PROFESSIONALISING MOTHERHOOD: 
IDENTITY INTERPLAY IN THE CO-CONSTRUCTION 
OF GOOD MOTHERHOOD IN SINGAPORE

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of 
Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) 
in the Faculty of Humanities

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Alliance Manchester Business School
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Professionalising Motherhood:
Identity Interplay in the Co-construction of Good Motherhood in Singapore
2016

ABSTRACT

Professional career women often find themselves caught in a dialectic ideological tension between fulfilling the demands of full-time motherhood and the expectations associated with their professional career. The stories of 10 middle-class, stay-at-home mothers from Singapore who had previously worked within commercial organisations are presented. Their narratives are collected through a series of phenomenological interviews and the use of a visual construction method. The findings unravel the complexities surrounding the women’s enactment of culturally constructed good mothering, weaving a path between their conflicting sense of home-bound maternal duty and their aspiration for self-reliance.

As stay-at-home mothers, the participants variously engage in entrepreneurial and self-development projects. Their families outsource an array of care responsibilities to business establishments outside the home, challenging the conventional notion of home, and in some cases, commercialising their intimate family life. The women, seeking to negotiate tensions between the home-based maternal duties and aspiration for independence, assimilate their occupational sense of self into motherhood to construct images of a competent and effective parent. The professionalisation of motherhood emerges as a way for the participants to reframe good mothering, blurring the rigid boundaries between paid work ideology and motherhood expectations.

The findings highlight the women’s interplay of diverse and interrelated sense of selves at the personal, relational, and collective level in the co-construction of good motherhood. The identity interplay processes illuminate how the women’s heterogeneous selfdefinitions coexist, compete, and cooperate in their everyday experiences of doing motherhood, which moves away from the traditional paradigm that conceives identity as an individuated entity, in relation to prevalent discourses within Singaporean society centring on a politically-driven struggle for gender equality. The thesis concludes by presenting its contributions and implications at the theoretical, managerial, and policy levels.
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Dedicated to

Belinda Sutan,
Thank you for walking the mysterious journey through together in the past 20 years. Without you, the discoveries in this voyage would not have been as glorious and meaningful.

Matthew Qiu and Madeline Qiu,
You are our lovely gifts. I treasure you both equally, enormously.

Teguh Wijaya and Kumalasari,
My beloved late parents – to whom I am eternally grateful

Amazing Grace,
How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me…
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Being an executive scholar is a vigorous experience. In the last 6 years, I had to both run a full-time professional career in the day and maintain a relentless focus on reading, research, and writing in the night (and over every weekend and during every holiday season). I needed to be strategic about when I slept and ate. This thesis is the culmination of my 6-year marathon of cross-border study in Manchester and Singapore. I have been blessed by, and could not have completed this thesis without, the help of so many gracious people who have made their contribution to my study in one way or another.

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(As of September 2016)
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the context for this thesis. It begins by highlighting the importance of research in co-constructed consumer identity and how the notion of identity construction has evolved (section 1.1). The focus of this study, an exploration of how professional career women in Singapore transition to become stay-at-home mothers, is then presented (section 1.2). Based in the context of Singapore, this study involves Singaporean research participants; in turn a historical and social overview of Singapore as a research site is offered (section 1.3). The objectives and research questions of this thesis are then outlined (section 1.4). This chapter concludes by presenting an overview of this thesis, chapter by chapter (section 1.5). A map of this chapter and the major components of it is illustrated in Figure 1.0 (with each subsequent chapter being introduced and depicted in a similar manner).

1.1 The Importance of Research in Co-constructed Consumer Identity

“No other aspect of contemporary life, it seems, attracts the same amount of attention these days from philosophers, social scientists and psychologists. It is not just that ‘identity studies’ are fast becoming a thriving industry in their own right; more than that is happening – one may say that ‘identity’ has now become a prism through which other topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined”. (Bauman, 2001, p. 140)

In the opening quote, sociologist Bauman (2001) highlights the importance of identity that has become a metaphorical lens through which people see and make sense of their world. This centrality of identity is also affirmed in consumer research literature. Consumption, originally premised on the utilitarian consideration, has been increasingly seen as an identity construction process to enhance a consumer’s sense of self and help one connect with social worlds (Belk, 1988). Identity is recognised as a key driver for individuals to acquire and consume objects (see for example, Banister, Hogg, Budds & Dixon, 2015; Banister, Hogg & Dixon, 2010).
But it is also argued that much of what we know about how consumer identities are conceived and enacted is out-dated (Epp & Price, 2008). The predominant paradigm of looking at consumer identity as either an individuated or collective entity needs to evolve to account for how multiple and relational identities interplay and influence consumption behaviours (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 65; Epp & Price, 2011). Particularly, family researchers in the field of consumer behaviour
advocate progressing the knowledge about identity construction processes from an individualistic identity orientation to a mutually-constructed notion to promote a better understanding of, and uncover more nuances in, consumption behaviour (see for example, Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012).

Identity is a central facet of contemporary life (Bauman, 2001), and yet, it has seldom been considered from this broader, relational perspective. Focusing on women’s role transition from paid work to (unpaid) stay-at-home motherhood, the present study seeks to respond to the call for further research (Epp & Price, 2008) by exploring identity interplay processes and recognising the mutually-constituted nature of identity.

1.2 Women’s Transition from Professional Career to Home-Based Motherhood

The last several decades have seen emergence of women’s movement around the world and Singapore is not immune from this development (Lyons, 2010). During this period, Singaporean women have gained tremendously in the areas of education, employment, and health (Chan, 2000). In the early stage of Singapore’s development during the 1970s, education served as a major instrument in working to build the nation, driving a remarkable increase in the number of women entering tertiary education (Bastion, 2005; Straughan, 2015).

As a nation with no natural resource, Singapore’s strategy has been to mobilise every single resident – including the talents and resources of women – to help contribute to the nation’s economic survival and success as a society (Bastion, 2005). Singaporean women have represented a critical component of Singapore’s economic progress (Pyle, 1997). Over time, they have become a larger proportion of the workforce, and at the same time, “the reproducers” of the next generation of workers (Pyle, 1997, p. 216).
In the fairly traditional Asian culture of Singapore, where patriarchy is the dominant ideology (Straughan, 2015, p. 62), women are viewed as “a symbol of home” in Singaporean society (Stivens, 2007, p. 35). Various state policies have aimed to raise women’s educational and economic status, and encourage women to work outside the home. But the juxtaposition of women’s economic role with their (traditional) familial role presents a dilemmatic challenge to women (Chan, 2000; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). Singaporean women inextricably face role strains as, on the one hand, society seeks to uphold traditional (Asian) family practices (with mothers encouraged to adopt a home-based role to look after their children, propagated by patriarchy); while, on the other hand, the state pursues economic competitiveness in the creation of a “modern” society (Quek, Knudson-Martin, Orpen & Victor, 2011, p. 947) which encourages women to focus on their paid career.

A notable trend has concurrently emerged whereby women are seen to opt out of the job market in order to stay home (Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010); and exploring this phenomenon represents the context of this thesis. The participants in this research project – high-achieving and educated Singaporean working mothers – have chosen to leave their professional career and remain out of employment for an extended period of time (beyond the normal duration of maternity leave) to engage with a more traditional gender role at home. This thesis looks at how these women make sense of their domain transition from their former professional career to their caregiving roles at home through construction (and reconstruction) of their identities, in the context of wide-ranging and competing socio-political forces that are at play within Singaporean society. The next section introduces the social and political context of Singapore as a research site to help add context for the reader.
1.3 Historical and Social Context of Singapore

Modern, multicultural, and cosmopolitan are some of the most frequently used words to describe Singapore, a Republic located at the heart of the Malay archipelago, at the southernmost tip of the Asian continent. As “one of the world’s smallest countries” (Koh, 1998, p. 172) and ethnically a Chinese nation, Singapore is situated among the massively more populous Malay-Muslim neighbours in Malaysia and Indonesia. The country occupies approximately 719 square kilometres of land and is home to 5.5 million people comprising individuals of a Chinese (79%), Malay (13%), and Indian (7%) background (Statistics Singapore, 2015a). Singapore adopts four official languages, namely English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, with English its working language.

Among the world’s most prosperous nations with the highest per-capita income in Asia, Singapore is widely recognised as a dynamic and efficient economy. For instance, the World Economic Forum five years in a row ranked Singapore as the world’s second most competitive economy behind Switzerland (The Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015, 2015). Moreover, for 10 years in a row the Republic has annually topped the World Bank’s chart on Ease of Doing Business Index study, giving Singapore global recognition for being a conducive environment to conduct business operations (Doing Business 2015, 2015). Meanwhile, Singapore also operates one of the top two busiest container ports in the world and runs the world’s most awarded airport, Changi International, the home base of Singapore Airlines, a globally-renowned national flagship carrier. Over the years Singapore has, capitalising on its strategic geographic location, established itself to be a global hub for commerce, finance, and transportation.

Despite Singapore’s accomplishments as a first-world nation, there is a deep-seated paranoia within the nation. Singapore’s government believes that while the country has achieved much to date, it remains as vulnerable as ever to the constantly changing external environment that brings about an (perceived) uncertain future (Lee, 2008). Singaporeans are, therefore, regularly encouraged
by the state to be mindful of the dangers of losing their competitive edge (Murray & Perera, 1996; Lee, 1998; Wong, 2015a). Singapore’s standing as a thriving nation can be traced back to the country’s early development and what has been described as its “traumatic birth” spurring the hardworking and resilient population to carve out their position in the world, and relentlessly securing its future in a volatile external environment (Lee, 1998, p. 2).

To set the context of this study, this section discusses the historical and socio-cultural background of Singapore (as a research site for this thesis) in a chronological manner, by tracing its roots from a pre-modern era to how it *accidentally* became a nation (section 1.3.1), outlining Singapore’s subsequent development of the post-independence policies and nation-building efforts that helped shape its socio-cultural values and modern nationhood (section 1.3.2), highlighting the way Singapore conceives its vision and prepares for the future (section 1.3.3). The account of Singapore’s development is presented chronologically in accordance to a map depicted in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1 Historical and Social Context of Singapore**
1.3.1 Transition to Independence: An Accidental Nation

As a trading settlement, Singapore’s\(^1\) history began in the late 13\(^{rd}\) century, with the population of Malays, Chinese, and Orang Laut\(^2\) (Lee, 2008). Singapore’s strategic position within the archipelago made it ideal as a major trading hub, which increasingly grew in importance over time, and was later discovered by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 (Lim, 1997). The history of modern Singapore began on 29\(^{th}\) January 1819 when Raffles hoisted the British flag on the island of Singapore. The British, looking to expand its influence in the Far East, were attracted to Singapore by its strategic location in the middle of the trade routes between China and British India (Ho, 2010). Due to its favourable location and linkages with Britain as the dominant colonial power, Singapore had risen to become Asia’s major regional trading port and an immigrant society, where its indigenous culture experienced considerable alteration through encounters with different cultures emanating from the economic trade, military invasions, and British colonialism (Pieterse, 1995).

Following the Second World War and, subsequently, the end of European colonialism in Asia, Singapore sought to become an independent nation as the People’s Action Party (PAP)\(^3\) gained a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly in 1959, starting its dominance in Singapore’s politics that continues today (Church, 2006). Given Singapore’s small size, and with no natural resources, PAP leaders were concerned about Singapore’s security and sustainability as an independent country. Under Lee Kuan Yew’s\(^4\) leadership, PAP sought to merge Singapore with the Federation of Malaysia. Following a series of political manoeuvres, the merger was formally announced; Singapore became a constituent state of Malaysia on 16\(^{th}\) September 1963 (Chan, 1997).

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\(^1\) Singapore was formerly known as Temasek, which means Sea Town in Malay language. It later became known as Singapura, which in Sanskrit word, means Lion City (Lee, 2008).

\(^2\) Orang Laut means Sea People in Malay language (Lee, 2008).

\(^3\) The People’s Action Party (PAP) is a political party founded by Lee Kuan Yew (founding Prime Minister) and a team of Singaporeans in 1954. It has been the Singapore’s ruling party (government) from 1959 until the present day (Our Party, 2015).

\(^4\) Lee Kuan Yew is a third generation Straits Chinese, born in 1923, and was educated as a lawyer in Cambridge, UK. He became Singapore’s first prime minister elected under the full self-government constitution of 1959 (Lee, 2011).
A tangle of political and personal disagreements between Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and the Central Government of Malaysia ensued, leading Malaysia to eventually sever the 23-month tie between the two nations. Singapore was forced to leave the union, and was suddenly thrust into existence to become an independent state on 9th August 1965 (Chan, 1997). Lee Kuan Yew was grieved with the separation as he and his team members were convinced that Singapore, on its own, was seen to be too small and vulnerable to stand alone as a nation, and against the anti-Chinese sentiments coming from the vastly bigger neighbouring Muslim countries, Malaysia and Indonesia (Lee, 2008). In his televised press conference on the afternoon of 9th August 1965, Lee Kuan Yew was visibly anguished, making an emotional appeal for calm and firmness amongst the Singaporean population (Chan, 1997).

Today, Singapore has become widely recognised as one of the success stories of decolonisation (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Ho, 2010). Singapore has made remarkable progress and has sustained economic growth for a society that historically has been a melting pot of cultures, religions, and ethnicities. This accomplishment was largely credited to the (relatively) corruption-free, PAP-formed government which runs the country systematically and efficiently, based on the principles of meritocracy and multiculturalism since its independence (Lee, 2008). Singapore’s rigorously planned development “micromanages” almost every sphere of the lives of Singapore’s residents (Barr & Skrbis, 2008, p. 5; Lee, 2008).

Under the charge of the founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, his government skilfully stabilised political foundations, grew the economy, and strengthened social cohesion; his critical focus was on forging a shared sense of cultural value and identity (of being Singaporean) in the modern Confucian state of Singapore.

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5 Confucianism is originally an ethical and thought system founded on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius; it guides the orders of relationships in society, how one should behave, how family should be managed, and how a country should be organised to maximise the people’s welfare (Nadeau 2014; Zhang, 2002). Although its applications vary by countries, Singapore (along with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea in East Asian region) is perceived to be among the Confucian states, promoting the Confucian values system in its government policies (Wong & Wong, 1989; Zhang, 2002). For instance, the state’s acute
which upholds the ethical values of, and emphasizes on, thrift and hard work, harmony and cooperation, importance of family relationships, respect for education, and reference for authority and government (Lee, 1997; Lee, 2008; Nadeau, 2014; Wong & Wong, 1989, p. 5; Zhang, 2002). The government’s leadership style, thought to be “intrusive”, “paternalistic”, and “authoritarian” (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Church, 2006, p. 153), was reflected in Lee Kuan Yew’s comment of his own leadership style (published via local media):

“I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn’t be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn’t be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we [government] had not intervened on very personal matters – who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right. Never mind what people think”. (Lee, 1987)

Responding to his critics who accused him of governing Singapore like a nanny state⁶, Lee Kuan Yew, in one of his speeches, later stated: “If Singapore is a nanny state, then I am proud to have fostered one” (Lee, 1996, p. 30). In fact, the government’s role was extremely central in masterminding Singapore’s social and economic development, focusing on areas from the macro level (such as the national economic policies and education systems) to the more personal aspects of people’s lives (concerning issues such as marriage and family development) (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Bastion, 2005; Church, 2006, p. 153). To enlighten the population of current concerns to Singaporean society (as determined by the government), the state effectively uses a series of “national campaigns” as a socialisation vehicle to help inform the population of Singapore (Bastion, 2005, p. 69).

To date, more than 200 national campaigns have been launched by various government bodies as public education programmes detailing specific government procedures, policies, or practices to raise awareness about the need for a change of

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⁶ Nanny state is a term referring to a government which has an excessive interest in, and makes too many laws about, how people should live their lives (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016).
values, or to influence a particular behaviour (Bastion, 2005). For instance, to upkeep public hygiene in Singapore’s early days, the *No Spitting* and the *Flush Your Toilet* campaigns were implemented (Bastion, 2005). To boost the population, furthermore, the state launched the *Romancing Singapore* campaign to encourage single residents to get married and to start a family (Bastion, 2005). Such national campaigns, oftentimes, also touched on bigger, nation-building issues; for example, to remind Singaporeans to “*stay Asian*”, to promote the importance of family togetherness, marriage, and procreation, and to rally Singaporeans to preserve a fighting spirit and uphold one’s responsibility to the community (Bastion, 2005, p. 69). In a relatively short time span, Lee Kuan Yew’s government had transformed Singapore and had won popular legitimacy across every general election because of its delivery of a clean government and extraordinary social and economic achievements, which the following section will discuss.

1.3.2 *Social and Economic Transformation in Singapore*

The separation from Malaysia in 1965 marked a new milestone in Singapore’s social and economic development. The post-war Singapore had been burdened with a high rate of unemployment and social instability (Ho, 2010). Providing employment opportunities was a high priority for the government; Singapore’s economic development policies were geared towards meeting this need, in addition to providing basic infrastructure such as ports, industrial estates, communication systems, financial, and transportation networks (Ho, 2010). In a relatively short time period Singapore embarked on a development strategy that focused on labour-intensive manufacturing for the world markets (Lim, 2015).

The government’s strategy to push for an extensive industrialisation programme to promote economic growth at the end of the 1960s was hugely successful, due in large part to its timing; in the late 1960s and early 1970s the world economy was thriving, and manufacturing companies relied on Singapore for cheap labour and
low-cost facilities for their assembly production (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). Singapore’s industrialisation created career opportunities for all sectors of the market. In the same period, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of women entering the workforce; the proportion of working women in the labour market jumped from 21.2% in 1966 to 31.6% in 1974 (Deyo & Chen, 1976). The state was aware that as a nation with no natural resources, it had no other option but to invest in its only resource: people (Ho, 2010). The education system was, therefore, revamped to include the transmission of the professional, technical, and managerial capabilities to meet the needs of the market. From 1960 to 1980, Singapore’s economy grew at an annual growth rate of around 9% (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). The key dates and events surrounding Singapore’s political and social development are outlined in Figure 1.2.

