality care by asking parents to be more involved in their children's lives. It is essential that caregivers consider the interactions with the parents, and in this way include them in the childcare service (Higley, Lande & Suomi, 1989; Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Marhoefer & Vadnais, 1988). Such inclusion is necessary in order to understand the cultural backgrounds and lifestyles of the various families (Greenman, 1984; Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Patten, 1986). The philosophy in such an approach focuses on the belief that instead of dealing with the child in isolation one should deal with him or her as a member of a family unit and a broader community (Nover & Segal, 1986). Such a perspective is strongly linked to the conceptual lenses of the researcher who places emphasis on ecosystemic principles. In this theory there is a focus on relationships within systems and ongoing interactions between different members within a particular ecology. To ignore this interaction is to see the individual as an isolated or self-contained individual independent of context and mutual interactions.

Another way in which high quality centers can be evaluated is by means of staffing. If the ratio between teacher and child is not adequate then the quality of care can be questioned. Although ratios differ from center to center, some authors believe that the ratio should consist of one adult for every three or four children (Muscarì & Morrone, 1989; Trunzo, 1986; Willer, 1989). Others see the difference in ratios as dependent on the children's ages. For example, in terms of infant care, the ratio should average 1:5, for toddlers 1:6, and for preschoolers 1:13 (Auerbach, 1988; Muscarì & Morrone, 1989). It is also important that teachers and staff be

effectively trained to meet the family and child's requirements (Jones, 1984). Staff members should meet regularly to discuss and evaluate program goals for the specific childcare service and continue their professional growth in the field of preschool care. Furthermore, good teacher-child relationships should be enhanced and sought in order for children to experience childcare as a trusting and safe environment. This is especially important in the formation of positive attachment (Bowlby, 1973a; Greenman, 1984).

Finally, high quality centers are essential for parents who choose to enter the work force but still wish to provide their children with good personality and educational development. If the center's appearance, curriculum, physical environment, staffing, family-school relations and developmental needs according to different age groups are adequately accomplished, then high quality care has been achieved (Levitan & Alderman, 1975; Lindon & Lindon, 1993; Patten, 1986).

In order to understand the dissertation topic in a more holistic manner, it is deemed important to consider this issue within the South African context. Since most of the literature has been based on American and European studies, it is important to take into account the developing discourses in South Africa. These will be provided in the next section as pertaining to the historical events that have taken place over the last 20 years.

Working Women in South Africa

As Laurence Sterne, the English novelist once wrote, "Now hang it! quoth I, as I look'd towards the French coast -- a man should know something of his own country too, before he goes abroad", so too is it important to understand the dissertation topic within the South African context. Just as wider social discourses advocating participation in the work force have changed in more developed countries, so too has this evolution been seen in the South African context. Here, many women of all races have entered the work force either because of the need for self-fulfillment, for financial necessity, or for political and historical reasons. As such, a brief history of the changes that have occurred before and after the election period in 1994 will be discussed. The pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial

history of working women in South Africa will not be given because of the limited scope of the dissertation.

During the 1960s and 1970s labour force participation amongst South African women was rife with inequality. According to Terblanche (1978), it was exclusively white women who were working in the medical, paramedical and clerical fields. Only 12% of black women were active in the labour force due to the political philosophy of the time. It was during this period that apartheid was the prevailing ideological discourse, and for this reason many black women were not allowed to carry out medical and clerical employment opportunities. Instead, they were removed from their rural homes and families to work in many of the white women's urban homes as domestic workers. Some remained in the rural areas working as farm workers in the agricultural sector (Lemmer, 1989; Terblanche, 1978). When white women began rejecting low paid work positions and moved into better-paid positions, the opportunity arose for black women to fill the low paid posts. Others decided to enter into the teaching and nursing professions even though they were subjected to poor qualifications and pay, as well as subservience to white female and male workers (Lemmer, 1989; Schoombee & Mantzaris, 1991). Coloured women also began entering the work force, particularly into the textile factories, while Indian women continued to remain in the home or in family businesses because of cultural codes advocated by community discourses (Terblanche, 1978).

Although female participation rates were much slower to evolve as compared to America and Europe, the increase has been inevitable. With the end of apartheid and a need to earn a salary, the rate at which all South African women are participating in the work place has increased manifold (Benjamin, 1997; Primo, 1997; Terblanche, 1978). This has been seen in conjunction with the discourses taking place in evolving industrialisation processes, urbanisation, economic inflation, financial obligations, emphasis on career satisfaction and increased independence (Shafer, 1983; Van Rooyen, 1982). Statistics in 1995 showed that while in 1960 the active work population was 77% men and 23% women, the ratio is now very different. According to Barney Erasmus and Elmarie Sadler (professors at UNISA, speaking at a research conference on economics, business management and human resources management in Cape Town 1998), men occupied 56% and women 44% of the labour participation rate by 1995 (Working women, 1998). Such statistics do, however, need to be

seen within the South African political context, which has been based in the past on racial division and segregation in labour markets. Even though discriminatory policies have overshadowed equal opportunities for most South African women, particularly black women, today the situation is somewhat different as many black women begin to enter high level corporate positions and professions (Makgetla, 1995; Nyman, 1997; Primo, 1997).

In terms of childcare issues, South African women have also experienced a few related problems in the past (Erasmus, 1997). According to Maconachie (1990), many of them have had to rely on childcare arrangements provided by domestic workers, crèches and relatives. Others have sent their children to more formal daycare centers (provided by local authorities or registered welfare organisations) with little emphasis on educational development (Shafer, 1983). In the past, discrimination and segregation were also rife in many childcare centers. Improved childcare facilities remained high for white people while poor facilities continued to be prominent for the more discriminated groups. Today, however, with a rise in work participation rates by black women, their children have been able to enter childcare facilities with greater ease.

In terms of employer-supported programs, South African employers have not always created a work place that has been favourable and attractive to working mothers. Although the Department of Labour's legislative reform program has been set up to deal with inequality in the work force, such a reform alone is not enough to help South African women deal with hardships within the work force (Nyman, 1997). One of the ways in which practical problems can be dealt with is through the implementation of childcare facilities at work and in the community setting. These benefits are considered important, particularly for those mothers who work in industrial areas where unsuitable conditions exist (Boase, 1996; Nyman, 1997). Further benefits can also come in the form of appropriate maternity leave packages, unemployment and illness benefits as well as flexi-time and part-time work (Boase, 1996; Ortlepp & Foley, 1997; Purshotam, 1997).

Conclusion

As social discourses continue to evolve and as the number of women in the work force continues to increase, so too has the dilemma in choosing between work, home and mothering responsibilities increased. When women choose to enter the work force, either because of the need for self-fulfillment or financial necessity, society usually steps in to provide the mother and the child with a viable solution. One such solution has come in the form of appropriate family and childcare benefits that allow for mothers to carry out their lives in a more balanced manner. Also, by bridging the gap of poor care by providing high quality childcare arrangements, mothers may feel more comfortable to leave their children at childcare facilities. This is vital when parents take into consideration the child's emotional, physical, social, psychological and cognitive development. By implementing both solutions, working mothers and employers may become more content, while work productivity and the quality of home life may increase. Taking the relationships between mothers' choices, meaning systems and related contexts into consideration is deemed vital for the creation of meaning in the dissertation. This interactive view is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

ECOSYSTEMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

*"No man is an Island, entire of it self;
Everyman is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main..."*
(John Donne)

Introduction

A major contribution to the world of psychological assessment, diagnosis and intervention has come in the form of ecosystemic thinking regarding human problems and dilemmas. Such a perspective no longer focuses on a traditional lineal epistemology but rather begins to view relationships within systems and ongoing interactions between different members within a particular ecology (Auerswald, 1985; Jasnoski, 1984; Stachowiak & Briggs, 1984; Tomm, 1984). A new theory that has emerged from within this postpositivist paradigm and which provides a richer description of the meaning creation taking place within systems is the social constructionist perspective (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Cecchin, 1992; Hoffman, 1992; Gergen, 1985). This theory emphasises the meanings that have been and continue to be co-constructed amongst individuals within various interactive systems. Furthermore, it focuses on interactions which are embedded in language and dialogue (Hoffman, 1992). These processes of language allow for the construction of meanings and beliefs about existing realities that are never finite or fixed but are rather in a constant process of evolution and continuous co-construction (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1992; Owen, 1992).

The types of interactive systems in which language processes take place and which bring forth specific meanings and behaviours are described as dyads, groups, families, organisations and social networks (Hoffman, 1981; O'Connor & Lubin, 1984). One such

interactive system, which is prevalent throughout the dissertation, involves the interactive process between the employer, the parent or non-parent employee, the child, the childcare facility, other family or work members, the researcher and the wider socio-politico-economic and historical discourses. The meanings arising from these interactions, particularly those between the mothers and the researcher, will be conceptualised within the framework of ecosystemic epistemological principles and the social constructionist perspective.

Description of Ecosystemic Thinking

Systemic and ecosystemic thinking only began to emerge in the 1940s and 1950s with the development of the family therapy movement (Becvar & Becvar, 1988). The emerging cybernetic and systemic exploration of individuals and problems moved away from intrapsychic psychology, assessment, diagnosis and treatment towards a focus on relationships between individuals within particular contexts (Jasnoski, 1984; Keeney, 1979; Meyer et al., 1989; Phares, 1992). With the emergence of such a non-linear epistemology, the context of interaction among individuals and their environments became essential to the understanding of human behaviour and problems (Stachowiak & Briggs, 1984). Systems theory thus became grounded in the context of sociocultural systems wherein relationships between individuals and other systems were observed (Elkaïm, 1985; Levant, 1984).

Description of Social Constructionist Thinking

Social constructionism is a specific theory, which fits with ecosystemic principles and beliefs. Although ecosystemic and social constructionist thinking are on different levels of abstraction, both form part of post-positivist thinking. The latter describes the generation and construction of knowledge as well as the existence of different belief systems. As mentioned in Chapter 2, social constructionism follows the view that human systems exist only in the "domain of meaning or intersubjective linguistic reality" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p. 375). All parts within a system simultaneously act on one another because of the inherent interconnectedness within the linguistic field (Efran & Clarfield, 1992; Hoffman, 1992; Osbeck, 1993). This interconnectedness amongst individuals is essential in the creation and

acquisition of knowledge and meaning through the process of communication and conversation (Hoffman, 1990; Owen, 1992; Ratner, 1989). Such knowledge is not acquired through individual processes but rather within constantly evolving familial, historical and cultural contexts (Gergen, 1979; 1985). Social constructionism therefore maintains that the generation of meanings and knowledge is not based on individual processes but on interactive processes which place emphasis on non-linear and relational epistemologies.

This dissertation is concerned with the above two discourses that have evolved from post-positivist concepts and that allow for a richer description in terms of systems, relationships and contexts.

Foundations of Ecosystemic Epistemology

The term epistemology can be defined as a process that specifies how one thinks, acts, knows and decides (Keeney, 1983). It refers to a belief system or personal framework according to which each of us operates on a day to day basis, and which provides us with a way of ordering our lives as constructed through personal and meaningful experience (Becvar & Becvar, 1988). It is a process of "thinking about thinking" (Auerswald, 1985, p. 1) in which the rules that govern thought processes and the expression of knowledge are studied.

The principle foundation of the ecosystemic epistemology is one that moves away from the individual and his or her behavioural problems towards a context of relationships between people and towards an understanding of patterns that maintain or create problematic situations (Bopp & Weeks, 1984). Furthermore, it is an epistemology that focuses on whole systems, ecologies and relationships (Auerswald, 1985; L'Abate et al., 1986). In terms of this dissertation, an ecosystemic epistemology is needed to understand the issues regarding working mothers, childcare and employer-support systems as being interrelated.

A focus on these interrelated relationships is necessary because an individual's existence and knowledge of the world is neither created nor experienced in isolation. It is, instead, viewed as part of a social domain where meaning structures and language processes exist (Anderson, 1992; Hoffman, 1992). Within this social domain, an individual's language

and dialogue co-creates knowledge with other individuals such that it is considered a social invention (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For example, the belief that women are entitled to a career and a profession has changed dramatically over time. It was once a socially accepted belief that women were to stay at home to care for the family. Meanings regarding women at home were thus sustained through communal languaging. This changed, however, once women began entering the work force during the Second World War. New meanings were generated out of such dialogues as women's positions in the labour market were recognised. A similar change in beliefs and social discourses was also seen in the development of family and systemic therapy. New meanings regarding the individual within a family system emerged during the 1940s and 1950s as part of the general systems theory (L'Abate et al., 1986). At that time there was a need to move away from intrapsychic and lineal epistemologies towards a more non-lineal and relational epistemology. Knowledge as a social invention then focused attention on the individual in relation to his family system or community and vice versa.

Epistemologies and socially constructed meanings are therefore never fixed or rigid. They evolve and shift within the context of dialogue, historical and societal changes (Gergen, 1985). Inherent in this idea of languaging is the notion that humans are continually engaged in a process of drawing distinctions. Keeney (1982) describes the drawing of such distinctions as a process of distinguishing an 'it' from a 'background' that is 'not it'. In other words, drawing distinctions signify the starting point for any action, decision, perception, thought, description, theory and epistemology (Keeney, 1983). According to Keeney (1982), all that an individual knows or can know depends on the distinctions that are drawn. Bateson (cited in Keeney, 1982) refers to this as the activity of 'punctuation' that organises circumstances in a particular way in order to provide meaning. After all, individuals are meaning making creatures and thus punctuate the world in specific ways (Hoffman, 1992). By punctuating it is implied that the individual first distinguishes occurrences and then describes them (Keeney, 1979; 1983). Thus, what one knows and perceives is largely based on the distinctions that one draws.

In keeping with this process of punctuating, this dissertation will highlight the punctuations of working mothers in the research and discussion chapters. Punctuations about

spouses and employers' meanings will be gained in the mothers' discussions and personal distinctions. This dissertation also allows the reader to infer his or her own punctuations regarding the research presented. These processes of punctuation are described by Keeney (1983) and take the following form. Firstly, I, as the observer, draw primary distinctions regarding the dissertation topic. This involves "raw data" about working mothers, children and employers individually and in relation with others (Keeney, 1983). These "raw data" are presented in Chapter 2 and focus on literature regarding the three systems. Secondly, with this first order of distinction, I jump a level of abstraction and draw distinctions that organise these raw data. Here, I attempt to draw patterns that connect the above individuals to each other and to other systems. The principles of ecosystemic epistemology and social constructionism are included in this second level. An elaboration of this second level of abstraction is further presented in the last two chapters with a discussion on the meanings, themes and consensual beliefs generated in the research method and design (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen, 1985; Keeney, 1983). In the same way, the reader also undergoes a process of drawing distinctions upon distinctions upon distinctions just as I did in my research. The reader will, however, draw such distinctions according to his or her epistemological lenses. My distinctions are based on aspects relating to personal assumptions and values, ecosystemic thinking and social constructionist lenses. These form the basis of my personal epistemology and it is with them that I draw distinctions about the dissertation topic. Concepts that are closely related to my personal epistemology and that will be discussed in the next sections include the following: context, holism, double description, multiple realities, recursion, problems and solutions, and self-referentiality.

Context

The term "context" or "ecosystem" refers primarily to any type of relationship between two or more individuals. It also refers to any type of unit or system composed of a population and its related environment (O'Connor & Lubin, 1984). According to Orford (1992), it is important to always view people within the contexts of their social settings because by considering them in their contexts, one is able to see them holistically. Furthermore, by considering them in a holistic manner one is able to encounter a complexity of relationships between people and their environments as well as a diversity in mutual interactions (Orford,

1992). Behaviour can then be described as being context appropriate and specific, while evolving from context to context. Behaviour is thus not described as an expression of personality traits inherent to each individual but rather as specific to different contexts. According to Seidman (cited in Orford, 1992), observing behaviour in this way allows one to view human beings as changing, and being changed by their contexts.

In terms of this dissertation, various contexts exist in the lives of working mothers, children and employers. For example, there is the context of the work place in which both employer and employee interact with each other. There is the context of the home where family members interact with one another and the context of the childcare facility, which brings forth relationships with family members, children and child caregivers. There is also the context of the interview, which includes the three working mothers and the researcher. The objective of this dissertation is placed on specific interactions and perceptions occurring within specific contexts such that meanings are revealed, co-constructed and understood (Anderson & Goolishian, 1984; Gergen, 1985; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Holism

According to Bateson (1972), in order to understand a specific phenomenon or experience, one needs to consider it within the context it exists. The overall picture of the situation in question needs to be taken into account by considering all other members or systems relevant to it. Whereas in the past the individual and his or her problems were viewed in total isolation, a shift now occurred towards a complexity inherent in human relations (Keeney, 1983). This took place conjointly with the development of family therapy, systemic thought and ecosystemic epistemology. A process of holism thus emerged when complexities were considered within systems.

According to Becvar and Becvar (1988), any two individuals in a particular relationship are not independent of each other but rather in a process of interaction where both mutually influence and are influenced by each other. It is this mutual influence that provides the observer with a holistic picture of the context, the inherent relationships and patterns

occurring between certain individuals (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). This interaction is what provides an observer with a more complete view of the whole, especially since the individual is no longer seen as a single member but as someone who is related to others in a particular context. For Keeney and Sprenkle (1982), holism accounts for such complexity in human interaction and experience by considering how an individual is connected to a larger system. Furthermore, it focuses on relationships between elements and not on the elements themselves (Lewis, 1989). Jasnoski (1984) describes this view of the whole as a synergistic process taking place within a system. According to the author, synergism involves taking into account the whole ecosystem as having an impact greater than the simple sum of its component levels. This means that the whole group or system has greater importance than the sum of the individual members within such groups or systems. Synergism thus allows one to focus more on relationships between components rather than the components in isolation. This synergistic whole, composed of interactions, determines the function of the individual parts. For synergism to take place, it is necessary that interactions between such parts occur, especially since each part within the system is functionally and reciprocally related to every other part (Stachowiak & Briggs, 1984). According to Burnham (1986), this is one of the fundamental concepts in systemic epistemology.

Since the whole contains the part and the part contains the whole in a continual process of communication and interaction, viewing childcare, working mothers, and employer-support issues in isolation would result in a simplistic mode of thinking (Minuchin, 1974). However, when a holistic picture of patterns inherent in such systems is gained, then a clearer understanding of system dynamics and patterns is obtained. For Keeney and Ross (1992), patterns refer to a cybernetic organisation of communication in human relationship systems. It involves taking into account a process of 'who-does-what-to-whom-when' and ascribing a particular meaning to such a sequence (Watzlawick et al., 1967). For Minuchin and Fishman (1981), patterns arise from a circular and continuous process of mutual affecting and reinforcing. This implies that people mutually affect each other through their interactions. In this way responses are elicited and reinforced by the other individual's responses so that a process of feedback occurs. According to Keeney's theory, each individual draws distinctions about the other individual's behaviour. For example, people create the idea of power through

a process of social constructionism. The idea of power is further created by “the context and is invented by the protagonists of the situation” (Cecchin, 1992, p. 89) such that people begin to behave as if power existed. . The established pattern is now one in which employers are able to decide on family benefits by managing the fate of the employee. In the same way, employees react in specific ways towards the employer, which bring about certain patterns of behaviour by the employer. These sequential patterns may eventually become repetitive (Watzlawick et al., 1967). By considering these patterns holistically, interactions and meanings are highlighted for both the observer and the observed and are considered to form part of a wholeness (Keeney, 1982). The interaction between individuals then brings about the creation of certain patterns, which are unique to that particular relationship. As Watzlawick et al. (1967) state, wholeness refers to the behaviour of all individuals in a system that is related to and dependent on the behaviour of all other individuals. On a different level, the working mother, the family and the organisation interact in specific ways such that fixed patterns between them are established and maintained. As an observer of this topic, I describe the interactions between the three working mothers and myself in a recursive manner such that a holistic view is gained. The notion of holism relates only to the interactions between the working mothers and the researcher, and not to fathers, employers and children. For practical reasons, these members are not considered directly in this dissertation because of the dissertation’s limited scope. Nonetheless, it is hoped that their perceptions will be highlighted in the of the three working mothers as well as in future research investigations.

Double Description

Although the concept of holism may be characterised as part of simple cybernetics, the epistemology of second order cybernetics sees wholeness at a higher level of abstraction (Keeney, 1983). For example, simple cybernetics, or first-order cybernetics, places the observer outside the system he or she is observing. As such, he or she is not acknowledged as part of the relational processes that occur in the system but rather ‘objectively’ describes what is happening by viewing individuals, their behaviours and their relationships with others. No connection with the system is acknowledged and in this way a bird’s eye view of that particular context is maintained (Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Griffith, Griffith & Slovik, 1990;

Lewis, 1989). Such an implication is that the observer is able to unilaterally affect the individual's or the system's behaviour from his or her position of power as the independent observer. Epistemologically, this is erroneous since no one part of a system can unilaterally control another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Cybernetics of cybernetics, or second-order cybernetics, on the other hand, transforms simple cybernetics into a more enriched view in which the observer is no longer viewed outside the system, but as part of it (Fourie, 1998; Hoffman, 1985). Rules and boundaries that delineate a system by means of repeated interactions and patterns now include the observer influencing, and being influenced in and by that particular system (Hoffman, 1985).

According to Keeney (1983), double description is likened to a holistic description of a particular setting or system. When two people interact with one another, double description allows each individual to punctuate the other's flow of interaction. When both punctuations are viewed, a sense of the whole system emerges as one observes the interactions in a sequential fashion. This implies that the punctuation pattern of one person will interact with the punctuation pattern of the other so that a simultaneous combination of all punctuations can lead to more holistic presentation of that particular relationship (Keeney, 1983). Double description or the 'relationship' is essential to the dissertation topic because it places the observer within a more holistic view of the working mother, childcare and employersupport system (Penn, 1982). No longer will the researcher be observing the working mothers in isolation but they too will be observing the researcher according to personal lenses and assumptions. Furthermore, the aim is not to act as an outside observer that controls the observed or analyses inputs and outputs in an outside environment. Since the term observer implies any individual undertaking a process of observation, both the working mothers and myself will be considered holistically (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn, 1987; Varela, 1989).

Recursion

Recursion follows the view that all parts within a system simultaneously act on each other (Boscolo et al., 1987; Keeney, 1979). For example, a mother influences and is

influenced by her child and employer in a recursive manner. In this way, recursion or circularity is based on the notion that individuals are “connected to each other in particular patterns through time...” (Boscolo et al., 1987, p. 96). This process of circularity involves a situation in which individuals construct shared realities through languaging and through their own personal epistemological distinctions (Golann, 1988; Keeney, 1983; Penn, 1982). Such distinctions are drawn as the observer distinguishes and then decides upon events and situations.

These recursive interactions taking place between people are further explained within the process of feedback. According to Keeney (1983), this is a process whereby a system is able to reinsert into itself the results of its past performance. Information about past behaviour is thus fed back into the system in a circular process. Watzlawick et al. (1967) explain feedback as a chain in which event *A* effects event *B*, and *B* then effects *C*, and so forth. In other words, when conversing with the working mothers, the researcher discussed something in particular that elicited a response from the working mother. Her response then evoked a further response by the researcher, and this brought about a further response by the mother. If the feedback, taking place in such a context continued to maintain the status quo of the relationship, it would be considered negative. However, if the feedback taking place between the working mothers and the researcher brought about an amplification or a change to the status quo of the system, it would be considered positive (Watzlawick et al., 1967). According to Keeney (1983), feedback can be positive or negative, the latter being likened to the function of a thermostat, which regulates the temperature of a house by reaching a particular threshold. Positive feedback, on the other hand, functions as an amplifying deviation that brings about a radical change in the system. Negative and positive feedback ultimately involves viewing both the behaviour and the responses of the system to such behaviour, so that the survival of the system can be maintained. For cybernetics of cybernetics, only negative feedback is possible because of the cybernetic descriptions made by the participant observer in that particular system. At this level, negative feedback is evolutionary because it embodies behaviour that is able to maintain the system but that also allows for continuous change to occur (Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Hoffman, 1981). With evolutionary feedback a system will be able to transform and evolve yet maintain its original structure. According to the Milan

associates, feedback, circularity or recursion is essential to the processes of observing systems (Selvini, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980). It is important to understand that in any system or relationship, people will act on each other. For example, *A* acts on *B*. *B* feeds back his or her understanding of *A*'s actions together with the wish or demand regarding how their relationship should be. *A* then incorporates this information back to him or herself as well as to *B* in the next communication. Such an example of evolutionary feedback can be seen in the interactions between employer and employee. For example, an employer stipulates that all employees need to work overtime for the next month. The working mother, who is pressured to fetch her child from nursery school at a specific time, becomes dissatisfied. She then complains to other working mothers with similar issues and they all agree that the new stipulation will only lead to more pressured lives. They decide to speak to the employer about his decision in order to arrive at some point of negotiation. This process continues in a similar fashion such that it becomes a circular organisation. For the Milan associates, on one level we find a circular system in which *A* influences *B*, *B* influences *C*, and *C* influences *A* once again. On another level we have the interactions of these interactions. In other words, we see the circular process of *A*'s interaction with *B* interacting with *B*'s interaction with *C*. This type of circularity is described as the capacity of a therapist to conduct his or her investigation on the basis of feedback from the family in response to the information solicited about relationships (Selvini et al., 1980). Thus, when mothers, children, employers and observers relate to each other, the interaction occurring between them is not individually based or one-sided. In terms of the work context, an employer cannot simply decide that mothers need to work overtime without expecting them to react in different ways. It is impossible for one individual to cause another person to behave in a certain manner without eliciting a certain reaction from the recipient as well as the whole system. The problem will not only belong to the mother alone but will also influence other contexts such as the childcare and family systems, which recursively shape the mother's behaviour and perceptions. These systems can include the child, the other parent, the employer or the colleague. The work context, too, may be impacted upon such that a decrease in productivity levels and an increase in absenteeism and tardiness occur. As Watzlawick et al. (1967) state, "person *A* does not only effect person *B* without taking equally into account that whatever *B* does influences *A*'s next move and that

they are both largely influenced by, and in turn influence, the context in which their interaction takes place” (pp. 35-36).

The same applies to the research process in which I, the observer, must also consider my interaction with the working mother system. In terms of ecosystemic thinking this relationship between observer and observed is termed self-referentiality and will be considered next.

Self-referentiality

Self-referentiality allows for a richer description in terms of mutual reciprocity and double description. Here the observer not only observes the behaviour of members in a system but also begins to take into account his or her own behaviour and assumptions. The observer’s own behaviour is seen as important in the interaction he or she has with others. Since the observer is placed in that which is observed, his or her description becomes a self-referential one. For Varela and Johnson (1976), self-referentiality implies that all descriptions or punctuations an observer makes in the therapeutic context are “reflective of his [or her] properties” (p. 30). When an observer interacts with a system or other individuals, he or she needs to be aware personal epistemological assumptions, frames of reference, values, tacit assumptions and biases. The observer needs to consider his or her own contribution to the whole system in the same way as working mothers, employers and children need to consider their own contributions to the systems they are in (Keeney, 1983). As Keeney (1979) writes “the therapeutic situation is therefore a whole system consisting of simultaneous interactions of all parts. These simultaneous interactions self-referentially identify, define, and constitute the whole system” (p. 124). Subjectivity is thus alive as the observer places emphasis on how he or she has become an essential member in perceiving, acting and creating his or her own reality, which is now no longer an external experience. This reality is created through the interconnectedness of the observer and the observed such that a holistic approach to the context of interaction is provided (Efran & Lukens, 1990; Varela, 1989). Finally, self-referentiality is illustrated in this dissertation by discussing my personal epistemology grounded in ecosystemic and social constructionist principles. These personal lenses are

mentioned throughout the dissertation in the drawing of ecosystemic distinctions of 'raw data' and also form part of the interviews, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Multiple Realities

Ecosystemic thinking rejects the notion of objective realities that can be directly known by observers. It posits that meanings and realities are co-created in language and are self-referentially shaped and context-specific. The basis for multiple realities thus rests on the notion of self-referentiality in that as soon as the researcher joins the system under observation, he or she will change and be changed by that system. This occurs as the observer brings in his or her own values, tacit knowledge, biases and past experiences. By becoming a participant in a particular system through the process of double description, the observer and the observed are then able to combine not only one view but many different views (Hoffman, 1990). This interconnectedness is what Bateson referred to as multiple descriptions and realities (Bateson, 1979). According to him, singular descriptions fail to exist as multiple interactions between individuals emerge. All individuals in such interactions have their own particular view of the flow of interaction between themselves and others. By combining these views a sense of the whole system begins to emerge (Keeney & Ross, 1992). An example of the diversity of multiple realities can be seen in the mother, child, employer and observer system in which each individual has his or her personal epistemology. Some employers, for example, may view working mothers as important individuals within the company and may avoid taking their employees' services for granted. Their views may allow them to improve mothers' work satisfaction by giving them opportunities to contribute to the success of the organisation, or by helping them to balance the demands of being mothers, wives and employees. Other realities may also exist as some employers consider it financially risky to set up childcare facilities or to provide working mothers with certain types of familial benefits. Their exclusion of mothers' needs in the work context forms the fundamental basis of their particular realities. These realities then have an impact on the context by eliciting further distinctions and multiple realities.

Multiple realities thus include individuals' habits of punctuation, which enable them to construct a particular world of experience (Bateson, 1979; Keeney, 1983). The combination of these punctuations provides a more holistic context of interaction such that a world of experience may emerge (Bateson, 1979). These shared co-constructions of meaning systems reject the notion of single truths and bring about different ways in which the world can be constructed, organised and understood (Hoffman, 1992; Osbeck, 1993; Ratner, 1989).

Finding such meaning is essential because it provides humans with a greater understanding of the flow of sensory stimuli that has repeatedly and continuously impacted on the world. Furthermore, it elucidates external forces, changes and behaviours that have led and continue to lead to a creation of differing experiences and beliefs. Bateson (1979) describes human reality in terms of clusters of meaning which are in continuous transformation because of the individual's interaction with his or her environment. In such a context, each system is made unique by the different sets of relations within it and by the specific meanings attributed to such characteristics. The notion of one "true" set reality or one "true" set of meanings is therefore not accepted (Hoffman, 1985). According to Bateson (cited in Hoffman, 1985), in terms of ecosystemic thought, meanings refer to premises as "shared ideas held collectively by family members that are laid down at a deep structure level and operate at a higher level of abstraction than particular behaviours" (p. 392). Such meanings cannot be verbalised but are often expressed through abstract means such as in the form of feelings and non-verbal behaviour (Golann, 1988; Hoffman, 1985; Keeney & Ross, 1992).

Such meanings, when expressed, will only hold truth if and when the system confirms them. If the system does not confirm them, then the meanings remain meaningless and fruitless (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Cecchin, 1992). This explains why a researcher, therapist or observer cannot unilaterally enforce meanings on families or systems. Furthermore, meanings and understandings are "socially and intersubjectively constructed" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p. 372) because they can only be developed through a process of communication and dialogue. They are also "not skull-bound and may not exist inside what we think of as an individual 'mind'. They are part of a general flow of constantly changing

narratives” (Hoffman, 1990, p.3). Thus, they are placed into a semantic frame of reference in which descriptions of past, present and future events are constructed to give individuals or systems a unique sense of experience (Keeney & Ross, 1992). Multiple realities and double description thus allow for a view of relationships that highlight “new orders of difference, relationship and context” (Penn, 1982, p. 268) by creating a more holistic and recursive description of individuals.

Problem and Solution

This dissertation considers the problems and stress inherent in the working mother, childcare and organisation contexts, as well as the possible solutions that are available to working mothers. It also focuses on problems and solutions that mothers, parents, children and employers face when dealing with the home and work environment within the larger socio-political and economic fields. Since all human beings form part of particular systems and contexts, it is impossible to observe them in isolation. Just as one needs to consider all contexts holistically within the larger macrocosm, so too is it important to consider the relationship between problems and solutions inherent in the working mother, childcare, employer and observer systems. The problem and the solution are thus interrelated in a complementary fashion. Such complementarity will be discussed in more detail in this section.