Singaporean women have benefited much from the national effort to develop the human resource, giving women opportunities to upgrade their skills and undertake professional careers; the female labour force participation rate had grown from 45% to 51% during the 1981 – 1991 period, particularly among the economically productive age range of 35 to 45 year olds (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). To further address the industry’s needs for labour (resulting from the tremendous economic expansion), every single Singaporean was encouraged to be economically active; with the state implementing programmes that were particularly aimed at mobilising women’s labour participation. For instance, women were given more attractive terms of employment (in relation to remuneration and paid leave conditions). A foreign domestic worker scheme, moreover, was implemented, and the employment of foreign domestic workers

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7 Despite the increase in female labour force participation, many Singaporean mothers also stayed at home to care for their families; these women felt they were the primary caretaker of children and that good mothers should be willing to “sacrifice their careers for a number of years to bring up their children properly” (Deyo & Chen, 1976; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999, p. 24).

8 *Foreign Domestic Worker* is an official term describing domestic maid and family helper, who are brought into Singapore (from Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and other countries), to mainly encourage Singaporean women with higher skills to remain in the workforce while also bearing and raising children (Kayoko, 2008; Yeoh & Huang, 2004). As a top employer of foreign domestic worker in Asia, Singapore grants work permits to domestic workers to help out with household chores and bear part of the responsibility of caring for children or elderly sick; domestic helpers often relieve Singaporean women for the workplace and help contribute to Singapore’s economy and the well-being of families (Kayoko, 2008).
has become increasingly pervasive\textsuperscript{9} over time to provide familial support to Singaporean dual-income families (Kayoko, 2008).

\textbf{Figure 1.2 Key Dates of Singapore’s Development}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 January 1819</td>
<td>Stamford Raffles lands in Singapore to establish a trading post for the British East India Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1959</td>
<td>People’s Action Party (PAP) wins the General Election. Lee Kuan Yew is elected as Singapore’s first (founding) prime minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 September 1963</td>
<td>Singapore becomes a constituent state of the Federation of Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 August 1965</td>
<td>The Malaysian Parliament expels Singapore from the Federation. Singapore becomes an independent nation after separating from Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End 1960s</td>
<td>Singapore launches massive industrialisation programme to promote economic growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 November 1990</td>
<td>Goh Chok Tong and Lee Kuan Yew become the second prime minister and senior minister, respectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 August 2004</td>
<td>Lee Hsien Loong, Goh Chok Tong, and Lee Kuan Yew become the third prime minister, senior minister, and minister mentor, respectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>National Education is launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>SkillsFuture is launched</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{9} Based on the Singapore Ministry of Manpower (MOM) data, there are around 227,100 live-in foreign domestic workers currently in Singapore (Foreign Workforce Numbers, 2015). This number is not insignificant given that Singapore has only a total of approximately 1,200,000 resident households (Statistics Singapore, 2015b). Singapore’s ratio of one domestic worker for every five households is considered much higher than those of other Asian countries in recent studies of transnational domestic workers in Asia (Kayoko, 2008).
Over the past decade, significant economic progress and improvements in health care brought about tremendous demographic changes in Singaporean society; such changes include the postponement of marriage, a decline in birth rate, and a rapidly ageing population (Nasir & Turner, 2014). The state attempted to arrest the decline in fertility and the number of productive workers by introducing tax relief and government subsidies aimed at encouraging families to have more children (for instance, the Baby Bonus\textsuperscript{10} programme) and incentivising women to return to paid work (by, for example, offering childcare subsidies targeted at working mothers).

While the schemes and incentives for working mothers make the financial burden of having children more manageable, “the underlying assumption that childcare is the responsibility of mothers, reinforces women’s traditional, home-bound roles” in Singaporean society (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999, p. 23). Acknowledging the quandary Singapore’s working mothers face (in juggling the demands of their career and child rearing duties), Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong\textsuperscript{11} (Singapore’s third prime minister) recently gave a sobering perspective to the audience of a public seminar in Singapore, about balancing many of life’s priorities for Singaporean women:

\textit{“On the one hand…they [Singaporean women] want to become good lawyers, good accountants, good managers, good leaders or entrepreneurs. So we would like you to do that and yet have kids. We would like you to be a super mom, but not everybody can be a super mom and so we try to make it easier, easier in terms of childcare, easier in terms of preschool, easier in terms of affording it because you got the Baby Bonus...But the other part of it which is not perhaps such a welcome message for Singaporeans is to say, well, we all want everything in life, but we must have a balance in life and you need to have a balance between wanting to have a family and wanting to have a career...At the end of the day, would you like to look back and say I have been a super lawyer or I had a good career and I also had a good letter”}

\textsuperscript{10} Baby Bonus is a financial assistance scheme launched by the Ministry of Social and Family Development to help Singapore families lighten the financial costs of raising children; this scheme includes a one-time cash gift (of S$8,000 for first and second child, and S$10,000 for third and subsequent child) and Child Development Account (Baby Bonus).

\textsuperscript{11} Lee Hsien Loong is Singapore’s third prime minister – succeeding his father, Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore’s founding prime minister) and Goh Chok Tong (Singapore’s second prime minister) – who was appointed on 12th August 2004.
family, have children, have grandchildren and I am content, I have lived my life well”. (Lee, 2015)

Still, the long-term, key solution to Singapore’s labour needs lies not in welcoming a large number of foreign workers and foreign professionals into the country (which has increasingly become a sensitive local issue, socially and politically) (Nasir & Turner, 2014), but in mobilising every single Singaporean (regardless of gender) to become economically productive. Gender equality in Singapore, however, has not been as well reflected in policy as it has in other developed nations (such as the Nordic countries). For example, Swedish companies have offered paternal leave benefit since 1974, aimed at supporting dual-income households and ensuring equal rights and obligations regarding work and family for men and women (Duvander & Andersson, 2006); in comparison, Singapore introduced a (one-week) paternal leave policy only as recently as 2013 (Yong, 2016). Furthermore, in Singapore, only 40 per cent of fathers use their one-week of (government-paid) parental leave compared to Sweden, where 90 per cent of fathers take an average of seven weeks of paternity leave (Duvander & Andersson, 2010; Wissö & Plantin, 2015).

In Singapore’s patriarchal society, this puts pressure on women to bear a double burden of employment outside the home and to perform maternal duties within the family unit (Nasir & Turner, 2014, p. 24). Ascribing to Asian values (Nadeau, 2014, p. 38; Wong & Wong, 1989; Zhang, 2002), Singaporean society sees women as the main caregivers of their families and children (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999; Ochiai, 2008a, p. 177). Despite the increasing rate of female labour participation, Singaporean women remain to be seen as “a symbol of home and nurturance” to help create stability in family and society (Stivens, 2007, p. 35).

Meanwhile, since independence, Singapore has constantly struggled to construct and articulate her national identity (Chia, 2012, p. 3). The government perceived the evolving political and societal forces as potential threats to Singapore’s long-term security and ethos of survival (Lau, 2005); this observation was expressed by
Lee Kuan Yew (who then became Senior Minister after Goh Chok Tong was appointed as Singapore’s second prime minister in 1990) in a speech:

“...the present generation below 35 has grown up used to high economic growth year after year, and take their security and success for granted. And because they believe all is well, they are less willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of the other in society. They are more concerned about their individual and family’s welfare and success, and not their community or society’s well-being. But this is very dangerous, because things can go terribly wrong very quickly. These people are not aware of Singapore’s vulnerabilities. All they read and see is No. 1 or No. 2 competitive country, No. 1 seaport, No. 1 airport, No. 1 airline and so on. Sometimes they complain that we are driving people too hard and making life too stressful, and so why not settle for No. 2 or 3, or 4! But it does not matter. For if we are not near the top in competitiveness, there is no reason why we should have a seaport, or an airport, or an airline – or indeed why there should be a separate independent Singapore. It is as simple as that”. (Lee, 1996, p. 8)

The government warned that if Singaporeans were not aware of their past and history, “we will have no common frame of reference for us to bond together as one people, which is necessary for us to survive and prosper” (Chia, 2012, p. 8). Senior government officials feared that if Singaporeans fail to “appreciate how they have come to enjoy their present way of life, or realise how unique and precious [Singapore] is”, the result would be that “Singapore will fail” (Chia, 2012, p. 8). Motivated by this concern, the state launched a National Education programme in 1997 accompanied by a government speech outlining the programme’s rationale:

“Many Singaporeans, especially pupils and younger Singaporeans, knew little of our recent history. They did not know how we became an independent nation, how we triumphed against long odds, or how today’s peaceful and prosperous Singapore came about. This ignorance will hinder our effort to develop a shared sense of nationhood. We will not acquire the right instincts to bond together as one nation, or maintain the will to survive and prosper in an uncertain world. For Singapore to thrive beyond the founder generation, we must systematically transmit these instincts and attitudes to succeeding cohorts. Through National Education, we must make these instincts and attitudes part of the cultural DNA which makes us Singaporeans”. (Lee, 1997)
National Education is a top-down, didactically socialised values system to foster a sense of Singaporean identity, promoting an understanding of Singapore’s recent history, major challenges, and inherent vulnerabilities (Chia, 2012). National Education is not only a curricular subject but also a comprehensive citizenship education framework for the entire educational system (from nursery to university) in Singapore (Barr & Skrbis, 2008). Its main objective is to “develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival, and confidence in the future” (Lee, 1997).

In other words, the objective of this National Education is to cultivate “the sense of shared history and common destiny, with underlying commitment and confidence in the country” (Ariff, 1984). In its implementation in schools, National Education messages are infused into formal and informal curriculum, including History, Civic and Moral Education, and Social Studies (Chia, 2012, p. 9). Central to the National Education message is the nationalistic notion called the Singapore Story12, a discourse on Singapore identity with a nationalist narrative that connects the past, the present, and the future of the nation. The narrative asserts the specialness of Singapore, based on historical facts about Singapore’s humble beginnings, its inherent vulnerabilities, and its envisioned future which all Singaporeans can look forward to, in the construction of the new notion of Singaporean identity (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Chia, 2012, p. 9).

As the economy matures, the government sets a new direction in building a first-rate system of making people’s education and learning a natural part of life, in preparation for the next lap of the country’s development. Speaking at a community event, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted that Singapore is not a welfare state and that everyone should pay his or her own way, rather than relying on the state for help; comparing Singapore to Britain, he said: “Singapore

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12 The Singapore Story is the country’s nation-building narrative aimed to foster a sense of Singaporean identity and national cohesion, by promoting an understanding of Singapore’s recent history (that is, how Singapore triumphed against the long odds to become a nation) and an awareness of Singapore’s developmental challenges and vulnerabilities, and instilling a confidence in the country’s future (Chia, 2012; Lee, 1997; Tan, 2005). Conceptually, it is thought to be the product of the PAP’s key leaders and government officials: S. Rajaratnam, C.V. Devan Nair, George Yeo, and Lee Kuan Yew (Barr & Skrbis, 2008, p. 18).
cannot adopt a welfare-state system like Britain as the country [Singapore] lacks natural resources and a hinterland” (Ng, 2015). For the nation to survive in the long run, Singaporeans are urged to be self-reliant and not to rely on the government for (unceasing) financial support (Ng, 2015).

In addition, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong outlined his government’s three elements which make up a comprehensive set of social safety nets: (1) keeping people in jobs; (2) getting them to save money for their old age; and (3) help from family and the community (Ng, 2015). The government encouraged Singaporeans to foster a “vital quality” of being nimble and competitive amidst uncertainties in the world (Wong, 2015a). Building on the nationalistic ethos and values which the National Education programme has institutionalised, the nation is forging a new path through a culture of lifelong learning and skills development, to build an advanced economy and inclusive society (About SkillsFuture, 2015).

1.3.3 Transition into the Future: A Skills-Based Nation

As a country with no natural resources, the Singapore government decided to focus on its only resource, people, to help sustain its progress as a society (Ho, 2010). This understanding was reflected in Lee Hsien Loong’s writing on how Singapore can prepare for the next wave of economic development in the information age:

“Ultimately economic performance, social cohesion and political leadership all depend on one factor – the talent of the people. Singapore emerged as an emporium and a hub by attracting able and enterprising people from all over the region, and giving them full scope to develop and express their abilities. It is because of talent that we have thrived despite our meagre natural endowments. In this information age, this will be a crucial factor”. (Lee, 1998, p. 8)

In line with the intent of the National Education programme to foster “the basic attitudes, values, and instincts which make them Singaporeans” (Lee, 1997, p. 4), campaigns have been introduced to instil pride and confidence in the people to
defend the national interest through lifelong learning (Goh, 1997; Shanmugaratnam, 2014b; Tan, 2005b). This foundational strategy was laid down early, and was articulated by Goh Chok Tong (Singapore’s second prime minister), when he introduced the National Education strategy in 1997. In his speech, then Prime Minister Goh set out this vision:

“Singapore’s vision for meeting this challenge for the future is encapsulated in four words: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation. It is a vision for a total learning environment, including students, teachers, parents, workers, companies, community organisations and the government...Learning Nation begins by recognizing that education is a continuum, starting with the early pre-school years and continuing throughout life...We will bring about a mindset change among Singaporeans...We want to have an environment where workers and students are all the time thinking of how to improve...Our capacity to learn, as individuals and as a nation, will decide our future, whether we stagnate, perish, or continue to succeed”. (Goh, 1997)

The state, in other words, sought to build a comprehensive environment to make learning and education a central enabler for people to defend the economic interests of Singapore. The perpetuation of a lifelong learning culture is manifestation of the state’s broader education strategy to foster in society a passion for lifelong learning and nationalistic commitment; this is, to realise the potential of every member of the society in the age of the knowledge-based economy (which depends on human capital as a source of economic growth and development) (Crawford, 2002). The National Education programme was designed to harness everyone’s talents and abilities, by inculcating nationalistic values and social instinct so the people will be committed to the national interests and will actively contribute their talents, “be it in intellect, the arts, sports, or community endeavours”, to enhance the competitiveness of Singapore as a whole (Tan, 2005b, p. 5).

The unrelenting national agenda (to develop a passion for lifelong learning and career management skillsets) is further demonstrated by the government’s
implementation of the SkillsFuture\textsuperscript{13} initiative: “Our future must be about mastery of skills, in every job, and enabling every Singaporean to develop themselves to the fullest” (Shanmugaratnam, 2014a). Through SkillsFuture, the state aims to foster a mindset of continually seeking greater excellence through knowledge, application, and experience and aims to capitalise on every individual’s “skills, passion and contribution” to help secure the nation’s future (About SkillsFuture, 2015).

At the launch of the SkillsFuture initiative, the state disbursed initial (seed) funding to every single Singaporean to encourage participation in training and education programmes through certified learning institutions (About SkillsFuture, 2015). Every eligible Singaporean citizen was issued with an Individual Learning Portfolio, an online, one-stop education and career guidance portal, in addition to receiving personal guidance from SkillsFuture counsellors and mentors along the skills-upgrading journey (Help for learning every step of the way, 2015).

As the city-state celebrated its Golden Jubilee commemorating its 50\textsuperscript{th} year of independence in 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong looked ahead and highlighted the “stark reality of challenges in three critical areas” for Singapore’s survival, delivered in a public lecture event (Yong, 2015, p. A4); Singapore needs to: (1) maintain economic growth to improve lives in the short term; (2) increase its total fertility rate in the medium term; and (3) forge a strong, shared (Singaporean) identity in the long run (Yong, 2015).

First, to grow the economy (without taking in foreign workers at a high rate), Singapore sees that its productivity must grow and workers need to be equipped with relevant skill sets; this is the area the SkillsFuture initiative is expected to address (Yong, 2015). Second, to boost its falling birth rate and attend to its rapidly aging workforce, the state is rolling out several schemes and incentives to encourage Singaporeans to marry (earlier) and have more children. Third, to

\textsuperscript{13} SkillsFuture is a national movement (re)launched in 2015 “to provide Singaporeans with the opportunities to develop to their fullest potential throughout life, regardless of their starting points. Through this movement, the skills, passion and contributions of every individual will drive Singapore’s next phase of development towards an advanced economy and inclusive society”. (About SkillsFuture, 2015).
forge a common identity, the government urges its citizens to instil a shared sense of nationhood and values (such as meritocracy, multiculturalism, fairness, and justice), so that Singaporeans will not “melt away, dissolved by globalisation” (Yong, 2015, p. A4). Most recently, following his PAP’s landslide victory in the 2015 general election (and a strong mandate to lead the country forward), Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong urged his citizens to work alongside the government to help secure Singapore’s future:

“Singaporeans are not defined by the accolades we receive, but by our constant striving to always do better, whatever the circumstances...The Singapore Story belongs to all of us. If we have faith that Singapore will endure and thrive, and put our heart and soul into building Singapore, then we will prevail, and secure our place in history”. (Wong, 2015b, p. 1)

Five decades after its independence, under the leadership of the PAP-formed government (which, sometimes, is still perceived to be authoritarian) (Singh, 2015), Singapore has transformed itself from a third-world, to a first-world nation in a relatively short period of time. “The government ownership of the nation-building projects and its micromanagement of everyday life” has brought about astonishing progress, economically and socially, to Singaporeans (Barr & Skrbis, 2008, p. 5). In moving into the future, the state has also redefined the role of learning (from merely attaining grades and degrees to a mastery of skills and for a lifetime of work and career management), so her people can remain relevant to a fast-changing labour market and serve the society in the long run (Davie, 2015). This strategy supports the notion of “Singaporeanness” (Barr & Skrbis, 2008, p. 13), which has gone through construction and re-construction, to give the people a shared sense of meaning of what it means to be Singaporeans (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Lau, 2005, Lee, 1997).

The modern Singapore inherited a great imperial harbour and a commercial centre located strategically at a major crossroad, and has swiftly consolidated its position as one of the nodes of rapid globalisation (Lee, 2008). The success and prosperity that Singapore has achieved today is the result of overcoming countless economic, social, and political challenges – and the meticulous planning and effective
policies of the government (Ho, 2010). As Singapore ventures into the future, it is facing uphill tasks; the Republic needs to maintain economic growth to continuously improve the lives of her people, increase its total fertility rate and address its rapidly aging population, and forge a strong, shared (Singaporean) identity (Nasir & Turner, 2014; Yong, 2015). Through the launch of many nation-building projects and initiatives, Singapore’s leaders systematically plan for, and determine, the kind of nation that would best suit its long-term needs in the evolving and increasingly globalised environment (Lee, 2008).