This dissertation focuses primarily on the stress experienced by working mothers in having to deal simultaneously with the home and work environment as well as the daycare needs of children (Tingey et al., 1996). Their stress increases if employers or family members provide limited help in both contexts. Situations are then created in which children and mothers spend less time with each other, mothers have less time for themselves and work productivity levels begin to decrease. In this problem-languaged context, very few solutions are available except those of adequate childcare centers outside the home and work context. For Anderson and Goolishian (1988), the working mother, childcare and employer system is one that has converged around a particular problem, which is specific to itself. According to these authors, a problem is “a form of co-evolved meaning that exists in ongoing dialogical

communication. In dialogue, new meaning is under constant evolution and, no 'problem' will exist forever. In time all problems will dissolve" (p. 379). In other words, any particular system that converges around a problem is considered to be a linguistic system in which meaning is intersubjectively constructed. Human beings thus engage in dialogue so that shared, consensual meanings are generated and co-constructed. In a problem-organising system, each member will hold his or her own understanding of the problem, and by interacting with other members he or she will be able to share ideas about the problem. In this dissertation, the three working mothers converged together to discuss the stress they encounter within the different areas of their lives. These include the handling of multiple roles in the work and home context. These problems are part of a problem-determined system and are created in language and dialogue between various individuals. In the same way, the dissolution of the problem will also occur through a process of dialogue and an exchange of ideas (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Such dis-solutions of problems involve the one proposed in this dissertation, namely employer-supported programs and benefits. Just as there exists a languaging of problems so too is there a languaging of solutions. Both problems and solutions then constitute both sides of the coin and are considered to exist with each other in a complementary relationship (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Complementarity refers to problems and solutions as being distinct and different, but also as participating with each other in complementary ways (Bateson, 1979; Keeney & Ross, 1992). An example of this is given by Watzlawick et al. (1967) who describe dominance and submission in a system as a complementary relationship. If one member acts in a dominant manner, it is expected that the other will reply to this behaviour in the form of submission. It is assumed that such submission will encourage a further assertion, and that this assertion will demand yet another submission. Thus one member does not impose a complementary relationship on another member, instead he or she behaves in such a way that assumes and justifies the behaviour of the other. In this way, a fit arises in their definition of the relationship (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Such complementarity further implies that one can consider both sides of any distinction drawn by an observer in such a way that alternative frameworks for observing are created and constructed (Keeney, 1983). Complementarity further implies a process in which different orders of recursion are able to demonstrate how similarities, opposites and extremes are interdependent and mutually connected to each other. With such a complementary view,

one is able to view the autonomy of whole systems, not in the form of outputs and inputs, but rather as wholes. Despite their dissimilar stances, both problem and solution are a particular communication of an encompassing pair or duality (Watzlawick et al., 1967). In this way, wider social discourses do not only generate meanings that deal with problems but also generate meanings that bring forth solutions. The problems and solutions encountered by the working mothers are therefore interdependent yet distinctly separate from one another. They are mutually able to comment on each other in such a way that a holistic connection between the two is gained.

Conclusion

Traditional psychological theories tend to focus entirely on the individual and the problem as lying within the individual. Dismissal of important factors such as family members, home environment, work place, school, neighbourhood and community hampers the observer from acquiring relevant and essential information regarding the individual within his or her context. Systemic and ecosystemic epistemologies, however, consider the individual and his or her problem within a wider context, together with the observer's own behaviour and contribution to the context being observed.

Although it would be reductionistic to reject traditional theories, the approach in this dissertation is to focus primarily on a more integrated and holistic picture of individuals, their problems and their contexts. This chapter has focused on ecosystemic concepts that will aid in the understanding of relationships between working mothers, employers and children. It also aids in the understanding of the interaction between wider social discourses, meanings and the actions that arise out of such meanings. Since childcare is not only a task but also a relationship between parent, child, employer and other individual personalities, an ecosystemic epistemology will attempt to provide a possible framework for understanding and observing the above interplay (Auerbach, 1988). In order to see the meanings and processes taking place in such relationships, the social constructionist perspective is also chosen to understand the existing co-created meanings, perceptions and punctuations inherent in these relationships.

To highlight the mutual interactions occurring between the working mothers and the researcher as well as the meanings that lead to specific choices, perceptions and actions, the next chapter will discuss the research methodology and design. This chapter will consider the naturalistic and qualitative approaches to research methodology and will form the basis of the last three chapters.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

*We're all of us guinea pigs
In the laboratory of God.
Humanity is just a work in progress.
(Tennessee Williams)*

Introduction

The goal in this chapter is to illustrate and describe the design of the research for this dissertation. Integration with the ecosystemic and social constructionist principles discussed in the previous chapter will be presented. Such a study will be carried out with working mothers and will address their perceptions about childcare, work and employer-supported childcare programs. Perceptions, instead of attitudes and feelings, will be discussed mainly because they fit with the theoretical assumptions held by social constructionism. Social constructionism assumes that cognitions and emotions are not part of an “irreducible inner reality” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 10) in which ideas and feelings are created from within the individual as discrete traits or states. Instead, emotions and thoughts are part of a complex web of communication between people (Hoffman, 1992). Human systems are thus considered to be language and meaning-generating. By languaging, humans are able to define a social organisation or a sociocultural system in which meanings and understanding are constructed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). As such, this dissertation will describe the meanings and perceptions held by working mothers regarding various issues. Although it would have been more holistic to incorporate the meanings and perceptions of employers, spouses, children and childcare workers into the research design, such an undertaking would be too extensive for the limited scope of the dissertation. However, by conversing with the mothers it is believed that the perceptions held by significant others will be referred to.

Until recently, perceptions held by different individuals would have been analysed through the lenses of the positivist approach of the physical sciences. Today, however, positivism has been followed by the emergence of a new paradigm (post-positivism) which allows one to research issues in different ways (Moon, Dillon & Sprengle, 1990; White & Epston, 1990). This latter approach is chosen in this particular dissertation by focusing on qualitative and naturalistic principles. Before dealing with this approach in detail, it is necessary to consider the paradigmatic shift that has influenced research and the role of the observer or inquirer.

Positivistic and Naturalistic Inquiry

As described in the previous chapter, a new way of observing individuals, systems and problems has emerged out of traditional psychological approaches. Such a shift has influenced and challenged research methodology and its underlying assumptions, particularly those held by the positivist paradigm. These assumptions include the following. Firstly, positivistic research is based on the notion that there exists an external or 'out there' single and tangible reality. The possibility thus exists for it to be fragmented into independent variables and processed so that whatever one is researching may be controlled and predicted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Secondly, the researcher is seen as having the ability to predict and control representational knowledge in a particular field of phenomena and by doing so, he or she is able to reduce knowledge of patterns and experience to measurable quantities. What arise from such methods are generalisations of descriptions that ultimately become seen as statements of truth. These hold true irrespective of the passing of time and the shifts and influences of individuals and contexts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Harré, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, this kind of research purports to lineal cause and effect, particularly since every action that takes place is due to a cause that precedes or co-occurs with the effect (Harré, 1981). When studying the causal processes inherent in particular situations, a researcher avoids the depth that would exist in the study of internal processes and activities. In this way, important metaphysical assumptions are overlooked, while sensation and direct experience are

excluded from bearing any real significance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Positivistic inquiry thus becomes seen as value-free since it is no longer influenced by assumptions, theories, hypotheses, perspectives, social or cultural norms, and personal or individual values of the researcher (Moon et al., 1990). Social negotiation, sensation and experience that took place between different individuals are therefore not created and discussed. Instead, it is reduced to theoretical terms that only account for an insubstantial representation of the actual experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Harré, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Human or naturalistic inquiry, on the other hand, refers to a process of inquiry in which the mutual collaboration between the researcher and the observed is taken into consideration. The researcher's impact on the particular context is considered by viewing it in terms of self-referentiality (Heron, 1981a; Moon et al., 1990; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Interactions between researcher and subjects contribute directly to the creation of hypotheses, to the formulations of conclusions and to the processes inherent in such interactions. Naturalistic inquiry maintains that all inquiry is value-bound as it is influenced by the values of the inquirer, by the assumptions underlying theory/paradigm, and by the values within the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, both inquirer and 'object' of inquiry are seen in an interaction with one another in such a way that mutual influencing takes place (Reason & Rowan, 1981). Thus, the two are not separate and discrete entities but rather inseparable beings in a recursive and mutually influential world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Heron, 1981a; Keeney, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Naturalistic theory is also very closely related to social constructionist theory which advocates that all values, ideologies and social institutions are man-made (Gergen, 1985; Owen, 1992). Social interpretation and intersubjective influences of language, families, and culture become far more important than orthodox positivistic stances (Hoffman, 1990; Reason, 1994). Just as naturalistic inquiry takes into consideration the active role of the participant in the research process, so too does social constructionism place emphasis on meanings that emerge from the interactions between people (Hoffman, 1990; Moon et al., 1990). According to Osbeck (1993), "social constructionists assert that no 'real world' or objective reality knowably exists independently of human symbolic language" (p. 340). A world of experience

within social and historical contexts is thus constructed through individual and societal interactions (Gergen, 1985).

For the purpose of this dissertation, the research process will focus primarily on naturalistic principles when interviewing three working mothers with preschool children. They will not be viewed as objects or instruments but rather as participants with personal assumptions and values. They will thus play an active and egalitarian role in the study and may even become co-researchers at a later stage (Moon et al., 1990). Furthermore, my role will be that of a participant observer interacting with the other participants over a specific period of time. I, too, will bring in my own values and assumptions which will be reflected upon self-referentially, and together we will build up ideas about the dissertation topic through the process of language and discussion (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Boscolo et al., 1987). We will thus not be seen as individual entities, but rather in circular connection with one another. By being in conversation with one another, new social discourses and social meanings will emerge regarding the dissertation topic (Atkinson et al., 1991).

The Qualitative Research Design

The previous section highlighted basic characteristics of qualitative and naturalistic research. Although a quantitative study might have created a more holistic picture of employer-supported childcare programs in terms of statistical processes, the focus of the study adheres primarily to qualitative notions. These have been chosen for purposes of brevity, personal preference and congruence with the epistemological and theoretical assumptions of the researcher. The following six characteristics of qualitative research will thus form the groundwork for the ensuing inquiry into the issues of working mothers, childcare and employer-supported programs. These characteristics remain interdependent and are based on ecosystemic and social constructionist assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason, 1981).

Natural Setting

Naturalistic researchers choose to “carry out research in the natural setting or context of the entity for which study is proposed” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). This implies that by

spending time in different locales, existing realities will have to be understood contextually and not in isolation (Orford, 1992). Realities are wholes that cannot be fragmented into parts, and since observation influences what is seen, the research needs to take into consideration the entire context including the role of the researcher and the working mother (Hoffman, 1990). Most qualitative researchers believe that actions can be better understood when they are observed in the setting in which they occur. To separate actions, words and feelings from their context is to lose sight of its richer significance and relevance (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For these reasons the inquiry regarding working mothers and employer-supported childcare places importance on the natural setting. Unstructured interviews will be carried out with working mothers either in the home, the work context or both. Depending on what suits the mothers best, the choice of the natural setting will be flexible yet negotiated between the participants and the participant observer. If other individuals (spouses' views and needs) or objects (the home environment) shape the subjects' setting and behaviour then these, too, will be observed.

Process versus Outcomes

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), qualitative principles focus primarily on process rather than on products or outcomes. They consider the "who-does-what-to-whom-when" process, at how people negotiate meanings, how they infer certain assumptions, how interactions take place and how activities are carried out (Hoffman, 1990; Watzlawick et al., 1967). Taking into account the process of interactions between working mothers, families, children, employers and the observer in the interview forms a fundamental basis for the research as new meanings are generated within the process of language (Keeney & Ross, 1992; Watzlawick et al., 1967). These meanings are thus created out of the interactions taking place between individuals so that new or previously held meanings can be shared and co-constructed (Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1992; Osbeck, 1993, Owen, 1992).

Inductive Data Analysis, Emergent Design and Grounded Theory

Qualitative researchers do not gather data that prove or disprove hypotheses they held before carrying out the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Instead constructed meanings, grouped together by the researcher form the basis of the data gathered (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987; Hoffman, 1992). Furthermore, the inquirer's hope is to allow the research design to emerge and unfold, rather than to construct it in a preordained manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe it "theory developed in this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than from the top down)" (p. 31). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this is called grounded theory, in that theory emerges from the data through interviews and interactions between the inquirer, the respondents and the relevant context. Since an *a priori* theory is not able to encompass the multiple realities inherent in the research and since it is often based on generalisations and biases, grounded theory is sought in order to account for the varying contextual and individual values within the context (Reason & Rowan, 1981). It is as if a construction of a picture begins to take shape as the inquirer collects and examines the parts. For Bogdan and Biklen (1992) this process of data analysis can be described as a funnel where "things are open at the beginning (or top) and more directed and specific at the bottom" (p. 32).

In terms of the dissertation's research process such an emergent design has occurred in the way I have approached the research topic. For example, I had intended on interviewing parents regarding childcare and employer-support issues. However, my focus began to concentrate more on the role of working mothers because of the amount of literature I read regarding their responsibilities in caring for the children. Literature regarding working mothers advocates that they still continue to show more responsibility than men when it comes to the care of their children (Browne Miller, 1990; Fernandez, 1986; Tingey et al., 1996). When conversing with fathers and mothers regarding these issues, for example, it was always the mother who showed more interest in the topic. The fathers usually remained silent or moved away from the conversation. In terms of the emergent design I also found that my previously held assumptions about the dissertation topic were modified as I came into contact with literature and with the mothers. A few of my perceptions were modified because of the

co-construction of new meanings that took place in the interviews. These shifts in perceptions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Random and Purposive Sampling

In this dissertation, random/representative sampling is replaced by purposive/theoretical sampling. This approach is preferred because it increases the likelihood of encountering an abundance of multiple realities, mutual shapings and local values (Hoffman, 1990; Keeney, 1983). It exposes the researcher to a larger scope of data and aids in the creation of a grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Moon et al. (1990),

selection means that the researcher delineates the relevant unit(s) of analysis precisely, using criteria based on specific considerations, and then selects participants and/or phenomena for study that meet those criteria. Generally, qualitative researchers prefer to study a few cases intensively in the natural context. (p. 360)

The sampling taking place in this dissertation will thus be purposive in that I will interview working mothers with preschool children of different ages, race, cultural groups and social backgrounds. In all cases the women are employed in large corporations.

Descriptive Research

Once the data have been collected through “participant and non participant observation, interviewing and document analysis”, it will be described in the form of words rather than numbers (Moon et al., 1990, p. 361). The findings, containing transcripts, common themes and quotations of discussions, will illustrate a small aspect of the interview and will be referred to as “assertions” (Moon et al., 1990, p. 361). In this dissertation, it is attempted to describe the conversations with the mothers as truthfully as possible to lay the groundwork for the description required by naturalistic research. Furthermore, since multiple and varying realities exist and since findings are to some degree dependent on the interaction between

inquirer and member, generalisations and simplifications will be avoided (Bateson, 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Legitimation

A fundamental difference between positivist and post-positivist research is the way in which legitimation takes place. Criticism leveled against the latter states that qualitative findings are too subjective, uncontrolled and possibly invalid (Atkinson, Heath & Chenail, 1991; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Atkinson et al. (1991), however, the legitimation of any research finding is not always determined by the researcher him or herself. Instead, the validity of findings, hypotheses and explanations needs to be legitimised as part of a communal process. Communal judgement about the validity of a research design can only take place when the research is accessible to the reader or observer. The role of the researcher is then to present his or her personal way of organising experience so that the reader may have access to the researcher's process of inquiry (Atkinson et al., 1991). By reading about the researcher's own way of drawing distinctions, the reader can then infer his or her own distinctions and punctuations about the study. He or she begins to apply such distinctions into his or her own life by examining the legitimacy of the research process. In this way, the researcher will present a study based on her own distinctions described in chapters three and four, together with new distinctions that will arise collaboratively out of the interviews with the three working mothers. The reader, in turn, will decide on the legitimacy of this study by inferring personal distinctions.

The Influence of Ecosystemic and Social Constructionist Principles on Naturalistic Inquiry

According to Atkinson and Heath (1987), the observer's way of organising the world should be revealed in the research that is being carried out. His or her unique way of perceiving and organising the world will be seen in the way tasks are carried out. In this dissertation my personal way of organising the world and of creating lenses is based on ecosystemic, social constructionist and naturalistic principles. The concepts of holism, double

description, recursion, multiple realities and self-referentiality are also important in the way I interact with the world and with others. Emphasis on shared meaning systems as created through a process of language is also essential to my personal framework. The primary focus of this dissertation is therefore to place meaning on relationships, contexts and languaging processes such that mutual recursions and shared meanings can evolve and be co-constructed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Hoffman, 1990; Keeney, 1983; Owen, 1992). What is important to these lenses is the contribution individuals and observers bring into the research context through the drawing of distinctions upon distinctions upon distinctions. Personal and unique characteristics of all three participants thus have value in their interactions with the participant observer and vice versa (Bateson, 1979; Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Keeney, 1983).

Since the interaction between observer and observed excludes cause and effect, outcomes, generalisations and proving of hypotheses, the focus is placed primarily on the experience of the individual's recursive and language-based interaction with others and the observer. It is this kind of mutual context that Maturana (1975) refers to as the "consensual domain". Here people are seen as being associated with each other in a common world of experience and meaning within their particular ecologies. This consensual domain will bring about a greater understanding of the meanings and thoughts mothers, fathers, families, childcare workers, employers and children have about the childcare issue. It is thus a co-evolution of meaning, through linguistic processes that occurs between observer and observed (Bateson, 1979; Keeney, 1983; Ratner, 1989).

Focus and Design of the Present Study

Research that focuses on experiences, namely experiential research, is referred to by Heron (1981b) as the

kind of research on persons in which the subjects of the research contribute not only to the content of the research, i.e. the activity that is being researched, but also to the creative thinking that generates, manages, and draws conclusions from the research. (p. 153)

The primary focus in this dissertation is to explore the relationship between working parents (particularly mothers), the childcare system and employers in organisations, as well as the relationship between meanings and actions. It is believed that these three subsystems cannot be seen in isolation but rather in a recursively-interconnected manner. It is also believed that meanings, which arise from personal distinctions, wider social discourses and languaging processes, naturally give rise to specific actions and decisions.

This focus was prompted by the conversations I had with a few mothers who felt that they were not spending enough time with their children because of long working hours, harsh employer rules and lack of family benefits. They also complained about the lack of effort they were putting into their work. At this time I was completing my second year in ecosystemic training at UNISA and realised that the subsystems of the working mother, children and employer could be viewed more holistically. In fact, I decided to take all three systems into consideration by considering their mutual interrelation so that new opportunities and solutions could be created for related problems. I began seeing the perceptions of the individuals in all three systems as related to each other and to particular contexts or settings. The more I thought about this the more I moved away from listening to perceptions in isolation but rather to meanings as being co-created by people within a language setting. When undergoing this study I further acknowledged the interaction between meanings (created through processes of social constructionism) and mothers' decisions and actions. The perceptions and meanings the mothers held formed the basis for their decisions regarding issues of work, home and childcare. It was the above perceptions therefore that provided the research with the initial focus.

The research design originated by considering the working mother, the child and the organisation in relation to each other within a dialogue-based context. The meanings that were generated in such a communal context were of value to the design so that relevant information about each subsystem could be gathered. An example of this is seen in the second chapter in which I refer to social discourses of working mothers, childcare experts and employers. I also aimed to examine the link between work productivity and employee benefits. The assumption was based on the notion that working mothers' productivity levels

would increase if more employee benefits were introduced. These benefits consist of on-, off- and near-site childcare centers, alternative work schedules and family benefits. The initial aim was also to interview mothers, fathers and employers regarding employer-support in order to provide the dissertation with a more holistic perspective (Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Keeney, 1983). However, in terms of the limited scope of this dissertation, it was decided that their views would have to be gained either indirectly through what the mothers reported or would have to be considered for later and more comprehensive research endeavours. The design also began to focus primarily on the working mothers' perceptions as a result of the literature that was read. It was evident that in most cases, the mother was and is still mainly seen as the parent responsible for the child's education and well-being. She is the one who bears the children and who is given maternity leave in most organisations. Furthermore, when discussing these issues with both parents, I found that it was the mother who provided the most input and who showed the most interest. These observations do not, however, imply that by including fathers an even richer and more holistic picture could not have emerged.

Choosing the Observer and the Observed

It was decided to interview three working mothers aged 21 and older from different social backgrounds, race, creed and cultural groups within the Gauteng area. Although more women could have been included to create richer descriptions of the issue at hand, it is believed that these experiences will suffice in representing certain consensual experiences regarding the childcare, working mother and employer-support topic. Key themes and meanings in their experiences will be identified and discussed in the next chapter.

It must be noted that the women in the study were not selected randomly but rather purposively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This implies that the women were chosen deliberately because they fitted into the study's goals, and would be instrumental in shedding light on this particular issue. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "all sampling is done with some purpose in mind" (p. 199). In this study the aim was to focus on the many specifics that give the context of each woman its unique flavour. Women in this study were thus distinguished from others by means of the following criteria. Firstly, they had to be mothers of preschool children

(irrespective of the number of children or their ages) and secondly, they had to work in large organisations with personnel ranging from 50 employees and over. Women working from home, in supermarkets, in retail shops, in small or medium enterprise (0-50 employees) or in the government sector were excluded from the study. The aim was also to interview mothers working in the private sector. There was no restriction on language groups, religious backgrounds, social class or colour.

Finding the Observer and the Observed

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), it does not matter where the inquirer begins in the sampling process. The entry route used in this study started with gatekeepers and key persons (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lemmer, 1989). According to Lemmer (1989), these are people who are in "important organisational or socially defined roles as regards the selection of prospective informants" and 'sponsors who make known prospective informants to the researcher" respectively (p. 153).

Thus, the women in the study were located by people who had contact with them or who knew of their particular situations. Their names and telephone numbers were given to me and three women were short-listed from the total of seven names. Telephone calls were then made to the three women who had already been made aware of my intentions through the gatekeepers and key persons. My aims and assumptions concerning the study were discussed with the women beforehand. I also told them that the interviews would be held confidential and anonymous. It was mentioned that the interviews would be unstructured and thus would acquire the genre of a conversation. I also mentioned that the conversation would be recorded for practical reasons. The interviews were then arranged depending on a time and a place that mutually suited both the observer and the observed.

Interviewing the Observer and the Observed

The interviews were conducted during the months of January and February 1999. They were conducted at the mothers' homes or work places as was decided upon during the telephone conversations. Before the start of the interviews, brief social contact took place with each mother and this was followed by a short discussion of the research topic. At this point it was noticeable that I had already entered into a process of mutual influencing with the mothers since my understanding of the topic would already lead them to recursively interact with me in their next dialogue and vice versa. This circular process included the drawing of distinctions upon distinctions upon distinctions, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The sources of data included recorded interviews, brief notes, observations and nonverbal cues about the mother and her context. If family or work members came into the room then these were also considered important to the gathering of the data. The data were based on the conversation topics, ranging from the mother's family and work experiences, her feelings about her employer and family benefits, her responsibilities at home, her relationship patterns with her family and husband, and her feelings towards the researcher and the interview. The interviews were held in an unstructured manner and were informed by my personal theoretical assumptions.

Inductive Data Analysis

Once the recordings were listened to and transcribed (see Chapter 5), a process of inductive analysis was chosen to "make sense" of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). For these authors this is based on a process in which embedded information is uncovered and made explicit. Here, key themes and shared meanings about the context and the lives of the interviewees were comprehended and perceived. Thematic information and emerging patterns were extracted from the data as a basis for the emergent design, the grounded theory and the existence of multiple realities. In this way, *a priori* generalisations were avoided. The aim therefore was for the data analysis to remain open-ended and not deductive, as is common in quantitative research.

Limitations of the Study

Although the dissertation has been approached within the ecosystemic and social constructionist perspective, only the perspective of the mother has been considered in this study. The confines and constraints inherent in the requirements for the dissertation justify this limitation and as such, exclude the perceptions of significant others such as fathers, grandparents, child caregivers, employers and many more. It is nevertheless believed that the three mothers' experiences and perceptions regarding the dissertation topic will be useful in providing a description of the interconnected patterns they have with family and work members, as well as the perceptions held by these individuals.

Conclusion

A verbatim exposition of the perceptions and distinctions drawn by the three women will be discussed in the next chapter. These will exclude any theoretical perspectives and will allow the reader to infer his or her own distinctions regarding the punctuations of the observer and the observed. Chapter 6 will deal with an interpretation or meta-communication of these verbal quotations and will be based on the ideas and principles that were discussed in this chapter as well as in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

**CASE ILLUSTRATIONS: PERCEPTIONS OF THREE WORKING
MOTHERS**

Quot homines tot sententiae: suo quoque mos.

*There are as many opinions as there are people: each has
his own correct way.*

(Terence)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the perceptions held by the three working mothers regarding the dissertation topic in verbatim form. Although their names have been changed for purposes of confidentiality, a detailed presentation of their perceptions and meanings about childcare, employer-support and work issues will be provided in three sections. The three sections will be based on the distinctions I have found to be important and include the role of women in the work place, the role of the employer and the childcare context. The reader will also be able to draw his or her own distinctions about the mother's personal distinctions and punctuations.

Case Illustrations**Relevant Background Information****Sam and the Perfect Childcare Center**

I came into contact with the first working mother (Sam) through a gatekeeper who was aware of her struggles as a mother, student, employee and wife. I phoned her regarding a

possible interview and explained to her what it would entail. She was willing to speak to me regarding her experiences with childcare and employer-support.

Sam is a 23-year old woman from Pretoria, who has been married for four years. Her husband is 25-years old and they have one daughter of three years. Sam is now pregnant for the second time and the baby is expected in March. She has been employed at a well-known bank for the last year and a half as a bank teller, while her husband has been working for the past four years at a welding company. Both of them contribute to the income in the home. At the moment, Sam and her husband have placed their daughter at a day mother. From the conversation it appears that there are no flaws in this arrangement. In fact, both Sam and her husband believe that they have found the perfect childcare center and hope to place their second child with this day mother. Although Sam does not need to find a better childcare center, she did mention that employer-support is lacking within her organisation, and that if it were established her life circumstances would change for the better.

When I telephoned Sam to organise an appropriate time for the interview, it was mutually decided to meet at her home. Since she would be taking two weeks off before returning to work, meeting at her home would be the best option. I arrived at her home in the morning, spoke to her for a while and then moved on to the unstructured interview section, which lasted approximately two hours.

A brief description of Sam's work entails the following. She starts work at eight o'clock every morning and finishes at half past four (4:30 p.m.) in the afternoon. As a full-time worker she gets a 45-minute lunch break with no tea breaks either in the morning or the afternoon. She works six days a week including Saturday mornings. In terms of transport, Sam travels by bus every morning by leaving home at six thirty (6:30 a.m.) and arriving in the evening at five twenty (5:20 p.m.).

Mpho and the Expensive Childcare Center

A key person, who found out about my dissertation topic during a brief conversation, suggested that I interview one of his colleagues at a research center. He found Mpho by contacting the human resources department, who in turn suggested that she would be the perfect person to interview. He immediately approached Mpho and mentioned my interest in speaking to her. Once I had her number I decided to contact her telephonically. She agreed to see me during her lunch break on a Thursday afternoon when she would not be too busy. The interview, however, only lasted 30 minutes as Mpho was called back to her desk.

The interview began with personal details important to the inquiry. Mpho is a 39-year old working woman, who has been employed at this center since 1987. She works as a receptionist in one of the departments and is doing her Std. 10 qualification at night. She has been married for 18 years and has three sons. The oldest child is 18-years old, the middle child is 16-years old and the youngest child is 3-years old. Her husband is 40-years old and works as a salesman. One of the aspects she enjoys most about her work is meeting new people. This characteristic was seen in her conversation with me as we both entered into an amicable and friendly discussion. In terms of preschool arrangements, Mpho has recently placed her youngest son at a childcare center 20 minutes from her home. She decided to change the childcare arrangement since the previous one had not been beneficial to her son's personal care and development. It was also discovered that Mpho's organisation does not offer too many family benefits except the on-site childcare center. Although such an option would be an advantage to Mpho, as well as a means of relieving her pressured timetable, it is nevertheless not viable because it remains too expensive. As such, Mpho's husband has to continue driving his son to the crèche every morning and back home every afternoon within the limits of his own busy schedule.

In terms of working hours, Mpho starts work at eight o'clock in the morning and finishes at half past four (4:30 p.m.). She only gets a 30-minute lunch break with no tea breaks in the morning or in the afternoon. According to Mpho, she is unable to take breaks

because of the nature of her work. She also travels by bus and leaves home every morning at quarter to seven (6:45 a.m.). She gets home in the evenings at quarter to six (5:45 p.m.).

Emma and the Stimulating Childcare Center

The last working mother I interviewed was a single mother of two children aged seven and four. Emma is 35-years old, has been divorced for three years and has custody of her children. Her ex-husband resides in England and only sees the children once a year. Emma has been working at a large insurance company in Johannesburg for the last three years as an underwriter. Every morning she takes her seven-year old daughter to school and leaves her four-year old son at a nursery school halfway between her home and her work. As a single mother, Emma is very busy both at home and at work. She finds it stressful at times to balance both her personal and professional life in a more effortless manner. She thus has to make time for herself early in the morning or late in the evenings for more relaxing moments without the children. Weekends are special moments for Emma and her family since this time is spent together as a family within a less pressured environment. Since Emma does not envision meeting a potential marriage partner in the near future, all her hopes, efforts and time are placed on her children.

When I first heard about Emma, my belief was that her experiences would enrich my study in such a way that it would make it meaningful to other divorced and single mothers. When she agreed to the interview it was decided that I meet her at her home in the evening since her children would be in bed. I arrived there at 7:30 p.m., had a brief chat to her children and saw them to bed at 8:00 p.m. We talked for one hour and thirty minutes. Valuable information was gained regarding her experiences, views and beliefs about the dissertation topic. In particular, Emma places great importance on childcare that is intellectually stimulating and educational. Furthermore, she believes that companies should do more for female employees who have different roles to balance. Her experiences in England show that South Africa is not providing employee benefits to its female workers due to macro-level economic problems. As such, Emma feels that the implementation of such benefits may take a long time to become a reality.

Since Emma is responsible for running her own office, her working hours are not always fixed. Because of the amount of work she needs to do, Emma usually starts working at seven o'clock in the morning and finishes at five o'clock in the afternoon. She usually takes an hour off for lunch but does not take any tea breaks even though they are company policy. Emma travels by car but first drops off her children at their respective schools before going to her work place. She then picks them up once she has left the office.

Presentation of Themes and Meanings

An in-depth inquiry of the interviews brought to light various perceptions and meanings held by the three working mothers regarding the dissertation topic. I aimed to focus on the three themes throughout the interview and thus punctuated the flow of the interview according to these themes. Although they are interrelated, it remains important to discuss them in separate sections. It is believed that in presenting the three themes a research design will emerge and unfold so that new meanings and perceptions can be created and shared in the interactions between the working mothers, their contexts and myself. An discussion of these themes will be provided in the Chapter 6.

Women in the Work Force

During the interviewing process the three mothers openly discussed their perceptions and beliefs regarding the work force, in particular their professions. They also shared their personal beliefs regarding their roles in such a system. It was during this process that new meanings and themes emerged. For example, the following three extracts describe Sam, Mpho and Emma's perceptions regarding their work respectively:

Sam: You know it is a big responsibility, especially at the bank. People don't realise that you're responsible for every penny lying in front of you. You also have a lot of fraud and you have to be alert all day. You can't sleep on the job. So when I

get home, I sometimes feel I have had enough. I can't find it in me to keep my mind fresh all of the time.

Mpho: I am always on the run. Sometimes I cook meals in advance and freeze them so that they can last the whole week and so that my family can help themselves. It [the studies] is only going to last for a year. Then it will get better.

Emma: It can get quite difficult, especially being a single mother. It does happen that when I get too stressed out at work that I do bring it home with me and often let it out on the kids. I know it isn't fair but it does happen.

For Emma, having to balance the roles of being a single and working mother can sometimes lead to stress, guilt and a lack of time by herself. For example:

Emma: Whichever way I look at it I am still going to feel guilty. If I am not working, then I am going to feel guilty because I can't provide for them and if I am working, then I feel guilty because I can't spend time with them. The time we do come together, I think we do spend quality time with each other. Not as much time as I would like but at least some quality time. Okay look, we do have bad days together when things do become quite difficult but we try to get over them quickly and make the best of the situation.

Researcher: What is your schedule like when you come home?

Emma: I come home, I start cooking immediately, we spend some time together and then they go to bed at 8:00 p.m.

Researcher: That doesn't leave you with much time to be with the children.

Emma: No, but we make up for it during the weekends. The weekends belong to us and we make the best of them. That is when we spend the most time with each other.

Researcher: So do you ever have time for yourself?

Emma: Well, I think that is one of the worst problems in my heavy schedule. With the stress I encounter I run the risk of not spending time on my own, which means I really have to work hard at it. At the moment I get to spend some time on my own at night when the kids go to bed and also early in the morning. I wake up each morning at five in the morning just to relax, read and do my own things. That is my time. You see I am very busy in my job so at times I run the risk of being in a meeting with a broker for hours on end. It is quite hard at times.

Researcher: Do you think this affects your family life?

Emma: Yes, my job does affect my family life. I find that I cannot be a mother and a father to my children at the same time. You cannot play two roles. It is one or the other. Not having a father around makes the responsibility and the discipline rest entirely on my shoulders. My ex-husband has no interest in the children whatsoever and he only gets to see them once a year. So yes, it is very difficult. Sometimes I think I am being unreasonable because I come home and my children want to talk to me but I just want to read a book and be quiet. I hope they understand and I hope they won't resent me for having brought them up alone and for not always feeling up to spending time with them.