1.4 Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of this thesis is to explore the notion of identity as a co-constructed entity (Epp & Price, 2008). This research project, more specifically, focuses on examining the malleability of the self-concept during life transition. Two key underlying assumptions of this thesis are: firstly, that identity construction should no longer be viewed as an autonomous process, but instead identity construction should be understood as a collective and networked enterprise; and, secondly, that it is important for identity-related consumer research to acknowledge the heterogeneity of identities, particularly relational identities (Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006), in the co-constitution process of identity (Epp & Price, 2008). From this perspective, this thesis seeks to address the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How do the participants make sense of their role transition (and identity changes related to it) from their professional career life to home-based motherhood?
- **Research Question 2:** How do diverse identity goals interplay in the co-construction of the women’s identity? How does the confluence of socio-cultural forces shape the women’s identity constitution?
**Research Question 3:** What factors inform the assimilation of identity as the women transition from their professional careers into home-based motherhood?

As will be shown later in this thesis, the exploration of these questions offers a holistic understanding that highlights the interplay of heterogeneous identities in the co-constitution of a certain form of motherhood; this illuminates how diverse identity goals coexist and compete in the everyday experiences of *doing* motherhood, in relation to confluence of the competing socio-cultural forces in the Singaporean society.

### 1.5 An Overview of the Thesis

In chapter two, a review of the extant research in women’s changing roles in societies and their identity construction is presented. The chapter begins by introducing the notions of identity from the fields of psychology and sociology, articulating a socio-historical perspective of identity, to highlight the changes in how identity construction has been conceived and understood. The psychology and sociology literature is discussed as a basis for comparison with the existing consumer identity literature. Existing consumer identity literature largely conceives *identity* individualistically and, unlike the fields of social psychology and sociology, it is suggested that consumer research has not kept pace with the evolving nature of identity construction. This literature review, in addition, explores the existing identity-related consumer research highlighting the identity interplay processes and the co-constructed nature of identity. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of the challenges Singaporean women experience in balancing their commitments, and their identity construction in their role transitions, between professional career and home-based motherhood.

Chapter three explains matters in relation to methodology and the methods employed in this thesis. The chapter introduces the interpretive paradigm utilised
for the study. The consumer researcher seeks to gain first-hand understanding about consumers and their experiences by positioning himself as a tool in the interpretation process, consistent with the existential phenomenological perspective. Key concepts of existential phenomenology, including the focus on participants and their description of experience and suspension of researcher’s natural attitude, are presented. Practical matters relating to the methods of data collection, participant selection and recruitment, and the data contextualisation process are then elaborated. The chapter ends by discussing how the ethical matters surrounding this study have been addressed and the researcher’s personal reflections on the methodological aspects of this thesis are offered.

Chapter four presents the participant stories initially as single cases in order to provide an individuated overview of each participant’s narrative. The development of the individual stories forms an initial understanding of the data which, subsequently, moves to the holistic level following the part-to-whole analytical process. The continuous process of understanding from within and across the individual participant cases, together with the relevant literature reviewed, enables the global themes to emerge. These global themes describe the participants’ experiences in the women’s transition from paid work to stay-at-home motherhood and their enactment of good motherhood identity, in the context of competing socio-cultural ideologies in Singaporean society.

Chapter five concludes this thesis by discussing the major contributions this research has generated at the theoretical, managerial, and policy levels. This chapter ends by presenting the limitations of this thesis and opportunities for future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to review the extant research relating to consumer identity and role transitions, with a particular focus on women’s transitions between paid work and stay-at-home motherhood. More specifically, this chapter highlights a number of gaps in the current body of knowledge and literature surrounding how consumer identity construction is understood. The accelerating mobility of people, information, and technologies in the world today has forged fluid social environments that intersect with one another, generating new and blended forms of consumer cultures and consumption behaviours (Bardhi, Eckhardt & Arnould, 2012; Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2015). With the many changes in our social environment, this chapter suggests that existing consumer research studies have not given adequate empirical attention to exploring how diverse identity goals coexist, cooperate, and compete in the constitution process of consumer identity (Epp & Price, 2008).

Consumer research needs to keep pace with the changes occurring in how consumers negotiate, assimilate, conceptualise, and enact their identities in the transitions of their lives, and this chapter aims to highlight the call for further research which: (1) acknowledges the heterogeneity of consumer identities, particularly relational identities (such as dyadic, triadic, or close bond) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006), and (2) recognises the co-constructed nature of identity through the interplay of diverse identity goals (Epp & Price, 2008).

While it appears that consumer research has largely not considered consumer identity as a co-constructed entity, a number of more recent consumer studies have started to pay attention to relational identity interplay processes (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010). In addition, research in the field of sociology (for example, Christopher, 2012; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001)
has been more successful in describing identity as a mutually-constructed entity. Furthermore, research in psychology supports the heterogeneity of identity representations which coexist and interrelate with one another (for instance, Brewer, 2001; Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section (section 2.2) reviews literature on the topic of identity largely from the fields of the psychology and sociology. The psychology and sociology of identities are introduced to offer an account of the identity construct and a socio-historical perspective of identity research. The second section (sections 2.3 and 2.4) discusses identity-related literature in the consumer research field, with particular emphasis placed on exploring identity interplay processes and role transitions. The third section (section 2.5) presents a sense of how women’s role transitions between (paid) work and (unpaid) home life influence their identity construction, and the specific challenges Singaporean women face in performing their roles as mother and worker. A map of this chapter is presented in Figure 2.0.

The next section (2.2) presents the construct and socio-historical perspectives of identity research, drawing primarily from the psychology and sociology literature to show the extent to which the nature of identity – and how identity is believed to be constructed – has changed with time. Such an introduction to the literature (on psychology and sociology) of identity is needed to provide a counterbalance to consumer research’s preoccupation with an individuated-orientation of identity; and to acknowledge the magnitude of the changes that have taken place in our understanding of how identities are conceived. Using identity research from psychology and sociology also provides a context within which to review what we currently know about identity within the consumer research literature.
2.2 An Introduction to Identity

Who am I? In every era and society across different parts of the world we endlessly strive to seek knowledge about who we are (Paranjpe, 1975). From East to West, religions, philosophies, and mantras incite people with such slogans such
as know thyself and discover yourself. Vocabularies like identity crisis feature in both daily conversation and popular culture (for example, Solving an Identity Crisis, 2012) to explore identity-related phenomena in society. The fact that everyone can use the term identity with such familiarity suggests that the concept is rooted in a fundamental and universal human experience (Baumeister, 2009). Identity represents a central issue throughout history as well as in present-day societies (Baumeister, 1987).

Etymologically, the word identity comes from the Latin root idem, which means the same (Paranjpe, 1975). While the notion of identity may appear common, its definition, however, remains elusive (Reed II, Forehand, Puntoni & Warlop, 2012). As a subject of inquiry, identity has been approached from multidisciplinary angles, such as philosophy (see for instance, James, 1890/1950; Kellner, 1992), psychology (see for instance Baumeister, 1987; Erikson, 1968), and sociology (see for instance, Giddens, 1991; Stets and Burke, 2003).

In psychology, identity is mainly approached from an individualistic viewpoint and is seen to reside within one’s internal dynamic processes (for example, see Freud, 1921). Psychologists, in other words, see identity as an entity that exists within a person and is conceived within the internal mechanisms of personality and cognitions (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2007). The role of societal milieus (and thus, the co-constructed viewpoint) is not focally considered in psychology.

On the contrary, sociologists perceive identity from a different viewpoint. In sociology, society and social institutions are thought to play significant roles in identity construction processes; a person’s sense of self is derived from his or her interactions with society. There are reciprocal relationships between the individual who influences society through actions, and the society which influences the identity-bearing individual through shared languages and meanings, culture, social systems, and social roles (Stets & Burke, 2003). Knowing who we are enables us to know what we should think and do, and knowing who others are
allows us to anticipate what they think and do (Triandis, 1989). This reflexive\textsuperscript{14} thought process enables us to have a sense of self and identity (Gecas, 1982; Triandis, 1989).

It is difficult to discuss identity without in some way touching on the concept of self, and vice versa; in the social sciences, the two notions are often used interchangeably. For instance, in social psychology, Breakwell (1986) characterises identity as having a sense of sameness to the self over time, giving a feeling of uniqueness to the self in relation to others. Consumer research scholars, furthermore, refer to identity as a \textit{“consistent conception of the self”} (Jantzen, Ostergaard & Sucena Vieira, 2006, p. 180) and use the term identity interchangeably with the self and sense of self to describe consumer’s subjective perception of who he or she is (see for instance, Belk, 1988; Schau, Gilly and Wonfinbarger, 2009). In line with this tradition, this thesis uses the terms identity and self interchangeably, and therefore, it is appropriate to clarify some distinctions between the two.

2.2.1 Self and Identity

\textit{“The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves”}. (Giddens, 1991, p. 75)

Providing a definitive definition of the self is acknowledged to be difficult (Sirgy, 1982). Early psychologists such as William James (1890/1950) philosophically define self as a duplex concept. Self is conceived as comprising of both I (the subject or the knower) and me (the object or the known) at the same time (James, 1890/1950). As the I, self is an active agent, knower, or thinker, and includes streams of consciousness; as the me, self is a passive object and incorporates everything a person can call his or her own, including physical body parts, attitudes, his or her personality, inner experiences, and possessions among others.

\textsuperscript{14} Reflexive thought refers to human’s ability to think about oneself thinking (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011).
Because of the distinction between *I* and *me*, reflexive knowledge becomes possible since *I* (the knower) can sense and be conscious of the reality of *me* (the known). Since the *self* infers the reflexive process involving the *I* and the *me*, the concept of self (or self-concept) represents the *product* of this reflexive activity (Gecas, 1982). Self-concept is, thus, defined as the concept a person has about oneself as a physical, social, and spiritual moral being (Gecas, 1982). It is also known as *“the totality of an individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object”* (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7).

In addition, the self has been thought to have both an individualistic and collectivistic nature. For instance, early literature documents that the self was viewed as an unfathomable and un-socialised inner dimension of a human being (Freud, 1921). Freud’s *psychoanalysis theory* describes the nature of self as individuated and something unique only to an individual being (Freud, 1921). Such conceptions about the self were celebrated, and represented a dominant view; one of the possible reasons behind this understanding was the belief of social scientists that groups were made up of many *individuals* who interact with one another, rather than individuals who have a collective sense of shared identity (Allport, 1924).

However, literature also notes that the self draws properties from external interactions with others. For instance, an early psychologist Wundt, (1916, p. 3) asserts:

“...those mental products which are created by a community of human life and are therefore, inexplicable in terms merely of individual consciousness since they presuppose the reciprocal action of many”.

Wundt’s social psychology theories are noted to deal with collective phenomena of the self that involves language, customs, and myth, which cannot be understood in terms of the psychology of the *isolated individual* (Wundt, 1916). In the same light, the notion that self is not merely an individualistic entity is advanced by the *symbolic interactionism* theory; this theory is premised on the knowledge that the
self arises from having interactions with other people (Mead, 1934). The research of self as a collective conception began to thrive (for example, refer to Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

For instance, Triandis (1989) asserts that selves and cultures can vary and co-vary. Some societies influence individuals to conform to standard values and behavioural patterns, while other societies allow a wider range of diversity (Triandis, 1989). Moreover, Markus and Kitayama (1991) propose that self-construal can vary across cultures, and is characterised as either independent or interdependent. In studying self-construal between the American and Japanese cultures, for example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) discover that different cultures hold different construal of the self; they theorise that there are two construals of the self: (1) independent self-construal, where behaviour is organised largely by reference to one’s own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than by reference of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of other people; and (2) interdependent self-construal, which views the self not as a separate entity from the social context, but as connected and linked to others’ self-conceptions.

Meanwhile, one’s self-concept is empirically known to be both stable and malleable (Markus & Kunda, 1986). A self-concept can be enduring, in a sense that individuals seek consistency and stability over time, resisting any information that challenges their prevailing view of oneself (Markus & Kunda, 1986). In the meantime, the self-concept may also be dynamic and contain malleable properties (such as the good self, bad self, public self, and private self), triggered by different situations in the social environment (Markus & Kunda, 1986). Self-concept, thus, is not “monolithic” by nature; rather, it is dynamic and changes as it interacts with social contexts (Markus & Kunda, 1986, p. 865).

15 A person with independent self-construal is known to be individually-centred, egocentric, separate, autonomous, and self-contained; on the other hand, a person with interdependent self-construal is seen as socio-centric, holistic, collective, contextualist, connected, and relational (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

16 The concept of interdependent self-construal corresponds to the notion of relational identity adopted in this thesis, which will be further discussed in subsection 2.2.3 (Personal, Relational, and Collective Identities).
Therefore, as a person’s sense of self interrelates with his or her surroundings, the self is seen not as a passive recipient of input and feedback from the social world but rather as something that actively chooses, selects, and controls its environment (Baumeister, 2009, p. 12). As an agent, the self has an active role that goes beyond processing information; the self also seeks to exert control over the surrounding, initiates action, and pursues its various goals (Baumeister, 2009). Over time, what we know about the self and its conception has evolved from a banal, everyday phenomenon, into a more intricate understanding that continues to elicit research interest (Baumeister, 2009). The next section will in turn review self-identity literature from the socio-historical perspective, to highlight how its construction processes have evolved with time.

2.2.2 Identity in Socio-Historical Context

The rising interest among social science researchers in the self is part of a broader social trend in which individual identity has become a fascinating phenomenon; this is a result of how the self has evolved in recent history to become a more difficult and important subject to study (Baumeister, 1987; Sirgy, 1982). This section takes the socio-historical circumstances into consideration (Kroger, 2007), from the medieval times to modern eras, to review how the conception of self has developed to become a more intricate entity and process over time (Baumeister, 2009).

In the medieval periods (11th – 15th centuries), society was known to be more rigidly structured than it is today; the social environment was organised by lineage, gender, home, and social class, all of which were already determined by birth (Baumeister, 1986). As a consequence, institutional structures (such as family, religion, political systems, and so on) in social life primarily defined an individual’s identity (Baumeister, 2009). Identity was bestowed upon an individual; as a recipient of identity, the individual’s role was considered to be largely passive (Baumeister, 1986). Therefore, identity was defined in a
straightforward manner, by how the society was organised (Baumeister, 1986), as Kellner (1992, p. 141) further highlights:

“...one’s identity was fixed, solid, and stable. Identity was a function of predefined social roles and a traditional system of myths which provided orientation and religious sanctions to one’s place in the world, while religiously circumscribing the realm of thought and behaviour”.

An individual’s identity was determined in advance and did not undergo much reflection or modification (Kellner, 1992). This pre-modern notion about identity subsequently underwent a renaissance, challenging the prior idea about how identity should be defined. In the Enlightenment era (15th – 18th centuries), which emphasised the supremacy of reason, people were motivated to challenge traditional value systems and organised a new life on their own (Baumeister, 1986; Shankar & Fitchett, 2002). Identity in the modernism period defined a person as a cognitive subject with an unchanging essence; identity was viewed as something “essential, substantial, unitary, fixed, and fundamentally unchanging” (Kellner, 1992, p. 142).

The industrial revolution and rise of the middle classes then shifted how people defined their identity orientation; from kinship and value-based beliefs to material wealth (Baumeister, 1987). Over the centuries, the more traditional construction of identity (which was based on the social order that was fixed and stable) was abandoned. The American and French revolutions repudiated the age-old tradition about the social order and introduced radical ideas such as individual freedom and equality, which left people without clear guidelines in defining their identity (Baumeister, 2009). Self-definition – which originally was defined largely by very stable and ascribed attributes in the Middle Ages – has evolved and been influenced by liberal reforms which sought to free human life (Baumeister, 2009).

Modern self-definition has come to depend on “a changing, uncertain mixture of choices and accomplishments, and the self is assumed to contain the values and other bases on which these choices are made” (Baumeister, 2009, p. 4). Social
environments (including social institutions, social orders, and social expectations) increasingly play an influential part in shaping the process of identity conception (Baumeister, 1987). The notion of identity, over time, becomes closely related with a person’s social roles and statuses, such as marital status, occupation, socio-economic status, gender, race, and educational level (Brewer, 2001; Gecas, 1982).

This sociological notion of identity (in which society is perceived to play an influential role in the identity construction process, as introduced earlier in section 2.2) covers a spectrum of perspectives, from a view that identity is a reflection of a person’s adaptation to social contexts (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996), to the reciprocal interactions between an individual and the social contexts (Lerner, 1993), and to a radical position that one’s identity is merely an imprint of one’s social and cultural environments (Rattansi & Phoenix, 1997), which Kroger (2007) also calls the postmodern view of identity. In short, the notion of identity has gone through a major shift from identity-as-an-object (as in the pre-modern eras) to identity-as-a-process that involves construction and reconstruction (Shankar & Fitchett, 2002) that needs to be continuously monitored, organised, and managed as “a reflexive project of the self” (Giddens 1991, p. 5).

The discussion, thus far, has been to review the psychological and sociological backgrounds of identities. The notion of identity, in psychology, is approached mainly from an individualistic perspective, focusing on a person’s internal mechanism of personality and cognition; this is different from the sociological viewpoint that recognises society’s role in influencing one’s identity conception. The discussion has also clarified the notions of self and identity and reviewed how the understanding of identity has evolved socio-historically to highlight the changes in identity construction processes over time. The next section aims to introduce a range of identities derived from varied relationships with others; this is foundational in understanding the notion of the co-constructed nature of identity (as utilised in this thesis).
2.2.3 Personal, Relational, and Collective Identities

Until recently, social psychological theories of the self focused on the individualistic orientation of identity; that is, a person’s sense of unique self-concept differentiated from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Social and cultural perspectives have, however, renewed research interests in the social aspects of the self and the extent to which people define themselves in relation to their relationships with others and social groups (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). The social psychology literature notes that the self contains a repertoire of multiple identities, developed through heterogeneous and varied social relations with others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Social identity researchers such as Tajfel and Turner (1979) posit that there are two broad categories of identity that define different types of self: (1) personal identity, which defines self in terms of one’s unique traits and close personal relationships; and (2) social identity, which defines self in relation to group memberships. This theory clearly demarcates between identity that is internal in nature and the one that is external or socially-informed. In other words, personal identity corresponds to the inner feature, while social identity refers to the outer dimension of one’s identity.

Furthermore, Brewer and Gardner (1996) argue for, and conceptualise, three representations of self; these include: (1) individual self17, which is the personal and individualistic self-concept; (2) relational self18, which is the self-concept derived from close relationships and role connections with significant others, such as the dyadic relationship with a spouse; and finally (3) collective self, which corresponds to the group membership that differentiates us from them. In other words, people seek to define their identities in three fundamental ways, in terms of: (1) the unique attributes (such as the individual self); (2) dyadic relationships

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17 The individual self characterises most studies of the self in the Western psychology (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).
18 The relational self corresponds very closely to Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) theory of interdependent self, as discussed in the section 2.2.1 (Self and Identity).
(such as the relational self); and (3) group membership (such as the collective self) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Distinctive representations of identity emerge that describe how one relates to oneself as well as to the social environment. These include: (1) personal identity, (2) relational identity, and (3) collective identity (Brewer, 2001; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). While the individuated notions of identity prevail in contemporary consumer research, it is not so in relation to relational identity research; hence, there is a need to further explore what relational identity is, and how it is different from other forms of identity representations.

The origins of the relational self can be traced back to symbolic interactionism theory, which suggests that conceptions of the self arise from one’s interactions with others, as (Mead, 1934) explains:

“Selves can only exist in definite relations to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also”. (p. 164)

The term relational in relational identity places an emphasis on the influence of significant others more heavily than the prior terms (for example, social self and interpersonal self) which tend to connote a broader scope in society (Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006). Whereas social identities refer to aspects of the self derived from groups of (identifiable or unidentifiable) individuals or social group memberships, relational identities involve a connection with an identifiable significant other(s) (Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006). While both social identities and relational identities may evolve from connections with others, these others are viewed as fellow individuals in the case of relational identities, but as in-group members in the case of social identities (Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006, p. 161). A derivative of social identity, relational identity is the type of self that is achieved through the assimilation with significant others based on personalised bonds of attachment (for instance, the mother-child relationship, friendships, and romantic relationships) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). In addition, the relational self
characterises the self in relationship with either a single significant other (e.g. a sibling) or multiple significant others (i.e. small collectivities such as a family) (Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006). This comparison between the social self and the relational self is illustrated in Figure 2.1: Social and Relational Selves.

Figure 2.1: Social and Relational Selves

In Figure 2.1, relationships between the self and groups of multiple significant others (i.e. family and friendships) are denoted with dotted lines. The dotted lines signify collective relationships, such as the family or close friendship groups. The lines are dotted to signal that these are permeable, that is while sometimes we operate as a family unit, at other times the important relationship will be with individuals within that unit – for example with a mother, a sister, or a brother. The solid lines in the figure denote the relationship between the self and individual significant others (who are sometimes part of collectivities); relational identities therefore evolve from both collectives of significant others and significant others as individuals.
Furthermore, the relational self occupies an *in-between space* that separates the personal and collective selves (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) (refer to Figure 2.2). In other words, relational identity is differentiated from the individualistic identity; and relational identity does not represent a collectivistic identity found typically in a large social group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

**Figure 2.2: Personal, Relational, and Collective Identities**

Both relational and collective identities may be regarded as social extensions of the self; however, these two notions of the (relational and collective) selves differ in whether the social connections are personalised bonds of attachment (that is, relational) or impersonal connections derived from common identification with a group or social category (that is, collective) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The multiple representations of identity are summarised in the Table 2.0.

Brewer and Gardner (1996) explain that, at every level of self-representation (for instance, personal, relational, or collective identity), the opposing forces that come from *assimilation* (with others) and *differentiation* (from others) create a dynamic equilibrium that fluctuates with changes in the distance between the self and others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996); The relational self is often characterised in
terms of “the tension between intimacy and separation from others” (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, p. 91).

Table 2.0: Level of Representation of the Self

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>Self-concept</th>
<th>Basis of self-evaluation</th>
<th>Frame of reference</th>
<th>Basic social motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Traits</td>
<td>Interpersonal comparison</td>
<td>Self-interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Other’s benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Group prototype</td>
<td>Intergroup comparison</td>
<td>Collective welfare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To date, the field of social psychology appears to be more successful in shedding light on the heterogeneous nature of identity and highlighting relational identity as one of the self-representations. Nonetheless, exploration of the relational identity construct within the (social psychology) discipline has been limited towards, and is focused on, building theoretical models (for instance, refer to Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Smith, 1991).

2.2.4 Conclusion to this Section

The contemporary literature in psychology views self as an entity that interacts with social environments, actively seeks to exert control over the environments, initiates action, and pursues its various goals (Baumeister, 2009). In this section 2.2.3 the psychology and sociology literature has been used to highlight the heterogeneous representations of the self; drawing its properties from the external interactions with others, self is acknowledged to consist of a repertoire of definitions, including the individual self, relational self, and collective self
While relational self is recognised as one of the identity constructs within the social psychology literature, much research in marketing has either not acknowledged or not fully incorporated such notion.

The socio-historical perspective of identity highlights a shift in how identity construction has been understood, from a straightforward process (where identity was bestowed based upon one’s birth and would remain stable for life) to a more complex phenomenon where one is left without clear guidelines in defining the self (Baumeister, 1986; Baumeister, 1987). The role of consumption has become increasingly central in forging identities in consumer research. Consumption is regarded as a solution to provide meaning to identity (Cushman, 1990; Shankar & Fitchett, 2002). Marketing efforts have been geared towards helping consumers achieve meaningful states of being through a process of identity creation (Shankar & Fitchett, 2002, p. 512-513) as what individuals possess and consume represent a major contributor to, and reflection of, their identities (Belk, 1988).

The next section reviews what we know in the field of identity-related consumer behaviour research; this field of research has largely not kept pace with the shift in approaching identity as multiple representations of self (as reported in this section of the literature review). The next section proposes that there is a need for consumer researchers to consider the heterogeneity of identities to contribute to a better understanding of how identity is co-constructed, and how such co-construction thus influences consumption behaviours.

2.3 Consumer Research and Identities

“We are what we have... this may be the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour”. (Belk, 1988, p. 160)
The association between who we are and what we have, or between identity and possession\(^{19}\), is not new. An early assertion was made more than 120 years ago by psychologist James (1890/1950), who theorised that we are the sum of our possessions. In his now classic work, James (1890/1950) notes:

“a man’s Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down – not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all”. (p. 291-292)

The connection between identity and consumption is also proposed by philosopher Sartre (1943). Through his work, Being and Nothingness, Sartre (1943) discusses the relationships between having, doing, and being. He theorises that doing is merely transitory in nature towards a more fundamental human goal to have and to be. The only motive for us to want something is to enlarge our sense of self, and our identity is defined by what we have (Sartre, 1943).

Even though the relationship between identity and consumption has become widely accepted, the field of identity-related consumer behaviour research today predominantly remains focused on individualistic and collective consumer identities alone. Specifically, the extant scholarship characterises consumer identity as having individuated and collective representations, neglecting the relational and small group’s perspectives on identity co-construction (such as dyadic, triadic, and multiple collectivities of identity). While numerous studies in psychology and sociology lend support to the notion of relational identity (as discussed in the previous sections), this particular identity appears to not be transferred widely into the domain of consumer research.

\(^{19}\) Possession and consumption have similar meaning and are used interchangeably in this thesis; consumption is seen largely synonymous with having (see for instance, Belk, 1988; Fromm, 1976; Shankar & Fitchett, 2002); Fromm (1976, p. 36) posits that “to consume is one form of having and perhaps the most important one for today’s affluent industrialised society...”.

53
This section reviews the theoretical contributions generated by the current identity-related consumer research literature, and suggests that further exploration is needed to address the research call to recognise the heterogeneous nature of the consumer identity practices (section 2.3.1). A more complex and holistic process of how identity is mutually constructed is then presented in section 2.3.2.

2.3.1 Identities in Consumer Research

Early literature in consumer research perceives identity as a monolithic (rather than dynamic) entity and predominantly sought to explore congruence between perceived attributes of consumption objects and consumer’s psychological characteristics (see for instance, Landon, 1974). This tradition has continued (for instance, refer to Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn, 1995; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011; Shang, Reed II & Croson, 2008; Wu, Cutright & Fitzsimons, 2011) and reflects early psychological theories of selfhood and identity, whereby identity was thought to be largely individualistic and collective (as discussed in the section 2.2.1). Such a research approach, furthermore, generally views identity as a specifiable and measurable construct, which once quantified, can be generalised to predict consumer’s future purchase intentions, response to commercial programmes, or forecast consumer actions and market behaviours (for instance, see Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn, 1995; Wu, Cutright & Fitzsimons, 2011); this approach has been criticised for underestimating the extent to which consumption contributes to consumer identity (Belk, 1988).

During the last 25 years, consumer research has explored how consumption helps consumers forge identities from the perspectives of the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological dimensions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Joy & Li, 2012). Scholarship in this field of research has generated rich insights into why consumers engage in a variety of consumption practices within specific social and cultural contexts (see for instance, Ahuvia, 2005; Curasi, Price & Arnould, 2004; Fournier, 1998; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). This literature of
identity-related consumption largely rests on a central premise that consumers are what they consume and they consume what they are, contributing to the knowledge that identities are constructed, expressed, and maintained through consumption. This body of research emerges to offer a more “expansive view” (Belk, 1988, p. 140) of how identity construction provides special meaning to consumers and influences their consumption behaviour. This research category, furthermore, places importance on understanding the meaning consumers attach to their possessions and how the consumption forms part of themselves (hence, the term “extended self”); as Belk (1988, p. 139) clarifies:

“We cannot hope to understand consumer behaviour without first gaining some understanding of the meanings that consumers attach to possessions…to examine the relationship between possessions and sense of self. It is based not only on the premise that this relationship is of importance to understanding consumer behaviour, but also on the premise that understanding the extended self will help us learn how consumer behaviour contributes to our broader existence as human beings”.

In parallel with Cushman’s (1990, p. 559) assertion that the self is “empty” and yearns for consumer goods for fulfilment, Belk (1988) posits that what we have strongly infuses a sense of who we are (Belk, 1988).

Our understanding of consumer identity and consumption to date has been advanced in two major ways: First, it establishes and affirms the knowledge that consumption is not merely grounded in specific acts of acquiring, consuming, or disposing of an object. Consumption, originally premised on the utilitarian consideration, has been increasingly accepted as a process that is situated in the larger social framework (see for instance, Kozinets, 2002; O’Guinn & Belk, 1989; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Furthermore, consumption is posited to go beyond a mere passive act of consuming, to include an active act of producing meanings creatively to enhance consumer's sense of self and to help him or her connect with the social worlds (see for instance, Arvidsson, 2005; Cutcher, 2010; Fournier, 1998; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Therkelsen and Gram, 2008).
Second, consumption processes are embedded with identity-related meaning. People engage in consumption not only for economic values, but to extract meaning related to their sense of being and identity (see for instance, Banister, Hogg, Budds & Dixon, 2015; Belk & Costa, 1998; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Kozinets, 2002; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). Such meaning may be transcendental, breaking free from constraints of the material world (see Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; Kozinets, 2001). Consumers define who they are through messages they manipulate and transmit through the possessions they display to other people (see for example Garey, 1995; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Schouten, 1991a; Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006). Consumption, thus, represents a central avenue of self-expression, an observable manifestation of the abstract consumer identity (Schau, 2000). Consumption increasingly becomes a means to construct an identity and forge relationships with others.

While the growing body of knowledge in identity-related consumer behaviour literature contributes to a richer understanding of the relationships between consumer identity and consumption, existing studies largely approach consumer identity as a traditional, individuated entity within the collective identity setting. For instance, Fournier (1998) explores how individuals forge relationships with brands to derive personal meanings. Her research focuses more on developing the typology of consumer-brand relationship forms (such as “best friendships”, “marriages of convenience”, and “secret affairs” among others), which are conceptualised without further elaboration regarding how these various consumer-brand relational forms assign identity meaning to consumers (Fournier, 1998, p. 362). While Fournier’s (1998, p. 366) study also highlights the relational qualities of consumer-brand connections (for example, “love/passion”, “intimacy”, and “commitment”), it does little to explain how these relational notions contribute to consumers’ identity conception.

In addition, a study investigating how elective cosmetic surgeries help consumers gain a sense of self-completion found that the consumption of plastic surgeries contributes to relational identity meaning (for instance, “romantic fantasies” and
“sexual selves” linked to the consumers’ significant others) (Schouten, 1991a). But again this study primarily focused on understanding the individual customers’ motives of consumption and the changes to the customers’ individualistic self-concepts without much exploration of how the consumers’ relational identities are re-constructed following the cosmetic surgeries (Schouten, 1991a, p. 417).

Furthermore, several studies discuss how individual consumers make sense of the changes in their personal identities within the collective identity settings related to their movie fan club membership (Kozinets, 2001) and motorcycle club membership (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These studies – while aiming to explore how the collective identities drawn from the social memberships provide a sense of social cohesion and shared meanings to individual consumers – do not shed light on relationship dynamics between (and the relational identity aspect of the) individuals (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). In other words, these studies focus on the collective-personal identity interactions rather than the goal dynamics of these small collectivities. This begs additional questions, such as: under what circumstances do the individual and relational identities within the group (dis)agree with the collective identities? If the members of a group disagree on who they are as a group, how do the members (smaller collectivities) negotiate constructions of their collective identity following a challenge to it?

Despite the prevailing emphasis of seeing consumer identity as an individuated entity within the social identity setting in the current body of knowledge, notable exceptions exist particularly within family research which explores consumer identity as a co-constructed entity (for example, refer to Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010). For instance, Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane (2015, p. 713) investigate the nature of sibling relationships (“sibship”) within the context of consumer socialisation to understand the role siblings play within, and as part of, the broader family dynamic as consumer-socialisation agents. This study documents a series of socialisation behaviours, with children working in positive and negative ways to
develop consumer skills of their siblings (Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015). A typology of child relational identities that emerge as a result of socialisation processes within the family setting is developed (Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015).

In the same light, Kerrane, Hogg and Bettany (2012) examine how children within their family units engage in complex and iterative processes (such as coalition formation, perspective taking, and co-option of parents and siblings) to mobilise their influence strategies to sway parents’ consumption decisions. The “intra-familial processes” that form the children’s influence strategies in the families are co-constructed to guide the family consumption behaviour (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012, p. 809).

In addition, Kerrane and Hogg (2010) explore the process of child influence focusing on how sibling relationships, as one component of the family environment, shape the influence strategies which children direct towards their parents. This study’s findings reflect the co-constituted processes of sibling relationships and behaviours that work to both help and hinder fellow siblings utilise influence strategies on their parents’ consumption choices (Kerrane & Hogg, 2010).

As a research context, the family is understood to be “a consuming, producing, distributing, and socialising unit” in societies (Commuri & Gentry, 2000, p. 1). Families are also consumer-socialisation agents wherein a complex network of embedded and simultaneous family relationships coalesce, shaping processes of consumer socialisation within the family unit (Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015). Family decision making and consumption impact upon national economy (Kirchler, 1995) and this has motivated consumer researchers to understand who makes, and what contributes to, family decisions, giving rise to a new approach in conceptualising how consumer identity is co-constructed (Epp & Price, 2008).
Recent family studies (for example, Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012) are beginning to take a networked perspective rather than an individualistic point of view, thereby yielding new insights about a highly relational, distributed familial agency where specific consumption acts are a result of collective action (Epp & Price, 2008). This new paradigm (of seeing identity as a relational, co-constructed entity) challenges consumer research scholars to move from the individualistic conception of identity to multiple and collective perspective of identity to uncover new processes related to consumer identity construction (Epp & Price, 2008). Adopting the family perspective inspires consumer research to further explore, for instance, how consumers negotiate tensions and commitments among diverse individual, relational, and collective identity goals that get constituted in the consumers’ selection and experience of activities (Epp & Price, 2008).

Furthermore, a very limited number of non-family, identity-related consumer behaviour literature also points toward the link between mutually-constructed identities and consumption (for instance, Gentina, Decoopman & Ruvio, 2013; Therkelsen & Gram, 2008). In a study about mothers’ clothing purchase behaviour in the presence of their adolescent daughters, Gentina, Decoopman and Ruvio (2013) discuss the significance of mother-daughter relational identities to the mothers’ consumption behaviour. The statistically-based research indicates that the mothers’ personal and relational identities coexist and influence the clothing consumption practices through the mothers’ social comparison processes (Gentina, Decoopman & Ruvio, 2013). While the study highlights the coexistence of diverse identities, however, the relational aspect of the mothers’ identity is not explained in the findings and some key issues, therefore, remain vague. For instance, how diverse goals of the mothers and daughters may clash and converge in a process of forming the mutually-agreeable consumption decision is not well explored; this is a very likely scenario which receives little attention. The chosen research methodology lends this study to a more restricted understanding about the complex phenomena of identity constitution; however, the researchers’ attempt to reveal how consumer goals may interplay and be
mutually constituted represents progress (albeit limited) in how we view identity as a co-constructed entity.

In addition, a study by Therkelsen and Gram (2008) also seeks to reframe consumer identity, away from the classic individuated and collective to relational perspectives of identity construction. Their research explores the meaning production and identity formation of mature couple tourists in connection with their holiday consumption; the findings show that the couple consumers use the holiday consumption as a vehicle to express their relational identity more than their individual identities. The couple consumers, rather than the individual consumers in isolation, become the central identifying unit of the research. Therkelsen and Gram (2008, p. 289-290) observe:

“...consumers have their identity firmly anchored in a close relationship with their partners, and that the two individuals to a large extent share ideas about what they stand for and hence portray themselves as one unit with a collective ‘we’ identity... these couples very much present themselves as a unit by means of expressions like: ‘we are,’ ‘we would never do that,’ ‘that’s us’ and particularly the phrase ‘the two of us alone’ indicates that the partners feel close to and comfortable with each other”.

In this study, Therkelsen and Gram (2008) aim to shift the focal unit of consumer analysis from the individual to relational (or dyadic) levels and see the consumers through a bundled identity lens (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 50), and the holiday consumption as a process to co-construct the consumers’ relational identities (Therkelsen & Gram, 2008). This study, nonetheless, does not analyse or uncover the couples’ identity co-construction processes and interplay related to their selection of the holiday activities and consumption, a key aspect of research that this thesis seeks to explore.

Thus far, this section reviews how the extant body of knowledge in identity-related consumer behaviour contributes to a better understanding of the nature of consumer identities and how they influence consumption behaviours; while this progress has been significant, the literature reviewed largely seems dominated by conceptualising consumer identity as an individualistic entity within the collective
or social environment. Several consumer research studies, notably within the family research domain, suggest a shift in thinking about consumer goals from individual to networked entities (Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012). Recognising the dynamic interplay of individual, relational, and collective identities will provide further insight into how consumers manage conflict, tension, and synergies among diverse identity goals that lead to consumers’ selection and experience of consumption activities (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 62). The next section in turn will present a framework from family research to “sensitise and orient” (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 51) this thesis in the exploration of how the research participants draw from marketplace resources and communication practices to manage identity construction processes in the women’s role transitions from professional career to stay-at-home motherhood.