Although Sam has similar experiences in her day to day living, she prefers working rather than remaining at home. One main reason is the intellectual stimulation she finds within the work place with her colleagues.

Researcher: How does your job affect your family life?

Sam: Sometimes it does affect my family. I have to try not to let it affect me because it isn't my child or husband's fault that I have had a bad day, so I shouldn't let it out on them.

Researcher: Do you ever feel guilty when you are not able to accomplish more than you want?

Sam: Yes, I do. I sometimes wish that I didn't work and that I could be at home to do everything with my child and for my husband. But then also, I was a mother at a young age and I don't feel I must let myself go. One day my children will leave and then? Then I'm going to be alone and what am I going to do with myself? Being in a working environment, despite the bad days, is good for me because at least I get stimulation. I get to socialise with other people, hear their ideas about handling certain situations, and just enjoy their company. I feel you learn a lot when you are with people. If I were to stay at home, then I think I would become nothing. Sitting at home with my children will eventually make me 'bla,bla' just like them. I won't be able to talk to people on a more intellectual level if I don't go out there.

Researcher: I know what you mean. Intellectual stimulation is also important to me and I must admit that I have not found it by being at home all day. I feel that we have the right to be stimulated intellectually in the work place with or without children.

Emma: Oh, yes, otherwise what am I? Only a mother?

Researcher: Do you hold any perceptions regarding staying at home with the children and not getting the desired intellectual stimulation? In other words, could this be a detriment to the child or not?

Sam: Yes, it would be detrimental to the child because as an individual you are not evolving. Our whole lives are based on continual education whether you are 20 or 80 years old. If you're sitting at home, waiting for your husband to arrive, then you're not going to see the world. It will then be more difficult for you to enter into the work field once you child goes to school. I doubt whether it will be easy to get onto the same level as other people should one decide to work. Yes, you will know your ABC but what about all the other things you have missed out on? You're not really going to know how to interact with colleagues because of the established naivete.

Researcher: Do you ever spend time on your own during the day?

Sam: What, just me?

Researcher: Yes.

Sam: (Laughing). Not much. I think it's also because I choose not to do so. I prefer to spend time with my family. They are so much a part of me that time to myself means time with them, you know. If I take a bath, then that is time for myself. Sometimes I will go out into the garden early in the morning in case I need to think things over. Besides that, however, I feel that spending time with them is spending time with myself.

In terms of Mpho's role in the work force, the following was discussed.

Researcher: Mpho, do you ever come home feeling stressed or tired?

Mpho: Yes, I do.

Researcher: How does this affect your family life?

Mpho: Luckily now my family is more independent than before so they can do a lot of things for themselves. Because of this they don't need me there all of the time.

Researcher: Would you still like to spend extra time with them?

Mpho: Yes, especially with my son who wants all of my attention. But he can now play more with his dad and with his brothers so I do not have to take care of him all the time.

In their discussions regarding their perceptions about the work place, the three working mothers held strong beliefs about the influence of stress not only on their families but also on their levels of productivity. Sam, who spoke primarily about her views on her colleagues, shared specific meanings regarding the correlation between stress and productivity levels.

Sam: Yes, sometimes they phone in saying that they are sick but in the meantime they have to look after their children [who are sick]. Sometimes they come to work late because they couldn't find anyone good enough to look after the sick child.

For Emma, productivity levels are affected when she begins to display concern over her children's well-being during her working hours.

Emma: I have found that I spend a lot of my time phoning my children to find out if they are okay. This usually affects my job and I suppose my productivity level. After all I am using up their [the company's] time and money to ease my personal worries. So maybe in that respect my stress levels are affecting my productivity level.

The three mothers did, however, mention that the decreases in productivity levels are due to the way their employees treat them within the work force. For example, according to Mpho she does not feel that the company cares for her.

Researcher: Do you feel important as a woman in this organisation?

Mpho: No, not really. They don't really help us with all the things we are going through. We have to do everything for ourselves and try to keep all the things in our lives balanced.

Researcher: I sense this is a big problem in many companies and with many women. You said you have been here for 12 years. Have you noticed any changes in the way the company has approached women over the last few years?

Mpho: Nothing. The company still focuses all their attention on the men and not many benefits are given to the women. In a way we are not that important.

Sam also felt that her company only sees her as a resource that brings in the money.

Sam: It is only with your colleagues that some form of friendship exists. They are the ones who show concern, who ask about your problems, about your family. The company, itself, doesn't care. You are just a number in there. They pay your salary at the end of the month and if you make a mistake, they jump on your head. Yet, if you do well, they tend to brush it off. They don't see you as a mom. You are just a worker and you have to do your job. They are not really interested.

Sam related the fact that she experienced a few problems with her company regarding the maternity policy. Since she would be having her second baby in March, she asked the management board if she could take maternity leave two weeks before the due date. According to her contract it is stated that any employee can take time off from four weeks of the expected date. The management board, however, denied her this request saying that she had to take leave four weeks before the due date. Alternatively, she would have to ask her doctor to write a letter stating that she would be physically healthy two weeks before the due date. This suggestion would be impossible to accomplish since it would require her doctor to

guarantee her health. The bank then suggested that her doctor write a letter stating that her due date would be two weeks later than expected. Sam found this unacceptable, as it would require her doctor to lie. She thus decided to leave four weeks prior to the birth, and had the following to say.

Sam: They don't have much respect. In the first place, they don't look after your personal needs and what is worse is that they are prepared to lie. I can't believe that lying is acceptable to them when it is the worse thing that can happen in a bank system. It makes me angry that they can't review their policies to make our lives easier. The company doesn't really care for the actual person who has to receive the policy rules. Because they are so inflexible I am going to struggle financially. I'm still lucky because I can live on my husband's salary but what about all those other women who don't have husbands?

Researcher: How do you feel towards your company?

Sam: Look, I can understand that they are losing money when one of us becomes pregnant and has to stay at home. But you still need to feed your family and feel that your are being recognised as human beings.

Researcher: What are your impressions regarding the other mother's perceptions?

Sam: They get angry too. During maternity leave we only get paid 15% of our salary. This is too little for those who cannot afford it. Many of them have to make UIF claims even if that is a complicated issue on its own.

When asked about productivity level within the company, Sam said the following.

Sam: I don't feel I am encouraged to do my best. If someone isn't going to look after you, then you are not going to be productive. If they look at you as an employee, then they should also look at you as a mother and a wife with a family. You

won't feel like working for someone who isn't looking after your interests. You will do your job, but you won't do it in the best possible way. After all, you are still going to get the same in the end.

Improvement in the working hours would be beneficial to Sam, especially since her employers expect her and her colleagues to remain at work until late in the evening. Such long hours affect her busy schedule and usually cause a lot of stress and dissatisfaction within the family setting. A similar sentiment was raised in the interview with Emma, who admitted that she resents her company for not giving her some form of compensation for the hard work she does.

Researcher: How do you see the company treating you as a working mother?

Emma: I'm not sure...I think they just look at you as someone who can bring in the revenue. They don't see that you have a life outside your job environment.

Researcher: Is your company male dominated?

Emma: Yes, if I look around me there are many guys doing the same job as me but they are earning 40% more.

Researcher: Do you think that your perceptions about your company affect your productivity levels?

Emma: Well, I am able to focus on my work but I must admit that I carry out my job with some form of resentment, especially since I am not getting any compensation from them. I know I work damn hard. I am probably the only female employee with children out on the road. All the other men have wives looking after their children. Yet, I think that if more mothers had more benefits then they would probably produce more in the long run.

A discussion of the above perceptions will be given in more detail in the next chapter. The next section, however, provides a discussion of the perceptions of women regarding childcare issues. These are important for the dissertation as a whole and as such, were mentioned by the researcher in the interview.

Childcare Arrangements

The three working mothers have chosen different childcare arrangements for their children. For example, Sam has placed her child with a day mother because of its proximity to the home and because of the reliability she experiences with the day mother. She had the following to say about the day mother.

Sam: I know her well and I know that my child is being cared for in the best possible way... You see, I found someone who is perfect in looking after my child. I don't have a hassle in the world. She is close by and if I come home really late then I know my child is in good hands and that I don't have to pay for the overtime hours... She is quite flexible. I'll drop my child off in the mornings and I will fetch her in the afternoon. The day mother waits until I arrive...

Researcher: How were you able to find such a good childcare center for your child?

Sam: Well, I found out about the day mother when I saw her center's name on her gate. She only lives two houses away from me. I then decided to place her there and since then I have had no regrets. I believed she could offer my child personal attention and this is what made me choose a day mother instead of a crèche. Also, the chances of my daughter getting ill are not so great with the day mother and I know that if my daughter were to become ill then help would be at hand.

Researcher: How many children does the day mother look after?

Sam: Only my child because at the beginning of this year all the other children started school. Soon she will be caring for another two babies. When I have my second baby then the day mother will also take care of it.

Researcher: How long has your child been cared for by the day mother?

Sam: For about three years when I started work at my previous job. I got a bit of a fright this year when all the other kids left and she said she was going to close down. I thought I would have to leave my job and come home. Anyway, she saw how upset I was and decided to stay on with my child. She will now continue to look after the other babies. What a relief!

Mpho decided not to choose a day mother but rather a crèche. At the beginning of this year she realised that her child's previous day care center was not fulfilling her needs for good childcare in terms of physical and developmental growth. She decided to look for alternatives and ultimately found a better crèche, although far from her home. However, knowing that her child is in safe and loving hands is far more important to Mpho and her husband than the distance.

Mpho: I went there with my husband and a friend and we were very happy. It was a clean environment, there were many toys, and they took me around to look at the crèche. There was also a lot of food around and a menu for each day. You see, at the previous day care center my child would often come home dirty and hungry.

Researcher: So how many children are at this center?

Mpho: I'm not really sure, but I think about 100.

Researcher: And their ages?

Mpho: The ages range from two to about six.

Researcher: How many caregivers look after the children?

Mpho: Let me see. There are two ladies for the babies, three for the toddlers and two for the older children.

Researcher: Does the crèche have an educational focus?

Mpho: Definitely. It is much better than the other because they teach them songs and read stories. It is very good.

Emma also chose to place her child in a nursery school because of its proximity to her home and work as well as the focus on education. The proximity of the school makes it easier for her to drop and fetch her son in the mornings and afternoons. Although it is a large nursery school, there are only 15 children in her son's age group. Emma's main reasons, however, for having chosen such a childcare center revolve around her perceptions and beliefs that a scheduled routine and intellectual stimulation are essential for a child's growth.

Emma: I think I have found a good childcare center. You see I didn't want him to sit in front of a TV all day or play all of the time. I wanted him to go into a constructive environment where his interests would be stimulated. For me this is important, especially because I was brought up by my nanny when I was a child and there was no stimulation there whatsoever. Today you can't do this. Today children have to be brought up differently. They have to learn to stand on their own.

For Sam, the emphasis on educational stimulation was not the primary issue for having chosen the specific day care. The fact that there is some focus on educational development by the day mother is nevertheless an added advantage.

Researcher: Does the day mother merely look after your daughter's practical needs or is it more than that?

Sam: Well, she looks after her by feeding her, changing her clothes, making her take naps, and things like that, but she also teaches her how to do things around the home like work in the garden or clean something that is dirty. So she teaches my child things about the home.

Researcher: In terms of education?

Sam: The day mother hasn't been trained as a teacher but she will read to my daughter, teach her how to spell her name, teach her about the alphabet and words...she also teaches her songs and rhymes.

Researcher: Are you happy with this focus on education?

Sam: I think that for the moment I am. I believe that I'll have to put her in a preschool center before she goes to school. However, if I could keep her at the day mother until then, I would. She gets a lot out of being there.

Researcher: What else do you think she gets from the day mother?

Sam: Discipline. Also the learning of manners. I'm very happy with where she is and I wouldn't swop her for anything else.

Sam thus focuses more on custodial care and encourages some form of education and social development. Although she did not choose the latter at the beginning of her search, it appears that she is gaining more than what she expected. Because of the added benefits her child is getting at the day mother, her decision to keep her child there is steadfast.

Another theme that was purposefully introduced into the interviews involved the issue of employer-support. The three working mothers felt strongly about this issue and mentioned that it would be a relief if it were implemented in their work places.

Employer-supported Childcare Programs

Mpho believes that if her company were to provide employer-support, then many of her childcare problems would be alleviated. She spoke specifically about an already existing family benefit in the company, in the form of an on-site childcare center.

Researcher: How would the childcare center improve your lifestyle?

Mpho: Like this my husband would not have to drive around so much. Sometimes he has to go see a client at about six in the morning and this causes a lot of problems. He really has to travel a lot and sometimes he gets to his work quite late. Also, if I did bring my child here then I could travel with him and it would be good to have him around. I could also go visit him and spend more time with him. If something happened to him, like if he got sick, then I could go see if he was alright. I would be able to take care of him better. You see if my child was here then I could go see if he is feeling well or sick.

Researcher: When would you visit him?

Mpho: I could go there during my lunch hour because it isn't too far. I could always check up on him. If I could also just give him a hug occasionally, then I would feel great. But like this he is really far away.

Such an arrangement would not only help her get closer to her son but it would also help her husband with his own busy schedule. Although it appears like an attractive option, Mpho does not make use of it because of one specific reason.

Mpho: It is too expensive for me. I can not afford it. It is a pity because it would have been much better for me but I just can't afford it.

Sam had the following to say regarding childcare benefits at the bank.

Researcher: Are there any family benefits that your bank provides to its employees?

Sam: What do you mean by benefits?

Researcher: For example, does the bank provide time off for you to look after your child when she is ill? Do they have childcare facilities on or off the premises? What about flexi-time options in which you work for a certain amount of hours depending on your needs? Are there other benefits such as job sharing, alternative work schedules, sick leave policies? Things like that.

Sam: Not that I know of. Sometimes if I need time off then I have to speak to management, who might or might not agree to give me that time off. This, of course, is not bank policy.

Researcher: So what are your views concerning alternative family benefits? Would you ever leave your child in a childcare center that has been organised by your employers? Would you choose something like this?

Sam: I think it is quite useful for mothers who have problems in finding a place for their children and for mothers who are spending too much money on travelling. I don't think I would do it though.

Researcher: For what reasons?

Sam: I'm just the type of person who needs to concentrate on only one thing in order to do something well. If I knew my child were next door then I would probably

want to visit her all the time. My concentration at work wouldn't be so good then. I already need to balance a whole bunch of things when I am at home, so I think it would be difficult for me to balance two things at a time during work hours. It could also happen that my child would begin to become attached to me and clingy. I wouldn't want that. In fact I am glad with the independence she is getting at the day mother. That's the other thing, because I have found the perfect day mother for my child I do not need to find a better childcare option. Because I know her so well and because I know that my child is being cared for in the best possible way, I do not need to look around. You see, I'm so used to her and because I took a long time to find her I wouldn't like to do it all over again. She is perfect in looking after my child and because of her I do not have a hassle in the world. She is close by and if I come home really late then I know my child is in good hands. I don't even have to pay for the overtime hours.

Researcher: That makes a lot of sense. It seems that you have found the perfect daycare center and that it is sufficient in meeting all of your needs as a working mother. Is your husband also happy with this arrangement?

Sam: For sure!

Researcher: So what do you think something like this would mean for other mothers who do not have the same benefit as you? Do you find that your female colleagues who have children experience problems regarding childcare?

Sam: Yes, a lot of them are usually stressed out because they have so many responsibilities. I know that many of them have to work because of the money and because it makes them feel more useful in society, but if they work long hours then that is where the problems start. Most of them have to pay overtime if they fetch their children an hour late. Sometimes their children become really sick because of all the germs floating around, and sometimes when their children are ill they can't take them to crèche in case they spread the virus. Usually, they

have to find someone who can look after the child or lie to the bank by saying that they are ill themselves.

Researcher: Really? That can lead to a lot of stress and a lot of reorganisation in their lives.

Sam: Yes, sometimes they phone in saying that they are sick but in the meantime they have to look after their sick children. Sometimes they come to work late because they couldn't find anyone good enough to look after the sick child.

Researcher: So what do you think family benefits or a childcare center in the work place would do to help these mothers?