2.3.2 Consumer Identity Interplay and Co-construction

Consumer researchers see family as a residence of human relationships (Epp & Price, 2011; Price & Epp, 2005). Family, thus, houses unique bundles of identities which include the family’s collective identity, relational identities, smaller groups’ (such as siblings and parent-child), and individual members’ identities, which represents an appropriate context to examine identity interplay and co-construction process (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 50; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010). As a consumer socialisation unit in society, family represents a site where diverse identity practices coexist and interplay in everyday experiences of doing family (Epp & Price, 2008; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012).

Epp and Price (2008, p. 52) introduce a framework, called Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices, which is drawn on in this thesis in the process of data interpretation. The framework serves as a sensitising theory – not a deductive theory with a goal of prediction – but rather to see relations and identity practices in a new light. In particular the framework is used to help explore how the
participants use consumption to manage interplays among individual, relational, and collective identity enactments (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 51).

The Epp and Price (2008) framework offers a critique of widely held views within the current identity-based consumer research that retains focus on the traditional individualistic and collective approach to understanding identity (as discussed in the prior section 2.3.1). Epp and Price (2008, p. 65) counterbalance this viewpoint with an alternative and novel perspective focused on “multiple relational bundles” (Deighton, MacInnis, McGill & Shiv, 2010). The framework is illustrated in Figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3: Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices**
The framework presents identity construction as a dynamic process of interplay among individual, relational, and collective identities (Epp & Price, 2008). The heterogeneity of identities (hence, the term “identity bundles”) is a reflection of distinctive, goals-driven entities with diverse communication forms and multiplex consumption practices. Family identity is viewed as mutually-constructed internally by family members, and externally by outsiders (Epp & Price, 2008). Such a collective identity is not a construct that resides in isolated minds, but is rather enacted through co-constructed actions (i.e., shared interactions among relational bundles within the family) (Epp & Price, 2008). The theory recognises that identity construction is a networked process, involving the interplay among the individual, relational, and collective identities (Epp & Price, 2008; also see Epp & Price, 2011), which is also empirically supported within a growing body of family consumer research (Epp & Price, 2011; Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012).

This framework sees identity conception as a complex and mutually-constructed phenomenon that involves tensions and negotiations among family members (Epp & Price, 2008). The choices and actions of individual and relational identities, under some circumstances, may not always be consistent with the collective family identity; for example, teenagers might challenge their family’s ritual event of holiday travel by planning their own outing with their school friends. These differences induce tensions and conflicts within the identity bundles that need to be managed and negotiated.

Furthermore, the framework illustrates how families constitute their collective identities using a range of communication forms and drawing from consumer activities in the marketplace. It also introduces seven factors that moderate how families construct and manage their identities; the seven elements include: (1) level of adaptability of communication forms, (2) extent to which a family demonstrates a shared sense of collective identity (member agreement), (3) level of commitment family members display to maintain a specific shared identity practice, (4) whether and how individual and relational identities are synergistic
with the shared collective identities, (5) changes in life that disrupt identity practices, (6) barriers in the enactment of identities, and (7) contextual and divergent identity needs of the family and family members (Epp & Price, 2008).

The *Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices* framework, overall, serves to stimulate this thesis to move beyond the classic, individualistic identity perspective that is pervasive in the extant literature of consumer identity. By shifting the research focus to the multiple identities perspective, the thesis seeks to uncover the dynamic interplay of various identity practices and goals that influence consumption behaviour to address the gaps in the identity-related consumer research literature (Epp & Price, 2008).

### 2.3.3 Conclusion to this Section

The body of knowledge in identity-related consumer behaviour has advanced our understanding of how consumption helps consumers forge identities. The scholarship in this field of research, however, has not adequately accounted for the role of different relational and small group units in understanding how consumers conceive their sense of self (Epp & Price, 2008).

In the meantime, family research within the consumer behaviour domain has recognised the heterogeneous nature of identities, explored the interrelationships of diverse consumer identity goals, and how their interplay influences consumption; such a *family perspective* shifts the primary unit of analysis, moving from the individual to the interplay of identity bundles in action (refer to Epp & Price, 2011; Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015; Kerrane & Hogg, 2010). This (family) research approach uncovers processes related to consumer identity co-construction and will, hence, be considered in examining how the participants in this thesis jointly construct their sense of self as they transition from their professional, paid careers to performances of (unpaid) home-based motherhood at home. The next sections introduce the theoretical background of role transitions
in relation to consumer behaviour research (section 2.4) and discuss how women’s
role transitions in society influence their identity construction (section 2.5).

2.4 Consumer Research and Role Transitions

“Role transitions usually have dramatic effects on self-identity and social
identity: They represent changes in the plays, parts, scripts, and props in
our lives.... Thus, if we – as researchers of consumer behaviour – believe
“All the world’s a stage...” then we must study that stage if we desire to
understand changes in the social systems, social roles... we will discover
that the acquisition, usage, and disposition of possessions serve vital
functions for the performers as they enact their roles and role
transitions”. (Young, 1991, p. 38)

In the course of our lives we make life changes, including entering college,
graduating from school, securing our first job, getting married, having children,
changing jobs, getting divorced, and retiring. Young (1991) dramaturgically
states in the opening quote that life transitions, identity, and consumption are
interconnected. Consumers in transition, such as the participants in this thesis,
provide a valuable site for exploring the relationship between consumption and
identity construction. For example, literature focused on role transitions (within
the context of identity-related consumer research) highlights how new possessions
contribute to the formation of new identities (Solomon & Anand, 1985; Noble &
Walker, 1997; Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006), how disposition of possessions is
used to symbolise the end of a particular life stage (Price, Arnould & Curasi,
2000; Young, 1991), how possessions and consumption practices hold specific
meanings during geographic moves (Bardhi, Eckhardt & Arnould, 2012; Belk,
1992; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999), and how self-gift
giving is practiced to support consumers during important life transitions and how
in turn such gifts contribute to new identity formation (Mick, DeMoss & Faber,
1992). The current role transitions literature rests on the premise that the role
changes introduce problematic moments, disrupt consumer’s well-being (see Lee,
Moschis & Mathur, 2001; Voice Group, 2010a; Voice Group, 2010b), and drive
consumers to reconstruct their sense of selves (see Banister & Hogg, 2006; Schau,
Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 2009). Such research contributes to our understanding about how consumers, during their life transitions, manage their sense of self through consumption – although it approaches identity as an individualistic entity with little recognition of the co-constructed nature of the identity.

This section discusses role transitions as a context of the studies of consumer identity by introducing the sociological and psychological backgrounds of role transitions (section 2.4.1). The discussion in this section (2.4) informs the next section that explores women’s roles in society, how women’s transitions between the worlds of paid work and (unpaid) home-based motherhood can influence their sense of selves (section 2.5).

2.4.1 An Introduction to Role Transitions

There is no unified definition of life transitions, and research, particularly in the domains of sociology and psychology, discusses life transitions in light of social role change and the distress that change often entails, and consequently how individuals make personal and social adjustments to cope with the changing social status (Stewart, 1982; Wheaton, 1990). Role theory and social stress theory represent the genesis of the research interest in life transitions (George, 1993).

The origin of role theory can be traced back to the work of Linton (1936), The Study of Man, who defines status as a position in a social context and role as the expected behaviours of the persons who hold the social status. Role refers to a behavioural pattern associated with a specific individual in a specific social context (Linton, 1936); Park (1950, p. 249) affirms this notion of role:

“It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.”
Furthermore, role theory presumes that individuals hold expectations for both their own behaviours and those of other members of society (Biddle, 1986). This conception gives rise to the theories of role allocation and role socialisation (Biddle, 1979; Brim, 1966). Role allocation refers to the processes by which social roles are assigned to individuals, including role entry and exit (George, 1993). Meanwhile, role socialisation is a process where social structure transmits to the individuals the attitudes and skills compatible with their social roles (George, 1993). Furthermore, a role is acquired by, and allocated to, an individual as a member of a society, and can depict a social status. A person may represent several roles (or has role repertoires), identify oneself with certain roles, and assume different role-based identities in different social settings (Goffman, 1959).

From the sociological perspective, an individual’s role-based identities are influenced by social structures (or social institutions) such as the family, the economic system, the political system, the education system, and through religious institutions (Bates & Harvey, 1977; Reilly, 1982). Every social institution poses specific expectations on the behaviour of its institutional member (Bates & Harvey, 1977; Reilly, 1982). For example, within the family institution, the expected role of a husband is to work outside the home to bring income for his family (as grounded in classic studies of the nuclear family and breadwinner discourse); in contrast, a mother is expected to provide nurturance to her children and to tend for her family at home (see for example, Garey, 1995; Hays, 1996).

In addition, role theory implies that individuals assume and abandon their social roles throughout the course of their life (Gentry, 1997; Wheaton, 1990); thus the term role transition (George, 1980). Role transition is a term derived from the dramaturgic metaphor to describe a person’s passage from one social status to another marked by role entry and role exit (Goffman, 1959).

Van Gennep (1960) observes that role transitions generally consist of three important phases, including: (1) separation, in which a person disengages from a social role; (2) transition, in which the person adapts to fit into new roles; and (3)
incorporation, in which the person integrates the new role into the self. Turner (1969), furthermore, describes the transitional or liminal phase as a limbo between a previous state and a coming one; it is a period of personal ambiguity, of non-status, and of unanchored identity (refer to Schouten, 1991b). Changes in one’s role may induce personal disruption and distress (George, 1993). Sociological literature on the topic of stress establishes how changes in the socially-structured arrangement in life influence one’s well-being and self-concept (Pearlin, 1989; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman & Mullan, 1981).

2.4.2 Conclusion to this Section

A study on consumers in transition represents a potentially insightful window through which to investigate the relationships between consumption and identity construction. The extant literature on identity-related consumer research within the context of role transition has progressed our understanding to date about how consumption may help consumers to construct their identity during movement and migration; this existing pool of research, however, predominantly orientates its analytical focus on the individualistic identity within the social environment. Role theory and social stress theory provide theoretical foundations to the identity-related consumer research that focuses on role transitions.

2.5 Women’s Changing Roles and Identities

Historically, consumer researchers have viewed women primarily in the terms of the multiple caregiving roles of wife, mother, and homemaker (Venkatesh, 1980). There was a clear gender division of labour between the breadwinning husband who laboured in the public sphere and the housewife 20 who focused on

20 The term housewife is coined by Maria Mies (1986) to make invisible the concept of women’s labour, including the works involved in the reproduction of life, birth, childrearing, and housework. Through housewifisation women become “the cheapest producers and consumers in this world market system” (Mies, 1986, p. 4). Women are expected to offer their labour like the freely available natural resource of air and water, without prestige or power (Mies, 1986).
housekeeping and childrearing in the domestic sphere (Ochiai, 2008b). The roles of women outside the family, such as that of a professional worker or career woman, have been given relatively little attention in consumer research (Venkatesh, 1980).

The women’s movement encouraged women’s advancement by offering them a greater access to social and economic spaces which led to the dramatic rise in the employment of women outside the home; this has caused shifts in women’s roles and statuses in the direction of equality with men (Bartos, 1977; Chan, 2000; Venkatesh, 1980). The rise in women’s labour force participation has increased the number of households in which both husband and wife are wage earners (Bellante & Foster, 1984) leading to changes in lifestyle and consumption behaviour at the household and individual family member level; for example, consumer research literature documents changes in household’s allocation of resources (Commuri & Gentry, 2005), in consumption patterns (Bellante & Foster, 1984; Reilly, 1982), and in women’s and men’s lifestyles (McCall, 1977; Silverstein & Sayre, 2009b; Venkatesh, 1980).

More broadly, the rising trend in women’s employment has raised questions about the importance of motherhood in women’s lives (McQuillan, Greil, Shreffler & Tichenor, 2008); it is because mothering has been associated with women and motherhood is entwined with the notion of femininity (Arendell, 2000). Mothering has been presumed to be a primary identity for most adult women; motherhood and womanhood are viewed as synonymous identities and categories of experience (Arendell, 2000). In addition, the trend in women’s labour participation has stirred research interests regarding what it means to be a mother (see for instance, Christopher, 2012; Garey, 1995) and a father (see for example, Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2015; Wall & Arnould, 2007) within family unit, initiating the discourses on the identities of women and their appropriate

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21 The term discourse refers to the historical, social, and political aspect of language and hence of subjectivity; discourses act as structuring principles making reproduction of social institutions possible, and construct people’s ways of thinking (Weedon, 1997). Therefore, a discourse is socially constructed and historically situated; particular discourses support particular social structures embodied in social institutions (Bristor & Fischer, 1993).
roles in society, organisations, and the economy (see for instance, Hewlett, 2002; Koh & Balasingamchow, 2015; Soin & Thomas, 2015).

As in many parts of the world, Asian women have increasingly participated in paid labour especially as dual-income families becomes necessary for a family to meet the rising cost of living, and advancement in women’s education levels leads to the need for women to seek self-actualisation through careers outside the family in a move towards (paid) commercial-oriented work (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b; Lee & Choo, 2001). The boundaries between paid work and family life, therefore, are porous as women seek to navigate two contrasting spheres of work and home (Garey, 1995; Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Johnston & Swanson, 2007) and negotiate the relationships between the two different sources of their identities (Bailey, 2000; Carrigan & Duberley, 2013; Christopher, 2012; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Gatrell, 2007; Ladge, Clair & Greenberg, 2012).

The next section begins by reviewing literature on the cultural construction of motherhood and how women enact their good mother identities (section 2.5.1). What we currently know about the social constructions of work and professional identity is subsequently presented (section 2.5.2). Attention is then devoted towards exploring women’s role transitions between paid work and stay-at-home motherhood (section 2.5.3). The competing nature of women’s roles in society and the role strain Singaporean women particularly experience in seeking to balance their performance of paid work and motherhood are then discussed (section 2.5.4).

2.5.1 Motherhood and Mother Identity

From a social constructionist perspective, the notion of motherhood is constructed from both competing and cooperating discourses (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Voice Group, 2010b). Discourses of motherhood include ideas about women’s essential needs and development, children’s needs and development,
and the ideology\textsuperscript{22} of intensive mothering (see for instance, Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Wall, 2010). A dominant social construction of motherhood that exists within societies is recognised as standards against which people use to interpret their own experiences and construct their own meaning of mothering practices (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Garey, 1995).

The prevailing cultural construction of \textit{good} mother is defined through the \textit{intensive mothering} ideologies (Hays, 1996; see also Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Intensive mothering, according to Hays (1996, p. 8) is a child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally-absorbing, labour-intensive, financially-expensive ideology, in which mothers are primarily accountable for the development and nurture of the sacred child, and in which children’s needs take precedence over the individual needs of mothers. The ubiquity of the intensive mothering ideology in Asian culture as well as in other parts of the world is supported by a number of studies (see for instance, Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b; Garey, 1999; Wall, 2010). Such a mothering ideology has, however, been challenged through implementation of policies and incentives promoting involved fatherhood, notably in the Scandinavian countries (Duvander & Andersson, 2006; Duvander, Lappegård & Andersson, 2010) and, more recently, in Singapore (Leong, 2016; Yong, 2016).

The cultural construction of the \textit{good} mother identity assumes that children are cared for by their biological mothers (Hays, 1996). Intensive mothering is seen as \textit{“a constant responsibility”}, at least in a child’s early years (Macdonald, 1998, p. 30). The mothering ideology, moreover, presupposes a psychological bond between young children and their mothers, and this \textit{“umbilical connection”} remains unsevered during children’s early childhood; as the primary caregiver, the mother is best suited to understand her child’s needs and she is thought to respond to those needs intuitively (Hays, 1996; Macdonald, 1998, p. 30). This \textit{good} mother ideology infers the symbolic importance of home as the most appropriate

\textsuperscript{22} Ideology refers to patterns of beliefs, point of views, ideas, and values that are used to create meaning (Freeden, 2003). Ideologies define what exists, what is good, and what is possible (Therborn, 1980). Ideologies are not objective realities but rather promote a particular construction of reality (Johnston & Swanson, 2006).
physical location for enacting motherhood (see for example, Garey, 1999). Home, thus, is seen as a sphere where the pure and innocent mother-child bonding resides, and that home protects the sacred relationships within the family from “market valuation” (Hays, 1996, p. 54). In this light, child care is conceived to be the antithesis of paid work and should be kept physically separate from the workplace and commercial-related activities (Dillaway & Paré, 2008).

Meanwhile, a good mother is expected to focus on caregiving as her sole activity at home; she is not only at home but is also a full-time mother because she does not divide her time between paid work and family (Dillaway & Paré, 2008). A full-time mother implies that she has no other real interests outside her family and childcare responsibilities (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Russo, 1976; Woollett & Marshall, 2000). A good mother becomes a notion that blends with societal expectations for the family, and symbolises the fulfilment of family members’ emotional and physical needs (Arendell, 2000; Dillaway & Paré, 2008). A good mother has been synonymous with home and stay-at-home motherhood (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Garey, 1999), although this conception of good motherhood has been contested as mothers increasingly seek to balance their children’s well-being with their own interest (see for instance, Carrigan & Duberley, 2013; Christopher, 2012; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001).

In taking Hays’ (1996) intensive mothering ideology further, today’s good mother is not only physically at home with her children, but also spends quality time with them physically and psychologically to help them grow well, as O’Reilly (1996, p. 90) further explains:

“Whether the activity is one of the numerous structured moms-and-tots programmes – swimming, kinder gym, dance – or an at-home activity – reading, gardening, cooking, playing – the mother’s day is to revolve around...the child’s educational development. The child is to be involved in any domestic labour performed and the chore at hand is to be transformed into a learning experience for the child”.