Sam: It would probably facilitate their lives. It would make life much easier for them. For example, some of them are single or divorced and they have difficulty in taking the child to the center and still have to go to work. At least I have a husband who could help me with that. Also, they wouldn't have to worry about their children being far from the job. They could probably take a look at them during their breaks. It would maybe also help with their relationships at home with the husband and the children. The mother wouldn't have to be so stressed and in that way she would be able to spend more time with the child. It would probably be safer too.

The insurance company where Emma works also does not provide benefits for the female worker. This is unacceptable for Emma, who believes that companies should offer some form of support to their work force. In terms of on-site care, Emma believes that these are important in order to provide assurance that the child is safe and secure. Although she deems this an attractive option, she would nevertheless not make use of it. Her perceptions include the following:

Emma: By having a childcare center within the organisation environment you can feel more secure knowing that your child is being looked after and that should an

emergency occur, you are right there to help him or her. Like this, you are able to visit during lunch hours or short breaks to check up or spend more time with the child.

Researcher: Would you choose something like this for your children?

Emma: Yes, definitely but not in this country. Overseas maybe, but not here.

Researcher: Why not?

Emma: Well, I would never drag my children to Johannesburg. It isn't safe and it is dirty and polluted. I wouldn't subject my child to that kind of environment. I would rather expect my company to help me financially to find alternative methods. I am producing something for them and I expect something back in return from the people I am working for. You know, Paula, a company does not necessarily have to build a childcare center in the work place. They could always help the parents financially by sending the child to an off-site childcare center.

Researcher: Because Emma spent a considerable amount of time in the UK, she also had the following to say regarding her past and present experiences with childcare and employer-support.

Emma: It is going to take another 20 years for this country to realise that women are equal to men and that they deserve better benefits than the ones given to them now. Men can't handle stress the way women can. I am convinced about that. It is a very unusual man who can handle a home, a job and be a single parent at the same time. I know of men who have left their jobs to be with their family, but only in England. In terms of social security, we don't even have it in our country. Things like free milk for babies, free medical aid until the age of 18, help from an au pair. We just cannot afford it in this country; it would ruin our economy.

Conclusion

My aim in these interviews was to have the conversation flow normally but still retain the main themes as presented in the dissertation topic. As such, I asked the mothers to relate their experiences and perceptions regarding their roles as working women and mothers, their perceptions about childcare, and finally their perceptions and suggestions regarding employer-support. The next chapter will describe my personal distinctions regarding the interviews as well as the emergent design and grounded theory.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

*This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
(Robert Browning)*

Introduction

In this chapter the meanings that were co-constructed and shared in the interviews with the three working mothers are considered. The central meanings that emerged during the interviews will be discussed in terms of themes, and these will be illustrated in terms of the collaborative approach occurring between the working mothers and the researcher. Since these themes were shared with three different mothers at different interviewing times, the differentiation between the individual interviews will be lost in the discussion. A meta-level commentary of such themes will be provided in such a way that the researcher's personal epistemology is demonstrated. The mode of presentation will thus involve a recursive link between theory and practice. The reader will also be provided with an opportunity to infer his or her own personal distinctions.

The Emerging Design and Self-referentiality

As stated in Chapter 4, the positivist paradigm is mainly concerned with an objective and real world. This implies that absolute truths exist and that people are able to know reality objectively. Post-positivism, however, denies such a possibility and states that no absolute truth can exist outside a context and an observer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981). To illustrate this, I will describe the basic assumptions and punctuations that form the basis of the research method and design (Keeney, 1983). I started the interviewing process believing that there were three important aspects inherent in the working mother, childcare and

employer-support issue, namely the roles of working mothers in the work force, their choices regarding childcare and employer-supported programs. My principal objective was to elicit meanings regarding these issues. I purposefully asked them about their perceptions about such issues and in this way, themes were chosen according to my personal framework. These punctuations were guided by previously held ideas, tacit knowledge and limited experience in this field. Such self-referentiality was important to the researcher because it not only took the meanings of the working mothers into account, but the researcher's meanings too. It also considered personal epistemological assumptions, frames of reference, values, tacit knowledge and biases of the researcher when interacting with the working mothers. The observer was then able to see herself within a holistic framework of simultaneous interactions and personal epistemological assumptions (Efran & Lukens, 1990; Keeney, 1979; Varela & Johnson, 1976).

As mentioned before, it was my aim to accept and value all three mothers' points of view and existing realities. I attempted to understand their realities and experiences within the various contexts of their lives, namely their home, work and study contexts. We thus embarked on a journey in which we tried to make sense of one another's assumptions in a mutually recursive manner (Boscolo et al., 1987; Varela & Johnson, 1976). In such a system, I would refrain from analysing inputs and outputs, but rather become a participant in that which was observed (Boscolo et al., 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This would eliminate the existence of an outside and objective environment and thus create a process whereby the working mothers and myself would continually punctuate each other's flow of interaction (Keeney, 1983). Such punctuation allowed for double descriptions to take place and thus for a sense of the whole to emerge. Multiple descriptions between the women, their different contexts, and the researcher were created to allow for an emergence of meanings within the context of the unstructured interviews (Bateson, 1979; Penn, 1982).

These personal punctuations, however, were not rigid or fixed. As seen in the interviews and the grounded theory, my previously held assumptions and punctuations soon expanded and changed once the conversations with the working mothers began. This took place in terms of social constructionist thinking, which advocates that when language occurs in any particular context, the obvious outcome is a generation and co-construction of shared

meanings and beliefs (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Thus, in the languaging process between the mothers and myself, new meanings and themes emerged by means of mutual punctuation and distinction drawing (Keeney, 1983).

This chapter not only takes into account these co-created meanings but also demonstrates how meanings are co-constructed and shared when humans engage in a process of dialogue. The themes that will be presented include the following: meanings around problems, meanings around motherhood, meanings around employment, meanings around work productivity, meanings around employee satisfaction, meanings around the childcare context and meanings around solutions. These themes will be discussed on a meta-level and will be linked to the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Before dealing with these themes, however, a brief discussion of the relationship process between the mothers and the researcher is provided.

Recursive Interactions in the Unstructured Interviews

An important aspect of ecosystemic and qualitative thinking is the belief that no single and tangible reality exists. Instead, it is believed that multiple realities exist and that all human beings are capable of drawing personal distinctions and punctuations (Bateson, 1972; 1979; Keeney, 1983). Furthermore, it is believed that research is not a process in which there exists an independent observer unilaterally controlling or manipulating a system. Rather, there exists a mutual collaboration between the researcher and the observed within a process of dialogue, such that new meanings and belief systems are shared and co-constructed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Heron, 1981b). In the light of the above assumptions, my aim was not to try and alter the system of the mother I was working with, but rather to recursively connect with her in such a way that distinctions could be drawn and shared.

In this way, I tried to keep the interviews as unstructured as possible allowing the interview to flow in the form of a conversation. However, the tape recorder did remind us of the meaning and purpose of the conversations. Although it did not impact negatively on the nature of the interactions, the notion that I was there for a reason and that the conversations

would serve a purpose still persisted. The conversations thus began in a short and formal manner but later evolved into a more elaborate discussion with a sharing of meanings and experiences. The nervousness that existed at first between the mothers and myself soon disappeared as we mutually interacted with one another by sharing common thoughts and feelings. This process was facilitated by the use of joining skills as discussed by Minuchin and Fishman (1981). Here I tried to affiliate myself to the mothers by showing confirmation and recognition of their different experiences. I took an uncritical position and tried to make them feel recognised in their conversations with me. It was a type of interaction that contributed greatly to the creation of further assumptions and meanings regarding the childcare and employer-support issue. In this way, a rich description of the issues at hand was made possible through the process of social constructionism.

It was also interesting to note how my assumptions and values influenced the process of the conversation. Since in terms of self-referentiality, the research cannot be value free, descriptions and punctuations of the contexts with the three mothers became reflective of my own properties (Varela & Johnson, 1976). It was my aim to be aware of my own contributions to the system as a whole, especially when I, as an observer, would become an essential member in perceiving, acting and creating my own reality within the interviewing context. In this way, my questions regarding a particular aspect of the mothers' experiences (based on my assumptions and values) were usually followed by the mothers' responses regarding that issue (based on their own assumptions and values). My behaviour was a comment on the mothers' behaviours, which in turn became a comment on my own behaviour in a recursive feedback spiral. This recursion continued throughout the interviews as both the mothers and myself simultaneously acted on each other in a mutually recursive manner. Recursive patterns between the mothers and the different people within their lives were also acquired through the mothers' unique realities and descriptions thereof. I was able to gain an idea of the interconnected and already established patterns between the mothers and their spouses, children, employers, colleagues and day caregivers (Auerswald, 1985; Jasnoski, 1984; Stachowiak & Briggs, 1984). It was a complex interaction in which lineal sequencing was replaced by a movement of circularity with no beginning or end. It was also an interaction that provided for a convergence of multiple realities, which would ultimately create

a more holistic picture of the meanings in question (Bateson, 1979; Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Keeney, 1979; 1983). Such a process will inevitably continue as the reader infers his or her own personal distinctions on the shared themes that will be presented next.

Presentation and Discussion of Shared Meanings

According to qualitative/naturalistic thinking, all values, ideologies and social institutions are man-made (Gergen, 1985). This implies that meanings and belief systems emerge out of the interactions taking place between people in different contexts (Hoffman, 1990; Moon et al., 1990). Language is thus never static or constant, but rather always changing and evolving through a process of dialogue. In terms of the dissertation's research process, this implies that the way I viewed specific issues in the past inevitably changed and evolved as I entered into a dialogical process with the three working mothers. In other words, it was through the dialogue with the three working mothers that previously held constructs and beliefs were challenged and modified (Osbeck, 1993; Owen, 1992).

The interviews thus commenced with a discussion of problems experienced by the mothers in their day to day living. These problems related to the stress experienced by them in the home and work environment. As Anderson and Goolishian (1988) have stated, the system that converges around a problem will be considered a linguistic system where beliefs, meanings and understandings are mutually co-constructed. This implies that individual members in a particular system engage with each other in a linguistic process and create beliefs about a particular problem. Anderson and Goolishian refer to this as problem-organising systems in which individuals create their own systems according to their understandings and beliefs regarding a particular issue. Furthermore, a 'consensual domain' is formed between the participants and the participant observer as both reciprocally share ideas, beliefs and meanings about the particular topic at hand (Maturana, 1975). From the interviews, I also discovered a connection between the working mothers' values or meanings and wider social discourses. For example, in one case there was a focus on self-actualisation and intellectual stimulation arising from the work force. This reflects the current Western

feminist discourse that advocates the role of working mothers outside the home. Other shared ideas, beliefs and meanings that emerged were the following.

Meanings around Problems

A considerable amount of time was devoted to describing perceptions and beliefs regarding the experience of problems in the work and home context. All three mothers come from different contexts bearing different social discourses. However, a common meaning to all three was based on the prevailing feeling of stress and concern that is experienced within the work and home contexts. In the discourses with the three mothers, it was mentioned that difficulty is experienced in having to continually balance a set of multiple roles. For Mpho, Sam and Emma these meanings include the maintenance of the home environment (caring for the family), dedication to the work environment and other activities such as personal moments or extramural studies.

The working mothers' meanings are in some way related to wider social discourses that have been introduced by feminist and economic discourses. For example, since both advocate the need of the woman to work, whether it is for personal or financial reasons, it places added pressure on many women to enter the work force. This implies that they are faced with added work and home responsibilities, as well as stress in the accomplishment of all roles. In the research process, the three mothers mentioned that they have difficulty finding time for themselves, as they dedicate many of their hours to work and home chores. Although they place meaning on the need to spend quiet moments by themselves, all three hold different ideas about accomplishing such a task. For example, it is important for Emma to be on her own in order to reconnect with herself. She places importance on quiet times with few distractions and noise in order to read a book or complete unfinished home chores. Sam also deems this necessary but attaches different meaning to the concept of spare time. Although it is necessary for her to wake up early in the morning to walk in the garden alone, or to lie in her bath at night when everything is quiet, her meanings concerning spare moments are primarily connected to the idea of spending time with her family. For Sam, these moments entail a reconnection with her spirit and, by being with her husband and children, she is able to

feel happy and reconnected. The perceptions expressed by Sam illustrate the role of contexts as determining the behaviour of an individual (Orford, 1992). In other words, behaviour is always context-specific because of its role in shaping perceptions and behaviours. In this regard, one assumes that the behaviours and experiences of mothers evolve with changes in contexts.

Due to the many responsibilities Mpho has to fulfil on a daily basis, she does not view free time as a necessity. Free time for her is as important as the ability to accomplish all the responsibilities in the home and work place. She thus places greater value on responsibility and development within the family context. Furthermore, even if it is difficult to accomplish all her responsibilities, the support her family gives her makes this worthwhile. The knowledge that they are there as a support system is vital in helping her fulfil tasks and duties. Meaning is therefore placed on the role her family plays as a supporter and helper.

Mpho: It is not easy but my family supports me. I also feel I need to do this [study] for myself in case I lose my job and have to find new work.

Researcher: So you obviously don't have too much time for yourself or your family when you go home.

Mpho: That is true. I am always on the run. Sometimes I cook meals in advance and freeze them so that they can last the whole week and so that my family can help themselves. It is only going to last for a year. Then it will get better.

Another meaning held by Mpho is the value that is attached to the idea of studying. Mpho feels that this will improve her qualifications and help her attain better employment should she lose her current position. Preparing herself for the future through education constitutes an important meaning in Mpho's meaning system. Studying is thus far more important than giving it up and experiencing less stress, burdens and work or home responsibilities. Such a meaning arises from wider social discourses that place emphasis on furthering one's education. It also arises from economic discourses that accent the lack of

work opportunities in the current South African situation. These discourses are connected to Anderson and Goolishian's (1988) principles of problem-organising systems. In this regard, humans coalesce around the problem that few work opportunities exist in the current labour market and that in order to find employment an individual has to have some form of education. However, as in all cases, languaging about such a problem will eventually lead to the co-creation and co-evolution of new meanings and solutions (Anderson, 1992; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Goolishian & Anderson, 1987). One such solution involves either going back to school to complete unfinished standards or enrolling at a college, technikon or university to acquire a better education. According to Mpho, furthering her education by obtaining adequate qualifications is one way of "dis-solving" the problem.

Based on Mpho's meanings, it is further assumed that the father and the family can play a vital role in the life of the working mother. The assumption is that if fathers and children help mothers with household responsibilities and provide emotional support, then the stress and pressure experienced by the mothers may decrease. For example, Mpho's husband is able to take their child to school on his way to work. Although this helps Mpho considerably in that she need not make alternative arrangements, it is clear that he is beginning to experience problems attached to role multiplicity. The assumption thus exists that the stress experienced by the husband may in some way be influencing the stress experienced by the mother. It would be valuable to research families with fathers who help with home responsibilities and chores. Viewing the father within the contextual experiences of the working mother highlights the ecosystemic principle that places emphasis on relationships within particular social domains. Ecosystemic epistemology advocates the belief that an individual cannot be seen in isolation but rather in connection to others (L'Abate et al., 1986). The working mother and her husband are not independent of each other, but are rather in a process of interaction where both mutually influence and are influenced by each other (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Since each member relates in a mutual manner with other members through personal epistemological assumptions and meanings about the world, future research should take into consideration the role of the father when attempting to understand the working mother and childcare issue (Selvini et al., 1980).

Meanings around Motherhood

The stress and pressure of fulfilling multiple roles and needs are also coupled with a sense of guilt that is experienced by many mothers (Hart, 1997). In most cases this guilt involves not being able to spend more time with the children because of work and home responsibilities. Emma mentioned that she experiences a considerable amount of guilt about not spending more time with her family. Her meanings about motherhood involve the need to care for her children by spending more time with them, and the fact that she is unable to do so creates a great deal of pain and confusion. Since there is no way in which she can avoid earning a living, she tries to put this pain behind her and make the best of the situation.

Sam, too, experiences guilt in her day to day experiences and wishes that she could be at home to provide for her husband and child. Although her meaning structures about motherhood involve caring for the child in the best way possible, they do differ from those of Emma. For example, Sam feels that it is important to send her child to a childcare center because of her own need for social contact within the work place. Sam fears the loss of such contact with her colleagues and places more meaning on achieving intellectual, emotional and social stimulation through her profession. Sam perceives that such stimulation cannot be attained anywhere else besides in the work environment, and as such, one of her options is to remain at work and place her child with a day mother.