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The mothering practices at home, such as caring for and playing with young children, have been reframed as critical opportunities for mothers to stimulate and educate in order to facilitate their children’s cognitive development (Wall, 2004). The popularisation of brain science, provides parents with a formula to develop their young children’s intellectual capacity through stimulation (Nadesan, 2002). The children development market influences the norms associated with good mothering through the mothers’ roles in education and socialisation of their children (Budds, Hogg, Banister & Dixon, 2016). Some parents seek to integrate more enrichment activities into caregiving in order to give their young children a competitive advantage (Smyth, 2015). The early years (aged 0 to 3) is seen to determine infants’ future emotional, intellectual, and physical development (Allen, 2011). The importance of young children receiving adequate sensory stimulation during their early years motivates mothers to conform to the intensive mothering ideology (Wall, 2004).

Despite assuming the more challenging familial responsibility than that posed by paid employment outside the home (Hays, 1996), a home-based mother is frequently regarded as possessing lesser public value than that of a paid worker, especially so within the patriarchal cultures, such as the USA and Singapore (Chan, 2000; Crittenden, 2010; Hays, 1996; Dillaway & Paré, 2008). Familial caregiving is seen as invisible public labour that is not well-recognised or appreciated and does not receive tangible rewards or much positive acknowledgement despite the cultural expectations surrounding mothers’ responsibilities within the family (Crittenden, 2010; Dillaway & Paré, 2008).

Furthermore, societies in Asia including Singapore, equate the role of stay-at-home mother with that of a housewife (Ochiai, 2008b) or Tai-Tai (太太), a Chinese term referring to a lady of leisure (Zheng, 2014); and may be used as flattery but is often a subtle insult. In Singapore, supposedly every human resource is potentially valuable in terms of contributing to the nation-building project (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Shanmugaratnam, 2014b; Tay, 2015), so the term housewife incorporates negative connotations (Zheng, 2014). Singaporean society
perceives housewives as women with “a low level of education who is unable to find work and therefore has no choice but to concentrate on her house work” (Zheng, 2014, p. 140). The use of the term Tai-Tai also portrays the image of a woman who is not qualified to find work and, thus, stays at home (Zheng, 2014). Both labels (of housewife and Tai-Tai) enhance the notion of the division of labour between the breadwinning husband who works in the public sphere and the home-based mother and wife who specialises in housekeeping and childrearing in the domestic sphere (Ochiai, 2008b). However, a continued increase in the number of women entering the paid labour market and the fact that maternal employment is becoming more pervasive (see for instance, Garey, 1995; Johnston & Swanson, 2007) renders the division of labour between men and women as increasingly problematic (DeMeis & Perkins, 1996).

The notion that mothering is “natural” to women has its roots in patriarchy and is seen to lock women into biological reproduction, denying them of identities outside the experience of mothering (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b, p. 3). This gendered notion about women’s role (as the primary caregiver within their family), however, is at odds with a more recent development that sees increasing paternal involvement with childcare (see for instance, Bettany, Kerrane & Hogg, 2014; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013; Miller, 2011).

While research finds that men indeed experience a more difficult transition into parenthood due to their lack of physical connection to their partner’s pregnancy and societal conditioning and stereotypes surrounding men’s roles (Voice Group, 2009), the shifting perspective of men’s roles beyond income-earning and in family caregiving, has been well-documented more recently (Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2014; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2015). Governments play an active role in shaping how parenthood is enacted as their policies seek to promote higher female participation in the labour force. For example, countries such as Sweden (Duvander & Andersson, 2006; Duvander, Lappegård & Andersson, 2010) and Singapore (Leong, 2016; Yong, 2016) have

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23 Patriarchy is defined as “a social system in which men occupy a higher social and political status than women” (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b, p. 21).
rolled out more extensive workplace initiatives to promote (more) involved fatherhood, increasing gender equality in caregiving. Such policies, designed to help households balance work and family responsibilities, inform the change in how the notion of good motherhood is embraced and practiced (for instance, see Christopher, 2012; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). The next section will discuss how women weave paid work into motherhood and how paid work provides meaning and contributes to women’s sense of self.

2.5.2 Paid Work and Professional Identity

Literature in the social sciences has explored and established the relationship between occupation and a worker’s identity (refer to Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Becker & Carper, 1956a; Becker & Carper, 1956b; Morse & Weiss, 1955). For instance, professional institutions deploy organisational resources, such as role hierarchies, job titles, salaries, and privileges, to forge a worker’s particular version of his or her self at work and occupational identity (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008); such profession-based materials and resources influence the worker’s construction of his or her professional identity (Ibarra, 1999). Traditionally, the term professional is associated with individuals in specific professions such as medicine or law (McDonald, 1995). However, this thesis employs a broader definition to incorporate those who possess specialised knowledge and skills which have economic value (McDonald, 1995) and have the responsibility to provide services to particular stakeholders inside and outside an organisation (Maister, 1997).

Becker and Carper (1956b) suggest that a worker’s self-definition is largely influenced by elements such as their occupational title and work ideology (which provides symbolic meaning - expressing characteristics of the title’s holder, and nature of the worker’s professional role) and social position (implicitly communicated by the worker’s job title which is perceived to help the person attain a certain social position as a result). Moreover, Becker and Carper (1956a)
also suggest that a worker’s conception of his or her professional identity is formed through several social psychological mechanisms, including the individual’s development of interest in problem-solving, a pride in newly acquired skills, and acquisition of professional ideologies which lead to higher commitment to the worker’s occupational title (see also, Ashford & Mael, 1989). Even if people have inherited abundant wealth, enough to sustain their entire lives, research suggests that many continue working in order to obtain a sense of purpose in life and a feeling of being connected to the larger social environment. In other words, salary is not the only reason for people to engage with work (Morse & Weiss, 1955). Work provides the individual with a sense of identity and meaning beyond mere monetary reward.

Meanwhile, societies perceive professionals to possess unique knowledge and specialised skillsets (Benveniste, 1987; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006); societies view working professionals in high esteem and grants the individual a higher level of prestige and autonomy than his or her non-professional counterpart (Larson, 1977). Being someone who is seen to have special knowledge and skills elicits social validation and recognition (Goffman, 1959; Ibarra, 1999). Furthermore, possessing professional attributes is associated with career success and power (Baumeister, 1982; Ibarra, 1999). As such, people are motivated to construct professional identities and outwardly express professional-related qualities, such as intelligence, competence, confidence, trustworthiness, and initiative, in order to project a particular impression or gain social acknowledgement (Goffman, 1959; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006; Roberts, 2005).

Professional identity is known as a relatively stable and enduring set of characteristics, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences through which people view themselves in the context of their professional role (Schein, 1978). This work-related sense of self is integrated into the worker and moves with him or her from one work role to another. In their research, Beyer and Hannah (2002) find that veteran workers who change jobs bring with them a repertoire of cognitions
and behaviours acquired from their prior jobs (Brim, 1968, p. 28). Experienced workers have accumulated work experience in their past jobs and carry with them the knowledge and identity as personal strategies to adjust to, and become assimilated into, new jobs and work settings (Beyer & Hannah, 2002, p. 636). Such occupation-related self-definition develops gradually as one accumulates work experience and receives feedback from others over time, enabling the worker to gain insight about his or her central preferences, talents, and values (Schein, 1978).

While the maternal employment rate continues to rise (Christopher, 2012; Soin & Thomas, 2015), a mother’s career is seen to have a detrimental effect on her young children, and working mothers, while regarded as having more favourable personal traits and competencies than their unemployed mother counterparts (Etaugh & Petroski, 1985; Etaugh & Poertner, 1991), are seen as suspect because of their presumed lack of attachment to, and care for, their children (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Etaugh & Study, 1989). While children of stay-at-home mothers supposedly receive the undivided care and attention of their mother that is needed for their well-being and development (O’Reilly, 1996), a recent study found that children of working mothers do better in life (Browne, 2015; Nobel, 2015). The study, conducted across 24 developed countries, found that (adult) daughters of working mothers are better educated and earn more money. This research also found that (adult) sons of working mothers are more likely to contribute to, and spend more time on, child-care and domestic chores (Browne, 2015; Nobel, 2015). This study also found that when both parents work outside the home, that as well as helping the family economically, this can provide emotional well-being to mothers and give children “a signal that contributions at home and at work are equally valuable, for both men and women” (Nobel, 2015, p. 3).

To navigate the intensive mother and ideal worker ideologies to construct good mother identity, employed mothers explore a range of personal strategies (Garey, 24 Working mother is a term referring to a mother who typically works outside of the home 40 hours or more per week, and projects an image of a career woman (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 444). This motherhood orientation gains ideological popularity during the late 1970s and early 1980s and is seen as the feminist ideal (Douglas, 2000).

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For example, working mothers construct an *extensive mothering* identity, in which they delegate substantial parts of day-to-day child care to others, and reframe good mothering as being “in charge” of, and ultimately (vicariously) accountable for, their children’s well-being (Christopher, 2012, p. 73). Meanwhile, different groups of working mothers engage in night-shift employment to support a construction of *good* mother identity which closely resembles that of mothers who are not in the labour force (Garey, 1995). In a study about women’s construction of *good* mother identity, Garey (1995) examines how hospital nurses with children work night shifts in order to be seen as stay-at-home (or *good*) mothers during the day. These mothers limit the public visibility of their labour force participation, involve their children and themselves in symbolically-invested activities, and position themselves in the culturally-appropriate place and time: at home, during the day – these strategies work to highlight their visibility as stay-at-home (and thus, *good*) mothers (Garey, 1995).

Meanwhile, a population of mothers who engage with paid work and commercial initiatives without leaving their home, or “*work-at-home*” mothers, (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 454) becomes increasingly common. Such home-based paid work arrangements are popular among Singaporean mothers who need an extra income, want to work for their own personal satisfaction, or both (Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014). Like in other advanced countries (such as the UK), Singapore is a conducive place for small-to-medium businesses to operate (Doing Business 2015, 2015) and has seen a steady increase in the number of *mumpreneurs* (Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014). Mumpreneur is a term used to describe multi-tasking mothers who are able to balance running a home-based business *and* performing the duties of motherhood at the same time (Carrigan & Duberley, 2013; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Lee, 1996; Lee & Choo, 2001; Tai, 2014).

In order to enable mothers to care for their young children and undertake paid work at the same time, some women set up a business and engage in “*mumpreneurship*” (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012, p. 630; Tai, 2014), an initiative
to “discover and exploit new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership” (Ekinsmyth, 2011, p. 105). Mumpreneurship is seen to offer the benefit of staying close to their children within the confines of home, in addition to facilitating flexibility for mothers to arrange their work schedule around their (unpaid) maternal duties (Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014). This mode of mothering, combining income generation while simultaneously undertaking childcare responsibilities, thus seems to become a viable alternative to the more traditional labour market (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014).

In seeking to balance their (unpaid) caregiving role and paid work (or entrepreneurial projects), many women utilise commercial services to supplement their parental resources (see for instance, Christopher, 2012). To address the care gap in their home, women often delegate parts of their familial responsibilities (such as early childhood education, house cleaning, and meal preparation) to commercial and professional establishments (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Christopher, 2012; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Hochschild, 2012). This outsourcing arrangement supports the women’s enactment of good mother identity at home and in contrast with the more traditional way of performing motherhood (Hays, 1996).

While it appears possible for many mothers to maintain paid work and to perform good mothering in relation to meeting the needs and demands of their young children, a study on the lives of executive women suggests this balancing act produces a “myth” (Hewlett, 2002, p. 1). Literature records that high-earning career women, unlike career men, “do not have it all” and find it difficult to balance paid work commitments with caregiving duties (Hewlett, 2002, p. 1). Society in general continues to hold gendered expectations surrounding women’s and men’s responsibilities at work and at home (Coser, 1991; Etaugh & Study, 1989). The expectations underlying the work role and caregiving role are not

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25 The term outsourcing in consumer research refers to “the transfer of intimate tasks historically or normatively seen as being performed within the family and by family members to formal commercial establishments located outside of the family” (Lair, 2007, p. 32-33; also see Epp & Velagaleti, 2014).
symmetrical between men and women (Coser, 1991). Professional women are expected to be committed to their work, just like men, but the women (and not men) are still normatively required to give priority to their families and the unpaid demands of domestic labour (Coser, 1991, p. 114). Hence, the working mother, who is often characterised as “supermum” or a mother who is able to effortlessly balance the demands of her professional job and family caregiving responsibilities without sacrificing the needs of her career or children (Choi, Henshaw, Baker & Tree, 2005, p. 167; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999) is considered “mythic” (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 445).

In addition, literature about Singapore’s married women entrepreneurs documents work-family conflicts the business women experience at home, when combining paid work with their family responsibilities (Lee & Choo, 2001). The entrepreneur mothers end up assuming multiple roles (in her family unit and business), fostering time pressures and role strains, and leading to job-spouse conflict and low levels of satisfaction in relation to her career, marriage, and life in general (Lee & Choo, 2001, p. 206).

2.5.3 Women’s Role Transitions between Work and Home

Women who leave their careers to pursue stay-at-home motherhood have recently been the subject of much media attention (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008). Such women have been labelled as “opting out”, describing the phenomena of high-achieving working mothers who choose to leave their professional (paid) career to remain out of employment for an extended period of time, beyond the normal duration of maternity leave (Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010, p. 1). These women often cite family-related need as the primary reason for their departure from the (paid) workforce (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). During their withdrawal from the labour market, the women engage with a more traditional gender role, such as assuming family caregiving and mothering roles at the expense of paid employment (Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). The
media labels the women’s exodus from the labour market in a variety of ways, terming such women the “new traditionalists”, with such decisions heralding a “woman’s revolution” or “post-feminism” movement (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008, p. 498).

Dillaway & Paré (2008, p. 448), in their analysis of contemporary media and feminist family literature (comparing the role of women as stay-at-home mothers versus that of working motherhood), find that professional women who decide to become a stay-at-home mother view motherhood as a career choice. Becoming a home-based mother is characterised as a career move because motherhood is perceived to require the actions of a professional taskmaster (Bayard, 2006). Moreover, Ward (2006) went so far as to suggest that mothers should carry with them business cards, because motherhood is a job (albeit, unpaid). Professional mothers who transition to be stay-at-home mothers are defined in work-like terms by contemporary media, because stay-at-home mothers are viewed as doing work (that is, “every mother is a working mother”) just at home and without pay (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 448; see also Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Crum (2005, p. 40) clarifies “the job of mom”:

“We mothers are the chief operating officers of our family corporations...The job description, if there was one, would read like this: mother must provide unconditional love while applying firm consistent discipline; mother must offer a variety of healthy foods her child is likely to refuse; mother should not expect to complete a task before beginning another; retirement is prohibited”.

Crum (2005) describes the role of a contemporary stay-at-home motherhood as an exhausting job and in a managerial sense; it is unlike characterisations of mothers’ duties from the 1950s onward wherein mothers were described as “the keepers of morality” whose unremunerated labour was completely distinct from commercialisation (see for instance, Hays, 1996, p. 30; Russo, 1976).

While assuming a stay-at-home mother role, well-educated and professionally qualified mothers are reported to experience emotional distress (Rubin & Wooten,
Rubin and Wooten (2007) find that many women express feelings of guilt and conflict for not undertaking (paid) work and in not making effective use of their education and skills; the women also reported feeling vulnerable because of their financial dependency on their partner, and through the perception that they would lose the skills and marketability that they had worked so hard to achieve (Gerson, 2010; Rubin & Wooten, 2007, p. 341). Moreover, the previously professional stay-at-home women reportedly experience a loss of identity and self-esteem at home as they wrestle with a sense of not living up to their potential (Rubin & Wooten, 2007, p. 341). Feminists in particular see such stay-at-home mothers wasting their education (Feder, 2006). This triggers stay-at-home mothers to contemplate the decision to return to paid work (Ericksen, Jurgens, Garrett & Swedburg, 2008).

In whichever direction women wish to move toward, either paid work outside the home or full-time (unpaid) caregiving within family unit, they appear to be in a perpetual dilemma. The next section, thus, will specifically present the challenges that Singaporean women face in seeking to perform their roles in the society as a good mother and a good worker, in the context of the state’s didactically socialised citizenship education system to forge a Singaporean identity (Tan, 2005a).

2.5.4 Singaporean Women’s Paradoxical Roles in the Society

As the previous sections discuss, women’s decisions surrounding paid work and mothering obligations are dialectical and socially constructed as rigid binaries (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). Societies often portray women as making choices between whether they will be “stay-at-home” and presumably “full-time” mothers, or “working mothers” and therefore individuals who prioritise paid work over caregiving (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 437; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Rubin & Wooten, 2007). Women, as a result, face a dilemma and
dialectic\textsuperscript{26} tensions in trying to balance working outside the family unit (paid work) and their perceived motherhood commitment at home (unpaid labour).

As in other advanced countries (such as the UK and the USA), women in Singapore have made tremendous progress in many areas, notably in education and employment (Chan, 2000; Fu, 2015). Singaporean women have enjoyed more opportunities than before, and have contributed to Singapore’s success story (as a nation) in myriad ways (Fu, 2015). The state’s pursuit of a nation-building project has pushed Singapore to mobilise every single human and talent resource, including its female residents, to be economically active (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999); in the process, dual-career and dual-income families have gradually become a norm in Singapore (Lai, 2015). Despite the progress the working women have made in Singapore, they continue to face dilemmatic issues, which Lee, Campbell and Chia (1999, p. 4-5) outline as the Singaporean women’s “three paradoxes”:

“At the national, economic level, there have been mixed messages. Women are called to be productive both at work and at home. There are policies that encourage women to work, because of the tight labour market. There are policies that encourage women to have more children because of the declining birth rate. At the societal level, we want modern career women who earn money for their families and contribute to the economy but we also want traditional wives and mothers who provide comfort to their families and stability to society. At the organisational level, women managers and executives are still under-represented, although their educational level has been rising...women managers are expected to demonstrate decisiveness and assertiveness which are traits typically associated with masculinity, but at the same time, they are also expected to maintain their femininity”.

Women are expected to play a role outside their family and contribute to the national economy (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). But the patriarchal Singaporean society also sees women to be the primary caregiver within the family because

\textsuperscript{26} Dialectic refers to a “bipolar continuum that simultaneously pulls in mutually exclusive directions”; therefore, any movement toward one end of the continuum creates a strong strain toward the opposite end (Johnston & Swanson, 2007, p. 449). Dialectic is defined by Bakhtin (1981, p. 272) as “a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies”. In this thesis, the term “dialectic” is used to refer to the participants’ experiences in living through the tension (dilemma) between their need to be economically productive and their caregiving role at home.
they are regarded as “a symbol of home and nurturance” (Stivens, 2007, p. 35). The government’s efforts have raised women’s educational and economic status and encouraged women to work outside the home. But the juxtaposition of women’s participation in the workforce with women’s traditional role within the family unit perpetuates the paradoxical nature of women’s simultaneous role as mother and worker (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999, p. 29).