From the above, it is assumed that one's experience of guilt in leaving the children with a caregiver remains a personal distinction or choice, and is closely connected to meanings around what it is to be a mother. It also arises from the demands of certain social discourses that emphasise the danger children are likely to face when absent from their mothers on a continual basis. For some mothers, these social discourses affirm the belief that a fulltime mother is always better for the child's psychological well-being. These social discourses create a situation in which mothers tend to feel guilty about being absent from their children's lives. However, not all mothers are prone to accepting such beliefs. Other wider social discourses have come to the fore and emphasise the right of women to enter the work place in order to gain self-fulfillment and a salary. Since not all mothers share the same ideas about

childcare and motherhood responsibilities, one acknowledges the validity of multiple realities, which allow for different punctuations to be drawn by any individual. The fact that mothers share different meanings supports the ecosystemic assumption about multiple realities. This principle posits that all individuals have their own particular view of specific issues, and since they have different habits of punctuation, they are then able to construct a particular world of experience (Bateson, 1979; Keeney, 1983). However, there is no one “true” set reality or “true” set of meanings. Instead, realities and meanings are part of a general flow of changing narratives occurring within a socially and intersubjectively constructed context (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Lax, 1992; McNamee, 1992). In this way, the punctuations of the different mothers emerge from past and present discourses or contexts, and remain subjective, distinct and unique.

Self-referentially, it was also believed that all mothers would inevitably experience feelings of guilt when having to leave their children in a childcare facility. It was further believed that all mothers would want to be with their children at home instead of at work. Such beliefs were, however, modified when I came into contact with Sam, who was able to provide me with a feasible explanation for why some working mothers may not experience the expected guilt. My ideas were only able to evolve by collaboratively languaging with Sam around this issue. This illustrates social constructionist thinking, which focuses on meanings that are generated, maintained and evolved in a socially constructed manner (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

Meanings around Employment

In the discussion of the reasons for entering the work force, Sam once again confirmed the view that the choice women make to enter the work force is not only based on financial needs. Her need to work is not only financial but emotional and social too (Young & Jackson, 1973). She thus places meaning on the stimulation and personal benefits that can be acquired in the work environment. By working, she is able to achieve increased independence and feelings of self-worth as well as a greater sense of personal satisfaction and self-accomplishment. For Sam, this is more meaningful than being at home on a full-time basis.

Sam: If I were to stay at home, then I think I would become nothing. Sitting at home with my children will eventually make me 'bla-bla' just like them.

It is apparent that Sam's meanings about employment are connected to wider social discourses around a woman's right to self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968). These discourses have informed her decisions to enter the work place, especially since these have been able to fulfil her needs for emotional and social development. Wider social discourses have thus not only "dictated" what she should do, but have also empowered her to seek self-actualisation outside the home context.

For Emma and Mpho, however, their working needs are mostly financial. A possible reason for this arises out of their personal contexts and lives. For example, Emma is a divorcee who does not receive much maintenance from her husband, but who feels obliged to support her family financially. Her meaning structures emphasise the need for a reasonable standard of living in which her family need not encounter financial difficulties. In this regard, one can highlight the importance of certain social discourses that advocate single mothers to work. For example, when a mother is single, divorced or widowed, it is discourses that she be the financial supporter in the home. There are few if no policies or organisations that will provide for the family without a male supporter. With such an absence, society has advocated that mothers enter the work force in order to provide for the family. Since the mother is capable of working, it is then expected that she do so. In this way, individual decisions and behaviours are seen to be reciprocally linked to meanings that have been created from wider social discourses in a particular society (Gergen, 1985).

Mpho also finds it necessary to work because of the financial obligations she faces. Once again, wider social discourses have advocated that the wife help the husband by entering the work place, particularly when factors such as inflation, low salaries and a need for a higher standard of living abound. The wife is then no longer expected to stay at home with the children, but rather new perceptions about the wife are created to allow her to leave the home and to help the husband financially. Since Mpho has three children, two of whom are busy

with their secondary education, she feels obliged to help her husband financially. Her reasons for doing so are not only based on wider social expectations, but also on her meaning structures, which place importance on her role as a wife and a mother actively involved in the financial well-being of her family.

Meanings around Work Productivity

Another shared meaning which was co-constructed in the interview involves the relationship between the work context and the home environment. According to Adolf & Rose (1988), stress and anxiety regarding home responsibilities can interfere with work productivity, especially if the stress is evident in most aspects of the mother's life. Factors such as finding appropriate and quality childcare, being with children when they are ill, building relationships with family members and trying to do well within the work setting can lead to feelings of stress. Such stress, in turn, may lead to a decrease in productivity levels and work performance (Auerbach, 1988). This issue was pertinent to Emma who mentioned that because of her concern for her children's well-being during the day, her productivity levels naturally decrease. For example, although she phones her children constantly to find out if they are well, she realises that she is using up her company's time and money. Her meaning system thus places emphasis on the knowledge that her children are well during the day despite her absence. Her perceptions about motherhood include caring for the children in a way that they are well and secure. Although she realises the negative effect this is having at work, her children remain her first priority. This circular relationship with the work and home context supports the ecosystemic view of recursion and circularity (Boscolo et al., 1987, Keeney, 1979). Since recursion views all parts within a system as simultaneously acting on one another, the work place and the working mothers are then viewed in a circular relationship with each other. This occurs as each one feeds his or her understanding of the other member's actions into the particular relationship or context (L'Abate et al., 1986; Watzlawick et al., 1967). The experiences of the mother will not only have an impact on the mother herself, but will also influence other contexts in her life such as the childcare and family setting. In the same way, her actions (based on specific meanings) will impact on her experiences at work and her productivity levels.

Although Sam is not concerned about childcare benefits in the company because of the already excellent care she receives from the day mother, she did mention that many of her colleagues often allow home stress to affect their work productivity. For example, some mothers will phone in the mornings to excuse themselves from work because of illness. The truth, however, is that their children are ill and that they have no other means of care. This occurs as many mothers are unable to take their children to childcare services because of contagion problems. According to Sam's meanings about her colleagues, I further punctuated her descriptions in the following manner. Many mothers have meaning structures that place emphasis on their primary roles as mothers. One aspect of motherhood involves being available to the child at all times, particularly during moments of vulnerability and weakness. Although this clashes with the requirements of certain work places, it becomes necessary for them to stay at home with their children because of inadequate or absent support systems. While some may find other alternatives, those that do not have any options will resort to staying away from work. According to Sam's punctuations, resorting to such options is often embedded in a culture of few family benefits within the work place itself.

Finally, a decrease in productivity levels does not only mean that the mother is experiencing problems with childcare arrangements and family issues. Once again, productivity is a creation of the recursive interaction between the work system and the employee system (Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Keeney, 1983; Selvini et al., 1980; Watzlawick et al., 1967). Productivity also depends on the company's employee policies, and these are examined next in terms of the feelings they elicit in women as human beings in a company.

Meanings around Employee Satisfaction

On the issue of employee satisfaction, I realised that two different social discourses exist. One advocates that women have the right to work by leaving their children in childcare systems, and the other places emphasis on the fulfillment of work responsibilities and duties irrespective of the home context or extra-mural activities. From the interviews, it appears that both discourses are distinct and separate and are not complementarily or holistically

integrated. In other words, there is no particular discourse that takes into account the complementary relationship of the employee as a worker and as a mother. The differing discourses are not interdependent and do not mutually comment on each other (Keeney, 1983; Lax, 1992; McNamee, 1992; Watzlawick et al., 1967). This can be a possible explanation for why so many mothers encounter difficulties in dealing with work and home demands. Since there is no specific discourse that takes into account the dual or complementary relationship of the mother as an employee with a life outside the work context, few solutions will then be created to help mothers deal with their stress.

All three mothers agreed that the companies they work for do very poorly when it comes to treating the employee fairly and justly. Mpho, for example, does not feel that the company cares for her as a woman with home and work responsibilities. Her expectations about work advocate a certain amount of respect for the multiple responsibilities she encounters every day. It appears that her organisation is still very male dominated and that, as a woman, she is not being helped with the stress in her life. She has had to survive on her own by trying to keep all the different aspects in her life balanced and, even with the many changes occurring in the South African political context, her situation has not progressed. Although she did not offer possible solutions for how her employers could help her, the overriding feeling is one of disdain and powerlessness. Her feelings about work are negative and these are based on the view that her work has not done much for her in the past and continues to do very little for her in the present.

Sam places meaning on her role as an employee who should be seen as a valuable asset to the company. This is important, particularly seen against her perception that she is viewed merely as an employee who brings in the money. Her meanings about work emphasise a need to be seen as a rightful person with feelings and with a life besides that of work. She wants to feel respected as a woman who is working for her company. At the moment she feels like a mere statistic and feels that improvements could be made in the form of better working hours. Further meanings held by Sam focus on the negative effects that long working hours can create in terms of stress and tension both at home and at work. Once again, the recursive link between her home and work context is illustrated. In terms of ecosystemic theory, one cannot

exclude the one from the other since both are related recursively and circularly. Furthermore, it is impossible for one individual or system to cause another individual or system to behave in a certain manner without eliciting a certain reaction from the recipient and the system as a whole (Keeney, 1979; 1983; Selvini et al., 1980).

In the interview with Emma, similar meanings to those of Sam's were raised. Emma admitted that she resents her company for not giving her some form of extra compensation for the hard work she does. She believes that she works hard and that the benefits she gets are few and limited. Her meanings about work involve a "give and take" situation in that both employee and employer should work together to improve work and home conditions. From the above-shared meanings, I support the ecosystemic view of human systems, problems and solutions, which views both employer and employee within the holistic frame of the company and home setting. I have based my personal epistemology on such principles and as such, my lenses take into account the recursive interaction of systems with one another within specific contexts. One context, which cannot be viewed in isolation and which was discussed in the interviews with the mothers involves the childcare context. Meanings around such a context will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Meanings around the Childcare Context

According to O'Connor and Lubin (1984), the term "context" refers to any type of relationship between two or more individuals or to any type of system composed of a population and its related environment. According to ecosystemic thinking, it is important to view people within the contexts of their social settings so that one can gain a more holistic picture of the individual's experiences. This chapter has focused on the contextual parameters of the working mother within the context of the home and the work place. In this section, the childcare facility will be discussed and viewed by the three working mothers and the researcher.

According to Kamerman (1986), the demand for childcare services, especially for infant and toddler care, continues to increase as more mothers enter the work force. Their

reasons for placing their children either with family members, day mothers, crèches, nursery schools and preschool care also vary according to specific reasons. For example, the mothers in this study chose different types of childcare services for different reasons, based on different meaning structures. Some reasons were based on factors including the child's age, the nature of the care (curriculum), physical space, center location, cost, family-school relationships or operating hours. Sam, for example, chose to place her child with a day mother because it was close to her home and because of the satisfactory care her child is receiving at the center. For her, it is important that the day mother be a reliable caregiver able to support and care for the child when Sam is unavailable. If she arrives home late due to work demands, then it is essential that the day mother be prepared to care for her child without any additional costs. The flexibility she gets from the day mother is invaluable because of the values placed on the idea of a "substitute mother" who can fulfil the child's needs just as well as the mother herself. This also supports Sam's meanings around the importance of working and the personal benefits she gains from this. Her meanings about childcare thus involve having someone available to care for the child in such a way that the child is not neglected, abused or ignored. It is important to her that the child has adult supervision at all times so that she will not experience the loneliness and neglect that would otherwise be experienced in the mother's absence. Sam also values the role of the day mother who can help the child gain increased self-independence and self-confidence. The attainment of independence by a child at such an age constitutes an important meaning structure.

Mpho, on the other hand, holds different values regarding childcare meanings and beliefs. For her, it is important that the childcare center cares for the child physically, and that the arrangement she chooses provides for the child nutritionally and hygienically. Since she was unsatisfied about her child coming home dirty and hungry, the need to find a more adequate center became essential.

For Emma, however, the focus on education and stimulation is a first priority and she therefore chose to place her child in a nursery school where such needs could be fulfilled. Her values and beliefs regarding intellectual stimulation are of more importance than custodial care. She also values the role and benefits of a structured environment where the child is

exposed to a scheduled routine. Meanings are placed on structure as an important factor in childcare facilities. Other meanings also involve the provision of personal attention to the child by the caregiver. It was based on this meaning that Emma decided to place her child in a class with less than 20 children. According to her meaning structures, such personal attention can only be achieved if the class is not overcrowded. Once again, this shows how personal meanings and values inform the decisions and choices mothers make with respect to various issues, and highlights the recursive connection between meanings and actions as displayed by the three working mothers (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen, 1985; Selvini et al., 1980)

It is clear from the three mothers' multiple realities that not all share the same thoughts and beliefs regarding childcare. Depending on personal meanings and beliefs, specific actions will arise regarding certain issues. For example, while for some custodial care is important, others will see educational development as essential. In the case of Mpho and Sam, custodial needs are a priority even though educational care is still necessary. Emma, on the other hand, places more emphasis on educational care and structure. It appears however, that what remains essential to all three mothers is the need for good childcare, even if different meanings are attached to the term. It thus would seem that solutions would need to vary because of the different needs mothers have regarding childcare.

Meanings around Solutions

Since the dissertation topic includes a possible solution for working mothers and childcare issues, it was natural to introduce the issue of employer-supported childcare programs into the conversations with the three mothers. In terms of self-referentiality, it is believed that employers and employees can work together on childcare and family benefit issues to better the working conditions of all those concerned. This is linked to the ecosystemic perspective which views relationships within systems and within specific contexts (Levant, 1984). By adhering to ecosystemic principles, one no longer views an individual's existence in isolation, instead, one considers how he or she is related to other individuals within specific contexts in mutually reciprocal ways. Contexts do not only refer to the relationship between two or more individuals but also to the related environment or ecology of

which they form part (Anderson, 1992; Auerswald, 1985; Hoffman, 1992; Keeney, 1983). Furthermore, the belief that employers and employees can be viewed in terms of ecosystemic thinking is also based on the researcher's tacit knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 4, tacit knowledge is described as the "base on which the human instrument builds many of the insights and hypotheses that will eventually develop" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 198). Knowledge is thus based on personal intuition and feeling as well as on the values and assumptions of the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this way, the lenses used in the research process were partly based on the researcher's tacit knowledge. These ecosystemic and social constructionist lenses informed the types of questions and themes brought out in the interviews. My tacit knowledge, for example, brought forth one possible solution to the stress encountered by many mothers. This came in the form of on-site childcare centers and was seen as the best possible solution. By asking the mothers what their views were concerning this possibility, I realised that they attach different meanings to the idea of on-site care. It was only in language that I was able to evolve these previously held ideas.

According to the mothers, on-site care is not a preferred solution. What is preferred is the establishment of indirect family benefits which include the provision of information and skills (individual advice, employee assistance, referral services), financial assistance and alternative work schedules (flexi-time, part-time work, home-based work, maternity and paternity leave, sick days for childcare, leave for parents when needed) (Adolf & Rose, 1988; Auerbach, 1988; Browne Miller, 1990). Family benefits such as these are important in the mothers' meaning systems, especially since these are perceived to help them with work and home pressures. For example, for Mpho, the idea of onsite care is important because it will allow her to spend time with her child either during lunchtimes or on the bus. Such a solution will not only help her get closer to her son, but it will also help relieve the pressure experienced by her husband with his busy schedule. Such needs can, however, not be met since the facility remains unaffordable. In this case, financial assistance would be preferred.

For Emma and Sam, reasons why on-site childcare centers are not always beneficial are also based on personal meanings and values regarding the work and home environment. Sam felt that taking her child to work would be negative because of certain personal meanings.

She would prefer alternative family benefits above on-site care as these would be more advantageous in raising her productivity levels and contentment at work. She would be happier if employees worked fixed periods with no overtime, or if they were allowed time off during normal working hours to solve problems arising with the child either at home or in the childcare facility. By wanting such benefits, Sam's meaning system is highlighted in that value is placed foremost on the family. It is important for her that she arrives at home on time to be with her husband and children. It also means supporting and being there for her child during moments of illness. In terms of on-site care, Sam explained why this would not be beneficial by saying that she would not concentrate on her work knowing that her child was nearby. It is important for her to place all her effort and attention into her work and then go home and do the same with her family. This shows her values in accomplishing one task at a time. Not only does she value her home life but she also finds it necessary to give of herself completely to her work without any distractions. Furthermore, she believes that her child could become dependent and lose the independence and self-sufficiency she has gained by being with the day mother. Meaning is placed on the development of independence, especially since this will help her child to be strong and unattached, rather than clingy and dependent. Her value systems advocate that the only way of this being accomplished is by placing her child at a childcare center away from her work place.