2.5.5 Conclusion to this Section

The patriarchal construction of intensive mothering influences women’s sense of self and promotes standards by which they are judged, both as mothers and not-mothers, in a gender-stratified society (Arendell, 1999, p. 3-4). Cultural definitions of good mother are perceived to compete with cultural definitions of good worker; images of motherhood and professional careers are constructed in opposition to each other (see for example, Bridges & Orza, 1992; Etaugh & Study, 1989).

Women often have to decide whether to work for pay while mothering or make mothering their sole social role (Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Liu, Bowers & Conn, 2005; Dillaway & Paré, 2008), and endure some negativity within society (for instance, with the view of others that they are failed women, who have not made it in their paid working careers, or women who have failed to reach their full potential). With their increasing level of education and participation in the labour market, women have yet to be free of the dialectic tensions in their roles, which engulfs them and keeps them in a state of perpetual role strains.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed literature in three major areas: (1) the introduction of identity from the sociological and psychological perspectives, (2) identity-related
consumer research, with a particular focus on role transitions, and (3) women’s changing roles and identities in society. The sociological and psychological literature of identity demonstrates the extent of the changes in how identity construction is viewed, from a straightforward process to a more complex interplay of diverse identity types. Consumer research remains primarily focused on what could be considered out-of-date, individuated notions of identity. This research gap offers opportunities for the development of more nuanced understandings of identity construction processes (Epp & Price, 2008).

Although progress is being made towards understanding how the confluence of factors and heterogeneity of identity interrelates in the construction of identity (for instance, refer to Gentina, Decoopman & Ruvio, 2013; Therkelsen & Gram, 2008), further research is needed to gain a wider account of the co-construction process of consumer identity. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore the confluence of elements that shape identity construction processes and how diverse identity goals compete and cooperate in the construction of identity (Epp & Price, 2008).

The next chapter (Chapter 3: Research Methodology) builds on this literature review by presenting an account of the interpretive research paradigm (adopted by this thesis), focusing on a phenomenological approach. The research strategy employed to gain access to the narratives of the participants are introduced. The methods through which the participant stories are analysed are also presented.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

“Whether or not the world has a ‘real’ existence outside of human experience of that world is an open question.” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 202)

Consumer research has experienced spirited debates and substantial self-reflection about its appropriate philosophical and methodological foundations (Anderson, 1986; Hunt, 1991). Positivism, having its tradition in Objectivism epistemology (Crotty, 2012), has dominated early literature in consumer research (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). This paradigm views reality through a strong rationality bias (for instance, refer to Bettman, 1970), devoid of human consciousness and experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Aiming to approach reality in a purely objective fashion (through the utilisation of methods that prevent human contamination), the positivist postulates detachment between researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The dominance of this research tradition in the early days of consumer research is attributed to the Cartesian influence, a worldview which renders reality in mathematical terms (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

In the aim to be truly objective, the positivist separates the researcher from the participants; this stance, however, is criticised within the field of consumer research. For instance, Hudson and Ozanne (1988) explain that regardless of the effort to be objective, any research inquiry is likely to be value-laden. This is because the researcher’s values inevitably influence the choice of phenomenon to explore, the choice of method to utilise, the choice of data to present, and the choice of findings to highlight (Hirschman, 1986). “There is no such thing as a totally objective or value-free investigation”, Hopper and Powell (1985, p. 429) assert. Furthermore, it is argued that if knowledge of the world resides in the meaning-making mechanisms of the social, mental, and linguistic worlds that the
researcher inhabits, then knowledge is inseparable from the knower (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). So it can be said that the researcher and the participants are intertwined and mutually interactive (Hirschman, 1986).

Important signs of a major paradigm shift in the field of consumer research begin to emerge when the positivist tradition is gradually recognised for its insufficiency to understand consumption phenomena holistically (Anderson, 1983; Belk, 1987; Hirschman, 1986; Sternthal & Zaltman, 1974). Alternative perspectives in the research domain have been advanced with the emergence of interpretive consumer research (Belk, 1995; Ostergaard & Jantzen, 2000). Rooted in the Constructionism tradition (Crotty, 2012), the interpretive research approach rejects the traditional tenets of positivism in favour of a broader array of philosophical foundations (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Whereas the positivist seeks to predict and control specific phenomena, the interpretivist aims to understand it in a broad and contextual sense (Belk, 1995; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Utilising qualitative methods, interpretivist consumer research commits itself to “an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.4).

The philosophical assumptions of a study are fundamentally important because a researcher’s way of seeing the world and accessing knowledge will orient the methodological aspects of the study, and the subsequent decisions regarding which methods to employ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, this chapter begins by clarifying the ontological position, epistemological perspective, and methodological considerations in studying the research participants (section 3.2), to highlight the importance of knowledge construction through interpretation (section 3.3). Phenomenology and existential phenomenology are then introduced (section 3.4), outlining the basic phenomenological tenets (from sections 3.4.1 to 3.4.4) and the core concepts of existential phenomenology adopted in this thesis (section 3.4.6). Discussion about the adopted methodology then follows (section 3.5), where concept of a modified existential phenomenological interview (section 3.5.1) and how the modified phenomenological interviews, including visual
construction as a complementing method, were conducted (section 3.5.2) are presented. Subsequently, considerations in relations to sampling recruitment are explained (section 3.6) and the contextualisation process of the participant stories is discussed (section 3.7). Furthermore, the ethical guidelines that inform this research, including discussions about the ethical issues and concerns, are highlighted (section 3.8). The chapter culminates with personal reflections on methodological aspects of this research (section 3.9). The overview of this chapter is presented in a map depicted in Figure 3.0.

### 3.2 Research Paradigm

> “Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways”. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105)

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) state in the above quote, research paradigm is an essential philosophy that shapes how we see the world around us. It constitutes a strategic concern because a study’s ontological and epistemological assumptions inform the research process and introduce implications to the subsequent methodological consideration and choice of method (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For instance, when reality is understood to be concrete and out there, knowledge is then gained through observation, and scientific methods may not be appropriate. But when reality is assumed to be based on subjective experience and consciousness, knowledge will be gained through interpretation using appropriate choices of qualitative methods (Crotty, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mason, 2002). Choosing a research paradigm, therefore, is a personal consideration. It needs to align with the researcher’s personal belief about how the world and knowledge are to be viewed.

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27 Ontology refers to the nature of reality or phenomena that we wish to investigate, whereas epistemology is about what represents the knowledge or evidence of the reality that we wish to access (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).
It has been discussed earlier that the positivist’s preoccupation to generate so-called objective knowledge by detaching the researcher from the participants has been met, by some consumer researchers, with a response that postulates that we are part of the social world that we study, and that knowledge is socially mediated (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The two poles of contrasting perspectives are described as an objectivism-subjectivism continuum, characterising a range of approaches to the social science (Hopper & Powell, 1985; Morgan & Smircich, 1980).
At one extreme, objectivism (including positivism and post-positivism) regards the social world as having an empirical and real existence independent of, and prior to the cognition of, individuals (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). At the other extreme, subjectivism views that reality exists as a product of an individual’s experience and consciousness (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). The objectivism-subjectivism continuum, while helpful in drawing a clear distinction between the two divergent worldviews, could oversimplify the paradigmatic contentions in consumer research, as Crotty (2012) elaborates further.

Crotty (2012) highlights constructionism as a separate tradition from subjectivism, which previous researchers do not (Hopper & Powell, 1985; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). According to Crotty (2012), the epistemological assumptions with regard to how we view the world may be categorised into three distinctive approaches: objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism (and their variants). Objectivism, described by Crotty (2012) in the same spirit of positivism and post-positivism, is the epistemological view that things exist as meaningful entities independent of human experience and consciousness; these things have self-contained truth and meaning, and that careful research can gain access to that objective truth and meaning.

Unlike objectivism, constructionism assumes that meaning is not discovered, but constructed. Meaning does not reside in the object waiting for a researcher to uncover it; rather, human beings construct meanings as they interact with the world that they study (Crotty, 2012). Whereas constructionism holds that meaning and truth cannot be viewed as objective, by the same token, they cannot be described as subjective either (Crotty, 2012). While constructionism constructs meaning through interaction with the objects in the world, subjectivism creates meaning by the subject imposing it on the object (Crotty, 2012). Subjectivism, in other words, creates meaning from anything but interplay between the subject and the object (Crotty, 2012).
This research aims to explore the lived experiences of the research participants whose identities are reflexively constructed through dynamic interactions with their social environment. Given the study’s objective to understand (rather than explain) the phenomena, objectivism does not seem to be appropriate. At the same time, in order to understand the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher employed depth interviews and visual construction methods; the combined interactive techniques are to construct meaningful knowledge about the participants (Kvale, 1983). As such, constructionism (rather than subjectivism) appeared to fit most with the objective and theme of this thesis.

3.3 Construction of Knowledge in Consumer Research

“According to constructionism, we do not create meaning. We construct meaning. We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world”. (Crotty, 2012, p. 43-44)

As earlier highlighted in section 3.2, constructionism infers that meanings are constructed as the researcher interacts with the world he or she is interpreting (Crotty, 2012). This claim contains three important notions, the world, the interaction, and the interpretation, which will be clarified in the following paragraphs to explain the process of constructing knowledge.

First, the world according to the constructionists is not a concrete or real thing out there, as the objectivists assume. Instead, it is an ever-evolving process; created afresh in each encounter of everyday life as individuals interplay with the world they live in, to construct meaningful realms (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

The meanings that constructionists form, secondly, are derived from the interaction between the researcher and the participants. This notion about interaction stands in contrast to the subjectivists who view that meanings are not socially and culturally mediated (Crotty, 2012). In studying the participants, the
researcher actively engaged with the women to make sense of their lived experiences; interaction, thus, was an essential part of the data collection process.

Third, in the interaction, the researcher sought to make intelligible the multiple, perceived realities of the world (Hirschman, 1986; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) through a process called interpretation. Interpretation, in the social sciences, is a fundamental approach to knowledge construction (Denzin, 1994). In other words, the researcher interprets the participants’ interpretation of their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This process, where the researcher tries to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world, is called a second order and two-stage interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003). In short, it is through interpretation that interpretive consumer researchers construct knowledge (Hirschman, 1986; Thompson, 1991; Thompson, 1997).

Acting as a tool of the interpretation (Sherry & Kozinets, 2001), the interpretive consumer researcher leverages his or her totality of the human-being-in-the-world (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989) to translate the experiences of the participants into meaningful knowledge (Crotty, 2012; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Interpretive consumer research is oriented to gain first-hand understanding about consumers and their experiences through interpretation (Hirschman, 1986; Thompson, 1991; Thompson, 1997). Such interpretation aims to remain faithful to the participants’ experiences, uncontaminated by the researcher’s biases, assumptions, and any pre-given frameworks (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

The interpretive approach, utilising the researcher’s situatedness in the world he or she studies, placing primacy on the consumer experiences, and bracketing the human preconception and prejudice, reflects the theoretical tenets of phenomenology, and more specifically, existential phenomenology (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). As Hudson and Ozanne (1988) affirm, interpretive approaches contain the principles of phenomenology, the origin of existential phenomenology as adopted in this thesis.
Unlike the traditional (positivism) approach that focuses on consumer information processing structures and response patterns, existential phenomenology allows for a first-person description of lived experiences (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990). This paradigm addresses the criticism that much of consumer research ignores experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Levy, 1981). Existential phenomenology offers a robust means for putting consumer experience back into consumer research (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The key tenets of phenomenology and existential phenomenology are further expanded in the section that follows.

### 3.4 Phenomenology and Existential Phenomenology

> "Phenomenology is a significant philosophical movement because it deals so well with the problem of appearances. The issue of appearances has been part of the human question from the beginning of philosophy". (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 3)

Phenomenology, the philosophical precursor of existential phenomenology as adopted in this thesis, is a study of human experience, of the way things present themselves to us in and through consciousness, and the meaning things have in our experience (Sokolowski, 2008). It is not a set of dogmas, nor is it a rigid school of philosophical inquiry. It is a practice, and a radical way of doing philosophy (Moran, 2000, p. 4).

Phenomenology as a philosophical movement was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), a German philosopher and former mathematician, who was fascinated with the idea of a dynamic stream of consciousness as the basis of all human experience (Moran, 2005). Introduced to philosophy by his former teacher, Franz Brentano (1838 – 1917), Husserl conceived an approach of descriptive analysis of subjective phenomena that now lies at the heart of all existentialist philosophies (Sokolowski, 2008; Stokes, 2007). The Husserlian phenomenology is best described as:
“A radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer. As such, phenomenology’s first step is to seek to avoid all misconstructions and impositions placed on experience in advance, whether these are drawn from religious or cultural traditions, from everyday common sense, or, indeed from science itself. Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within”. (Moran, 2000, p. 4)

In other words, this philosophical platform requires a careful description of things as they appear to consciousness; the way things are approached must take their manner of appearance to consciousness into consideration (Moran, 2000). Although the diverse use of phenomenology within the social sciences leads to the proliferation of its meaning (Patton, 1990), the fundamental tenets of Husserl’s (pure) phenomenology are distinguishable; these include: (1) the aim to describe phenomena; (2) the importance of intentionality; (3) the need to be free from presuppositions by setting aside the natural attitude; and finally, (4) the emphasis of the ‘life-world’ as the context of all human experience (Moran, 2000).

These major themes of the philosophy are discussed in the next sections: section 3.4.1 introduces the phenomenological description of experience; section 3.4.2 expands the notion of intentionality; section 3.4.3 clarifies the concept of the suspension of the natural attitude; and section 3.4.4 explains the significance of the life world to experience.

3.4.1 Description of Phenomena

The term phenomenology derives from two Greek words: phainomenon (an appearance) and logos (reason) (Pivcevic, 1970). As earlier outlined, phenomenology studies the way things present themselves to human consciousness. This entails that one cannot separate the conscious state from the object of that state. In other words, phenomenologists reject the ontological
separation between consciousness and matter, and reality and appearance, which implies the dichotomy between an *inner world* (private experience) and *outer world* (public objects) (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1992). Moran (2000) clarifies:

“Indeed, the whole point of phenomenology is that we cannot split off the subjective domain from the domain of the natural world as scientific naturalism has done. Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity”. (Moran, 2000, p. 15)

Descriptions of phenomena begin with how we experience things. The distinctions as to what is real or unreal diminish as phenomenology attempts to describe phenomena as presented to consciousness (Cope, 2005). The act of human consciousness, in phenomenology, is intentional (Giorgi, 1997).

### 3.4.2 Intentionality of Consciousness

Intentionality is the essential feature of consciousness. Every act of consciousness we perform and every experience that we have, according to Husserl, is intentional (Giorgi, 1997). In other words, our consciousness or awareness is always directed toward objects (Giorgi, 1997). For instance, if one sees, one sees a visual object (such as a flower or a building). If one imagines, one imagines an imaginary object (such as a person or an idea).

The notion of intentionality here is not to be mistaken with *intention* as the purpose that drives one’s behaviour. Rather, intentionality concerns the theory of knowledge, highlighting the relationship between subject and object (Sokolowski, 2008). Intentionality of consciousness implies that the desire to describe an external (objective) reality is meaningless without relating to the internal (subjective) world of private experience, as the two are intertwined (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).
In order to provide an authentic and careful description of conscious experience, Husserl argues, it is necessary that we set aside all philosophical, scientific, cultural, and everyday assumptions and judgments (Moran, 2000). This presupposition-less approach is necessary to get back to the things themselves and involves suspension of the natural attitude.

3.4.3 Suspension of the Natural Attitude

“When we shift from the natural attitude to the phenomenological, we raise the question of being, because we begin to look at things precisely as they are given to us, precisely as they are manifested, precisely as they are determined by “form”, which is the principle of disclosure in things. We begin to look at things in their truth and evidencing”. (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 64)

The natural attitude, that is everyday knowledge including our scientific, philosophical, and cultural assumptions, can distort our engagement with, and how we see, the world (Moran, 2000). The natural attitude, according to Husserl, influences our perceptual experience in seeing the world more by what it should be like than by what it actually is like (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1992). To be free from preconceptions, Husserl proposes that one transcends beyond the natural attitude to adopt the phenomenological attitude (Moran, 2000).

The phenomenological attitude, which sometimes is referred to as the philosophical or transcendental attitude, questions and scrutinises the natural attitude (Sokolowski, 2008). Adopting the phenomenological attitude means that one needs to suspend28 the natural beliefs and bracket the world and all the things in the world (Sokolowski, 2008). The transcendental attitude, as the name implies, goes beyond the natural attitude and analyses it in a philosophical way. As Sokolowski (2008, p. 48) explains:

28 This act of suspension is also termed as epoché, a Greek term which means scepticism. Epoché signifies the restraint we should have toward our judgments about things until the evidence is clear (Sokolowski, 2008). It is an essential step by which we recognise and set aside the preconceptions about the phenomenon under study (King & Horrocks, 2011).
“When we move into the phenomenological attitude, we become something like detached observers of the passing scene or like spectators at a game. We become onlookers. We contemplate the involvements we have with the world and with things in it, and we contemplate the world in its human involvement. We are no longer simply participants in the world; we contemplate what it is to be a participant in the world and in manifestations”.

Through this detached, transcendental attitude, phenomenologists attempt to see the world as it is, not as it should be. The world, as phenomenology refers to, constitutes a concrete context of all human experience (Cope, 2005).

3.4.4 The Life World (The Lebenswelt)²⁹

“As Husserl put it, all cognitive activity presupposes a domain that is passively pregiven, the existent world as I find it. Returning to examine this pregiven world is a return to the lived-world (Lebenswelt), the world in which we are always already living and which furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance and all scientific determination”. (Moran, 2000, p. 12)

Described by Husserl as the Lebenswelt, the life world represents the world of ordinary and concrete experience as it is lived by people. It is the background and context for all human endeavours (Moran, 2000). In Husserlian phenomenology, a researcher has to be isolated from the world under study. This view, however, received much criticism, doubting whether one can really be removed from the world in which the researcher and the participants are situated (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). In seeing the world from a detached stance, “one becomes too removed from the situatedness of human existence” (Cope, 2005, p. 168).