Sam's perceptions and meanings were thus instrumental in the change that occurred in my own personal beliefs about working mothers and childcare centers in the work place. At the beginning of my research I believed that all mothers would want their children at work, especially if on-site care was available. In dialoguing with Sam about her personal meanings, my meanings were able to evolve. It is clear that not all mothers will consider the on-site care option because of the meanings they hold. One reason for not wanting an on-site childcare center is based on the knowledge that the child is already at a good childcare center. If the child is already acquiring reasonable care that fulfils his or her needs as well as those of the parents, then it is no longer necessary to take the child to an on-site center.

In Emma's case it was apparent that indirect family benefits would help her considerably in handling the stress and burdens she faces each day. She mentioned that her

company would be helping her if they provided financial assistance for childcare services away from the work place. Alternative work schedules and flexi-time programs would also be beneficial since she would feel more valued as an employee. The meaning that the company should support and validate the employee is firmly upheld by Emma. Meaning is also placed on the relationship between personal validation and work productivity. When asked about on-site childcare centers, Emma discussed its related benefits as well as its disadvantages. Personally, she would not place her child in such a center because of the crime rate and the effect of severe pollution near her work place. In this regard, her meaning structures place priority on her child's safety and well-being. Since she values her child's security and health, she has decided not to expose her children to the potential dangers of daily crime and pollution.

It is clear from the above discussion that different meanings about childcare and employer-support issues are held by the three working mothers (Gergen, 1985; Lax, 1992; McNamee, 1992). The opinions held by the working mothers highlight social constructionist and ecosystemic principles, which advocate the importance of multiple realities regarding problems and solutions. Meanings and realities are co-created in language and are self-referentially shaped and context-specific (Bateson, 1979; Hoffman, 1990). All individuals thus have their own particular view of the flow of interaction between themselves and others (Keeney & Ross, 1992). As such, it is assumed that mothers will hold different meanings about childcare as created by wider social discourses, epistemological assumptions, tacit knowledge, past experiences, personal biases and values.

Grounded Theory

As explained in Chapter 4, grounded theory is described as theory that evolves from the data collected. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it is theory that will "fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use" (p. 205). It further takes into consideration the multiple realities and the arising themes encountered in the research context. The process involved in the creation of grounded theory is also based on a continuous revision of hypotheses and beliefs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the

dissertation's limited scope, the grounded theory is restricted in its description of multiple realities, as fathers, employers and children were not interviewed. Instead, only the multiple realities of three working women are provided, as having been co-constructed with the researcher in the interviewing context. Within this languaging process, hypotheses and beliefs held by the researcher were challenged and modified.

Multiple Realities

The researcher entered the research process by assuming that certain solutions are available to working mothers who experience stressful situations in balancing work, home and childcare responsibilities. The researcher's tacit knowledge linearly suggested employer-support as a solution, in particular the benefit of on-site childcare programs. Through the language process with the three working mothers, I realised that linearity was not possible because of the collaborative and meaning-generating nature of the interviews. Instead, it was within the languaging context that the mothers generated other solutions for the relief of stressful experiences. This complementary relationship between problem and solution was noticeable throughout the interviewing process and, as such, I was unable to consider working mothers' problems in isolation without simultaneously discussing alternative solutions.

It was also in this regard that my previously held assumptions about the benefits of on-site care were challenged and re-evaluated. These assumptions were based on the belief that all mothers wish to be close to their children during the day. In firmly believing this I denied the existence of their multiple realities. It was only when the mothers discussed their perceptions and beliefs that I became aware of more suitable alternative benefits. For example, one mother believes that on-site care is unnecessary when good, alternative childcare arrangements already exist. There is also the possibility of productivity levels decreasing when paying attention to the child and to the work simultaneously. Furthermore, knowing that the mother is always available can increase the chances of dependent behaviour by the child. Another reality provided by one of the mothers against on-site care involves the belief that exposing the child to crime, pollution and heavy traffic in the work environment may be dangerous and harmful. In this regard, exposing the child to unsatisfactory work conditions is

not a solution. Finally, another reality for rejecting on-site care is based on the belief that the current on-site care at the work place is too expensive and unaffordable. When the company is still not targeting working mothers with preschool children, then alternative arrangements have to be made.

As seen in the above meanings, all three mothers held specific realities and personal assumptions about the dissertation topic. Each one had a personal reality grounded in specific epistemological assumptions, wider social discourses, tacit knowledge and personal or past experiences. The mothers' realities demonstrated that reality is not objective but rather subjective. The notion of multiple realities is thus affirmed when theory is grounded, and when interactions between researchers and participants occur within a languaging and meaning-generating context. An illustration of this meaning-generating process is given in the interviews as all three mothers brought other meanings to the fore. These meanings had not been considered by the researcher initially and were created through dialogue and distinction drawing processes. New co-constructed meanings that emerged included the following: meanings around motherhood, meanings around problems, meanings around solutions, meanings around childcare arrangements and meanings around employee satisfaction.

Alternative Family Benefits

Through the meaning-generating process, I became aware of the three mothers' meanings regarding other possible solutions. Since they hold different meanings about specific issues, it is natural that different solutions for problems would be created. In terms of the mothers' meanings about solutions, alternative family benefits would be preferred. For one mother, financial assistance of the childcare facility by the organisation would be beneficial, while for the other, better maternity leave policies and working hours were preferred. Although an on-site facility already exists in the one mother's work place, a decrease in fees would help increase its affordability considerably.

Finally, the three mothers agreed that they would like more emotional support from the employer and increased validation as human beings and employees. Since all three mothers

regard themselves as mere profit-making entities, increased validation as a wife, mother and a human being would help them deal with the many responsibilities they encounter both at work and at home.

Recursive Interactions

When discussing the above meanings with the mothers, it was noticed that they were unable to discuss their meanings in isolation. Instead, they related their experiences to the influences of the employer, the spouse and the family context on their lives. The three mothers indirectly brought family and work members into the interviewing context by punctuating these members' punctuations. By bringing these different systems and punctuations into the interviewing context, a more holistic description was gained. However, in order for a more complete picture to emerge, meanings and beliefs held by these systems should be considered more fully in future research.

Although the inclusion of the meanings of spouses, fathers, employers and children is not possible within this dissertation, it is still assumed, on the basis of ecosystemic thinking, that mutual and recursive interactions exist (Auerswald, 1985). All three women expressed the wish to be recognised and valued as working mothers with family and work responsibilities by the employer. It is believed that such recognition and value is not possible when observing mothers in isolation. Instead, they need to be considered within the family and work context. Employers and families thus have important roles to play in the lives of the working mothers and vice versa. For example, if an employer begins to see the mother as a valuable resource in the work force and encourages positive behaviour, then absenteeism, tardiness, accident rates, staff turnover and employee stress can be reduced (Fein, 1986; Goff et al., 1990; Levitan & Alderman, 1975). Employee potential, stability, quality, morale and productivity levels may also increase when organisations help working mothers (Seyler et al., 1995). Finally, just as the relationships between the working mothers and myself were recursive and brought to light new meanings, so too is it assumed that recursive relationships between employees, employers, spouses, fathers and children will generate specific meanings and beliefs. The grounded theory of this dissertation recognises the reciprocal and meaning-

generating nature of the employer-employee relationship, as observed in the interactions between researcher and the three working mothers. Such generations of meanings and reciprocal interactions were, however, only made possible through the processes of language and dialogue.

Conclusion

Common themes have been found in the multiple realities of the three working mothers that allow for the creation of a limited grounded theory. The aim is not to generalise their experiences to other working mothers, but rather to see their experiences as valuable and important in the understanding of the childcare, working mother and employeesupport issue.

The mothers' mutual punctuations were made possible through a process of dialogue and language with the researcher. These punctuations involved the sharing of meanings about motherhood, problems encountered with childcare and work issues, employee benefits and alternative solutions for the resolution of such problems. The elicited punctuations illustrate the role of ecosystemic epistemology in the understanding of the complex interactions taking place between working mothers, employers and other individuals. They further illustrate the importance of language as a meaning-generating tool. An example of this is seen in the evolution of my previously held beliefs regarding the dissertation topic. It was only through social constructionist thinking that my personal assumptions regarding organisational support were modified.

To summarise the findings of the above chapter and the dissertation as a whole, a concluding chapter on the meaningfulness of the research process will be provided next. A meta-level integration of the dissertation as a whole is given by referring to grounded and ecosystemic/social constructionist theory.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

*Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.*

(John Donne)

Introduction

This dissertation has punctuated the meanings and recursive interactions between three working mothers and the researcher regarding employment, childcare and employer-supported issues. By conversing with the three working mothers, multiple realities and meanings about the dissertation topic emerged through a process of language and circular interaction. The emergence of these meanings has occurred as follows.

Firstly, each system (working mothers, childcare systems and employers) has been separately discussed within a framework of existing literature in Chapter 2. A possible means of understanding these systems in relation to each other has been provided in Chapter 3 with a description of the ecosystemic epistemology and the social constructionist perspective (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Auerswald, 1985; Keeney, 1983). The fourth chapter further describes the research process and method to be used in the dissertation by describing the naturalistic and qualitative approaches to research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Since the research is qualitatively based, the fifth chapter considers the conversations between the working mothers and myself (observer) in verbatim form. Here, the observing system stance is significant in that the researcher, inquirer or therapist is not only the observer, but also the observed (Boscolo et al., 1987). This mutual and reciprocal process of feedback suggests that both the researcher and the mothers become collaborators in the research process. Chapter 6 then considers the working mothers and researcher's co-constructed

meanings about the dissertation topic. It is hoped that the reader, too, will infer his or her own distinctions and meanings about the dissertation topic.

Reflection on the Research Process

The dissertation considers the following issues. Firstly, it observes the dilemma facing mothers with preschool children. This dilemma involves choosing to remain at home with the child or enter the work force to accomplish personal or financial obligations. The stress they encounter with work and home responsibilities is also considered. A description of women employment and childcare arrangements in the South African context is also provided for the dissertation to be relevant within its local context. Secondly, various childcare options are provided together with a discussion on the importance of childhood developmental phases. Finally, a possible solution for mothers struggling with issues of role multiplicity is discussed in terms of employer-supported benefits. It is believed that organisations and employers can help mothers with childcare, work and home stresses because of the recursive connection that exists between employer, working mother, children, the family and the work environment.

Due to the dissertation's limited scope, the initial aim to acquire a holistic view of the relationships between working mothers, employers and children was not fully possible. Since fathers, employers and children were not interviewed, holistic principles could only be related to the interactions between the working mothers and the researcher, and to some extent to the perceptions of mothers regarding such systems. The primary focus on holism at the beginning of the dissertation and the research process evolved into a focus on meanings amongst the working mothers and myself. These meanings could only be acquired through the dialogue process, as well as through a discussion of personal epistemologies, tacit values, wider social discourses and personal or past experiences. Through dialoguing with the mothers, other self-referential meanings came to the fore. The researcher did not consider these until the discussions took place. For example, new meanings that were generated involved those around childcare issues, motherhood, work satisfaction, personal values and the complementary relationship between problems and solutions, and actions and meanings.

New Meanings and Perceptions

Meanings and perceptions that arose from the literature study, the theoretical perspective and the interviews with the three mothers were the following.

- Anderson and Goolishian (1988) describe problems as created amongst individuals through the processes of dialogue. As seen in Chapter 5, certain meanings about problems were created in the dialogue with the researcher. One such problem involves the stress that the three working mothers experience when having to balance various roles such as those of mother, wife, employee and student. For one of the mothers, being a single parent without a social support system makes this experience a stressful and negative one. For another, stress is accentuated when the work place is unsympathetic and imposes unfair restrictions in terms of working hours and personal needs. For the third, stress is encountered when numerous responsibilities have to be met and when the family experiences a similar amount of role multiplicity and stress. Different meanings about problems in terms of stress and role multiplicity were created through the process of language.

- From the above, the notion of multiple realities is highlighted in that each mother has a particular epistemology and view about the world (Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1983). According to Bateson's theory (1972), personal values and meanings are attached to an individual's ideas, actions and perceptions about life. The interviewing process demonstrates that all three mothers have their own way of viewing the world and hold specific and personal meanings about problems encountered at work and at home. These meanings arise out of wider social discourses, personal epistemological assumptions, tacit knowledge, past experiences, language processes and the individual's various contexts. The influence of contexts on an individual's life is also significant since it is related to the behaviours and experiences of mothers. Since contexts or ecologies recursively influence the behaviour of any individual, and since all behaviour is context bound and specific, it is important to consider the three mothers' work and home contexts to gain a thick description of the dissertation topic.

- From the discussions with the three women interviewed it would appear that the stress these mothers experience might be alleviated when employers begin to see them as important members in the company. One way, in which this can be done, is through validation and emotional support. Another way is through the introduction of alternative family benefits, which include better working hours, better maternity leave policies and financial assistance. The generation of alternative solutions by the three working mothers illustrates the ability of all human beings to dis-solve certain problems through the dialoguing process.

- One of the researcher's primary assumptions was that on-site childcare programs would be useful to all three working mothers. In languaging with the mothers about such a benefit, I realised that they, too, held specific ideas about this issue. In not seeing their multiple realities, I was inferring an objective reality by not taking into account their subjective beliefs. Only through the language context did I become aware of negative factors involved in such a choice. For one mother, on-site care is not acceptable because of the surrounding environment, which includes crime, pollution and heavy traffic. Instead, it would be preferable if the company could help her financially in paying a percentage of her child's current childcare fees in a more suitable environment. For the second mother, taking the child to work would create feelings of dependence and necessity in the child, as well as a decrease in productivity and attention levels in the mother when accomplishing work responsibilities. It is also unnecessary for her to make use of on-site care since she has already found a good center that satisfies both her and the child's needs. Based on these meanings, better working hours or employment policies would be preferred. For the third mother, on-site care could be advantageous if it were more affordable. Since it is too expensive, alternative arrangements have been found away from the work place. Other benefits that would be of help to this mother would come in the form of more emotional support, more financial benefits and better working hours. From the above, it is seen that the decisions and choices mothers make are based on their personal meanings and assumptions about the world. This highlights the relationship between actions and meanings as being recursively connected. All decisions are thus based on specific

meanings. Similarly, it is assumed that meanings arise from such actions thus rendering the two complementary. This implies that they are distinct and separate but also interrelated.

- From the mothers' punctuations it was also clear that they are involved with employers, fathers, spouses and children in a recursive and circular manner. In these relationships, feedback processes exist, as information is fed into a system in a circular manner such that behaviours and meanings are continuously created and generated. It is assumed that viewing the above relationships will bring about a more holistic view of the systems in question. In the same way, the interactions between the three working mothers and the researcher illustrated this process of circularity and feedback processes. The mothers' punctuations elicited certain responses by the researcher and vice versa. This dissertation only considered the interaction between three working mothers and the researcher. A more holistic description of meanings could have been acquired if meanings of other members had been taken into consideration.
- Anderson and Goolishian (1988) place importance on human systems as capable of generating meanings through dialogue. In terms of the researcher's own assumptions and meanings, it was only through this process that previously held ideas about motherhood, employment, childcare and employer-support were challenged and modified. It was only by dialoguing with the mothers in a recursive manner that the researcher's tacit knowledge about the dissertation topic evolved. This collaborative relationship between the working mothers and the researcher not only illustrates the value of the interactions taking place in the research process, but also illustrates the importance of relationships within work and home contexts. By evolving previous meanings and beliefs, the researcher is aware of the impossibility of outcome prediction and the inference of objective truths about certain issues. As demonstrated in the dissertation, meanings and perceptions arise out of mutual interactions between individuals and the influence of wider social discourses. Such interactions and discourses not only explain the choices human beings make but also reinforce the meaningfulness of the ecosystemic and social constructionist perspective to human relations, problems and solutions.

Recommendations

Based on the above meanings, it is recommended that future research be carried out on employer-support, working mothers and childcare issues, particularly within the South African context. Since South African women are entering the work force in increasing numbers, investigating such an issue in terms of its current context will be considered beneficial. It is further assumed that an ecosystemic perspective on working mothers, children, fathers, families and employers, as related to each other, will provide a thorough description of their experiences as well as a more holistic perspective of inherent meanings, patterns and behaviours. It would be of value, therefore, for future research to take into consideration the meanings held by fathers, spouses, children, childcare workers, employers and work colleagues.

Conclusion

On the issue of working mothers, childcare and employer-support, it is acknowledged that the punctuations drawn in this dissertation are based self-referentially on the meanings and beliefs of the researcher. These distinctions incorporate only one possible set of meanings and do not represent an objective or universal truth. This dissertation thus represents one possible way of understanding the working mother, childcare and employer-support issue and is in no way a single truth. It allows the reader to infer personal meanings and distinctions through a process of language as described by social constructionism and ecosystemic thinking.

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