The notion of the lived-world is later extended and developed into a stream of phenomenology that considers the totality of human relationships in the world and rejects the detached nature of the researcher (Cope, 2005). Known as existential phenomenology, the philosophy highlights the importance of being-in-the-world

²⁹ Lebenswelt is a German term, meaning “life-world” (Moran, 2000, p. 12).
Moran, 2000). Existential phenomenologists (such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre) emphasise the need to describe experience from the world-context (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Together, these major streams of phenomenology represent an important philosophical orientation in consumer research (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

3.4.5 Existential Phenomenology and Consumer Research

"Existential phenomenology seeks to describe experience as it emerges in some context(s) or, to use phenomenological terms, as it is “lived”". (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989, p. 135)

The central tenet of existential phenomenology is that human beings are beings in the world, and they cannot be studied separately from their lived world (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Existential phenomenologists are sceptical of the extent to which we can bracket our preconceptions as described in the transcendental, Husserlian approach to pure phenomenology. Whereas existential phenomenology rejects the bracketing of the world through suspension of the natural attitude, it continues to retain phenomenology’s method of description (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

Following the tradition of phenomenology, existential phenomenologists desire to understand the lived experience from the experiencing individual’s perspective (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Existential phenomenology seeks first-hand description of experience from, and places primacy on, the participant’s point of view (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). It, therefore, approaches the world under investigation carefully and without presuppositions to ensure the authenticity of the description of experience.

Acknowledging the totality of the human-beings-in-the-world, existential phenomenologists seek to study human beings as they emerge in some world-
context, from the environments in which they live (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Rather than removing themselves from the world, consumer researchers adopting existential phenomenology embrace the inherent situatedness to interact with the participants in constructing knowledge (for instance, see Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1996; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990).

In essence, existential phenomenological researchers are inextricably related to the lived-world under study (Cope, 2005). This philosophical orientation mirrors the basic premise of constructionism (Crotty, 2012), adopting an in-the-world ontology to construct knowledge through interaction with, and interpretation of the world under study (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

3.4.6 Central Concepts of Existential Phenomenology

“Though there are a number of themes which characterise phenomenology, in general it never developed a set of dogmas or sedimented into a system”. (Moran, 2000, p. 4)

Phenomenology is not a prescriptive philosophic tradition, as earlier explained. This thesis, therefore, does not follow, precisely, one systematic guide as to how phenomenological research should be conducted (as is the ethos of phenomenology itself). In constructing knowledge about how the participants made sense of their life transitions and identity journeys, this thesis relied on the researcher to interpret the participants’ interpretation of their own experiences; this follows a process that Smith and Osborn (2003), in their Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework, refer to as a two-stage interpretation (see also Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013; as discussed earlier in section 3.3).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) can be referred to as either a methodology (a theoretically-grounded orientation of conducting research) or a method (an approach of collecting data or analysing data) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). The term IPA in this thesis describes it as a method of data analysis. Its use in this study will further be discussed in section 3.7.1 (Modified Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)
In addition, this study places focus on the participants as expert in their own life experiences (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Overall, this approach aligns with the principal tenets of existential phenomenology (as adopted in this thesis), which include: the focus on participants and their description of experiences, the purposeful bracketing, and the role of the researcher as a tool of interpretation. Each of these central tenets of existential phenomenology will, in turn, be explained.

**Focus on participants and their description of experience.** Placing the participants at the centre stage is a basic doctrine of phenomenology. The research participants were seen as the subject matter experts in their own lives and experiences (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). This study values their experiences, prioritising their interpretation of their own experiences, rather than trying to validate or impose existing theoretical propositions. Throughout the data collection process, the participants were encouraged to share their life histories and experiences, and reflect on how their sense of self has evolved over time. The participants were in a position to decide what important aspects of their life to share without interference (positioning themselves as the expert in this inquiry).

**Purposeful bracketing.** In order to go back to the things themselves as suggested in phenomenology, bracketing is necessary during data collection. The bracketing employed in this study is used not in the sense of a pure phenomenological or in a Husserlian tradition, where the natural attitude is set aside in favour of the transcendental attitude. Rather, existential phenomenological research (adopted in this thesis) avoids bracketing the natural attitude because it places the researcher in a detached position, too removed from the situatedness of human existence (Cope, 2005, p. 168). This thesis, instead, utilises a bracketing approach to place to one side the knowledge gained from immersion in existing literature on this topic area. The study concentrated on “those aspects that are present in the consumer’s consciousness” (Hirschman, 1992, p. 160) and set aside the categorical concepts and theories in this field of study.
In addition, it also helps that personally, I\textsuperscript{31} have very limited experience with stay-at-home mothers; my wife is a career mother and my female relatives and acquaintances are full-time employees and business owners. The purposeful bracketing, hence, sharpened the focus of the interviews on the participants without undue influence from the pre-existing theories and personal presupposition.

\textit{Researcher as interpretation tool.} Whereas Husserlian phenomenology detaches the researcher from the world under investigation, existential phenomenology (as employed in this thesis) acknowledges that human beings cannot be studied in isolation from their world-context (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Consistent with constructionism (Crotty, 2012), existential phenomenologists leverage the situatedness in the world to construct knowledge through interaction with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 2012).

In the process of data collection, the participants’ interpretation of their experiences was interpreted; the process is known as a two-stage or double interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aim of this study was to capture the \textit{thick description}\textsuperscript{32} (Geertz, 1973) of how the participants made sense of their life changes, and how they interpreted their experiences. As a researcher, I served as the interpretation instrument (the second stage of interpretation) through which data emerged and was made sense of, in order to construct knowledge (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013; Hirschman, 1986; Thompson, 1997).

The philosophical discussion, thus far, has been strategically important because a researcher’s way of seeing \textit{reality} will directly guide the choice of data collection approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The next section aims to introduce the methodology for data collection adopted in this study. A modified

\textsuperscript{31} A limited number of first-person expressions are used in this chapter to articulate a direct, first-person account of the event (for instance, see Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Christopher, 2012; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014).

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Thick description} is a research approach in the social sciences describing a human behaviour including its context, such that the behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider (refer to Geertz, 1973).
phenomenological interview approach was used to collect the participants’ stories and is discussed in section 3.5.1. The process of conducting the modified phenomenological interviews, including the use of a visual construction technique, is then explained (section 3.5.2). What follows is a discussion of sampling considerations (section 3.6.1), and the recruitment and selection procedures used in this thesis are then outlined (section 3.6.2). Furthermore, an account of how the data were analysed is clarified (section 3.7). The ethical concerns surrounding the research process are then highlighted (section 3.8) and the chapter concludes with a personal reflection of the use of such phenomenological approaches in conducting this research project (section 3.9).

3.5 Research Methodology

Guided by the research objective to explore how the participants make sense of their life transitions and identity changes (as highlighted in Chapter 2: Literature Review) as well as the research paradigm (section 3.2), the following sections will offer a review of the research methods employed in this study. The next sections will introduce and explain a version of the phenomenological interview (section 3.5.1) and how the interviews and a visual construction technique were conducted in the data collection process (section 3.5.2). An overview of the data collection methods is presented in Figure 3.1.

3.5.1 Modified Phenomenological Interview

“With this interview format, course of dialogue is largely set by the participant. Rather than being guided by prespecified questions, the interviewer’s questions and comments are formulated in concert with participant descriptions. The interviewer seeks to provide a setting conducive to entry into a descriptively focused, non-judgmental dialogue...how the dialogue will unfold is not known in advance”. (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990, p. 347)
Interview literally means “inter-view”, an interchange of views between the researcher and the participant conversing about topics of interest (Kvale, 2011, p. 5). As an empirical approach, interviewing is very much located within the tradition of constructionism, which views that knowledge is constructed through interaction with the objects in the world (Crotty, 2012). It is the most powerful means for gaining an in-depth understanding of a person’s experiences (Kvale, 1983). At the heart of a depth interview is the intent not to test hypotheses or measure a response, but rather to understand the lived experience of participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2013). Depth interviews, therefore, are phenomenological by nature (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2013).

The phenomenological or existential phenomenological interview\(^3\) has been widely used in the field of consumer research (see for example, Fournier, 1998;}

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\(^3\) The terms *phenomenological interview* and *existential phenomenological interview* in this study are used interchangeably to mean depth interview based on the key concepts of existential phenomenology outlined in
Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990). It is a depth interview approach that is characterised by the core tenets of existential phenomenology (as outlined in section 3.4.6), which include: the focus on participants and their description of lived experiences, the utilisation of bracketing, and the role of the researcher as a tool of interpretation. Rooted in the phenomenological tradition, the phenomenological interview is not prescriptive, meaning it does not restrict itself to a single approach when collecting data (Seidman, 2013). Different consumer researchers adopting a phenomenological standpoint have developed a range of approaches that they have termed phenomenological (Seidman, 2013; see also for instance, Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013 and their description of the modified phenomenological interview).

Whereas the term interview has been frequently used, “conversation” (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p.35; please also refer to Thompson & Haytko, 1997) is perhaps a more appropriate depiction of the phenomenological interview, in which interaction is largely set by the participants, whereby dialogue emerges naturally and is guided by participants (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). In a participant-led conversation (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), the phenomenological interview does not impose a priori questions or pre-existing frameworks in the interview process; this gives the participants an appreciable amount of control to set the course of conversation (Cope, 2005). Such a play by ear approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) could, however, introduce uncertainty regarding whether the interviewing eventually serves the purpose of investigation; this is deemed to raise a methodological concern (Cope, 2005). While the phenomenological interview is appropriate for this thesis and has many useful features, at the same time, it also presents what Cope (2005, p.180) terms a “methodological risk”.

Responding to this concern, the interviews utilised in this study used broad-based conversation themes (or core interview themes) to help scaffold the conversations

section 3.4.6 (Central Concepts of Existential Phenomenology) (also see for example, Fournier, 1998; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990).
that took place. Also referred to by other interpretive consumer researchers as a “protocol” (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 35), the core interview themes explored in the conversations with the participants consisted of four general and major areas\(^{34}\) of conversation. It is important to stress, however, that the four major themes explored in the conversations were not absolute, and did not represent a predefined and rigid list of questions (and the conversation certainly did not follow a specific question ordering). The (interviewer’s) questions were, rather, formulated in concert with the participants’ reflections and responses of their lived experiences, directing them to share more thorough descriptions (as appropriate) of specific experiences (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The conversations circled back and forth to generate greater depth, helping fill in any missing detail that emerged in prior discussions (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990).

Furthermore, as experts in their own lives (as stay-at-home mothers), the participants were placed at the centre stage of the conversations, in a position of equality with the researcher (Kvale, 1983). The conversations “stress the importance of letting one’s subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 6). The use of the interview protocol is recommended and distinguishes the depth interview from other data collection methods (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013), helping to ensure that the interview sessions were participant-led, as well as being purposeful (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Thus far, the foregoing section has explained the framework that guided the interview approach employed in this thesis. The next section will detail the practicalities of collecting data, highlighting the multi-staged data collection process focusing primarily on conducting the interviews in this study.

\(^{34}\) The core interview themes in this study includes: (1) Life at home and the meanings of motherhood; (2) Life transitions; (3) Prior life experiences as a working woman; and (4) Aspiration, regrets, and dilemma.
3.5.2 Conducting the Modified Phenomenological Interviews

In order to explore how the participants made sense of their life transitions and the way in which social environments influence identity construction, data collection involved conducting multiple interviews with each participant (see for instance, Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013; Seidman, 2013). Given the potential limitations\(^{35}\) of a single interview (with the participants whom I had never interacted with before) to generate depth of understanding (see Locke, Silverman & Spirduso, 2004, p. 209; Mishler, 1986), data collection was, therefore, structured to include two\(^{36}\) separate interviews with each participant, alongside the use of visual construction technique.

The data collection occurred over three main stages, conducted at the participants’ own home. In the first stage, a life story conversation unfolded to establish the context of discussion and to allow participants to reconstruct the detail of their experiences. In the second stage of data collection, the participants took part in a visual construction exercise (at leisure in their own time at home). Finally, the third stage of data collection involved a follow up interview, covering (among other issues) relationships and reflections. Each stage of the data collection process will be discussed in detail in turn.

**Stage 1 of Data Collection: Life Story Interview (Modified Phenomenological Interview)**

As indicated earlier, the interviews (in stages one and three) took place at the homes of the participants (a venue which was mutually-agreed). This choice of interview location was designed to encourage the participants to feel at ease, with the conversations taking place within their natural environment (an approach often

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\(^{35}\) Arranging a one-shot meeting with participants “may tread on thin contextual ice” because it may restrict interviewer’s ability to explore and reflect on the participants’ experience, and place it in context to generate meaning (Seidman, 2013, p. 20).

\(^{36}\) All 10 participants went through two separate interview sessions, with exception of participant number one (Adele), having a third interview meeting to cover missing detail from earlier conversations.
used by consumer researchers; see for example, Fournier, 1998; Holt & Thompson, 2004). Moreover, the home environment was expected to provide a more conducive surrounding for audio recording (offering a potentially quiet environment for the interviews to take place). The meeting began by showing my Alliance Manchester Business School’s identification card and thanking the informants for their participation. The first interview started by informing the participants how long the conversation may take, seeking their informed consent, explaining the use of a device to audio record the conversations, and assuring the participants of their anonymity; this information was also shared with the participants during the recruitment and selection process, through the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.

The first interview session, a Life Story conversation, lasted between 82 and 114 minutes. This first stage of data collection aimed to elicit stories of the participants’ lives to create a context for the participants to tell personal account of their life transitions and identity changes (Atkinson, 2002; King & Horrocks, 2011; Patton, 1989; Seidman, 2013). Consistent with the constructionist perspective (as previously highlighted in section 3.3), my role as an interpretive consumer researcher was to translate the experiences of the participants into meaningful knowledge (Crotty, 2012; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), in line with the core interview themes (as explained in section 3.5.1); the aim was to generate “the narrative essence” of what has happened to the participants over time (Atkinson, 2002, p. 125).

The life story conversation encouraged the participants to reconstruct and reflect on the life they have lived and make them aware and conscious of various roles they played at work (previously) and as a current stay-at-home mother (see for instance, Thompson & Haytko, 1997). This created meaningful contexts for the participants to situate their personal accounts, feelings, important life events, and

37 The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form is a three-page document outlining the research objectives, why the participant is considered, how data collection is conducted, the confidentiality statement, and contact information of the researcher and the University of Manchester. The sample is included in the Appendix B.
identity journeys (please refer to McCormack, 2004; McAdams, 1993; Peacock & Holland, 1993).

The interaction started with a grand tour question (McCracken, 1988; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), such as “would you please tell me about yourself, perhaps beginning with your present life?” or alternatively, “can you start by sharing about your family background?” to open the conversation in a way that made the participants feel at ease and comfortable in progressing the conversation later to discuss their life transition events and experiences (see for instance, Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Subsequent questions were then introduced in concert with the participants’ response; for example, “you mentioned about your decision to stay home earlier. Could you please elaborate a little further how this decision came about?”

Starting from the general and more innocuous questions, the conversation gradually spiralled to the more specific discussion, exploring and probing the core themes of the interviews (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). A more specific question relating to the prior life experience as a working woman core theme, for instance, included, “prior to discussing about your motherhood role at home, you mentioned earlier about working for several companies. Can you share the experiences you had within these organisations?” A typical question that was posted in relation to the aspiration, regrets, and dilemma core theme included: “given your prior work experience and academic training background, how do you see them in light of your current role at home?” Overall, the interviews were characterised by a conversational quality and evolved from one topic to another in a circular and natural manner, along the lines of the four core themes presented in the interview protocol (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990).

The primary objective of the first stage of data collection was to enable the participants to feel empowered and comfortable in order to discuss their life as completely and honestly as possible, beginning from the general to the more
specific discussion themes, such as their role transitions from paid work organisations to the unpaid home-based environment; how people surrounding them reacted to this role change; the feelings the role change has elicited; and how they see their identity has evolved in the liminal situation. In essence, the conversation was facilitated in a manner to make the participants become conscious of their own lives through “the process of putting them together in story form” (Atkinson, 2002, p. 125). The first interview session concluded with an explanation to the participants about how they could carry out the relationship map exercise (a visual construction method used in the stage two of data collection, discussed next).

Stage 2 of Data Collection: Visual Construction Exercise

As Figure 3.1 illustrates, visual construction was used in the second stage of data collection, and this section discusses the technique and the practicality of this method in conjunction with the use of a modified phenomenological interview approach. Originating in psychotherapy (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013), projective and visual construction methods encourage participants to express their thoughts and emotions indirectly onto a drawing that may otherwise be difficult to articulate verbally (Soley, 2010). Adding visually-rich data into consumer research can reveal more insights than relying on words and numbers alone (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013).

Whereas the interviews sought a first-hand understanding mainly through verbal interaction, the visual construction method engaged the participants visually in order to enrich this thesis, bringing out more descriptive social meanings and cultural nuances of the relational aspects of the women’s identities (Belk, 2013a; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013; Chan, 2006). While the use of such (visual construction and projective) methods in other research domains have been established (for example, refer to Chan, 2006; Gillete, 2000; Martin & Woodside,

38 The participant guide on how to carry out visual construction exercise is included in Appendix D.
2011; Rooney, 2001), in the field of identity-related consumer research the
technique has been underutilised. This thesis, therefore, explored the use of this
technique in conjunction with the modified phenomenological interviews to
collectively generate “a first-person description of lived experience” (Thompson,
Locander & Pollio, 1989, p. 144) more vividly (Belk, 2013a).

The visual construction technique employed in this thesis was designed to help the
participants to “say things indirectly that are difficult to say directly” (Belk,
Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 44) in data collection. This exercise helped
stimulate and generate conversations in the Relationships and Reflections
Interview (stage three of data collection, as depicted in Figure 3.1), in which the
participants reflected on and described their relationship network and relational
experience. The interpretation that emerged from the drawings was therefore
jointly constructed (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013).

The use of this method was made known to the participants in advance, at the
recruitment stage. The actual explanation of how to carry out the drawing
exercise was provided at the end of the first interview the women participated in.
Furthermore, each participant was given a folder containing an instruction sheet
and two blank sheets of paper to use to help create the visual map.

The participants were asked to draw two relationship maps39, designed to reflect
their relationships and linkages with significant others. The first map was
intended to depict their relationships in their prior (paid) work life (as a working
woman). The second drawing was designed to illustrate their relationship
network in their current (unpaid) familial role (as a stay-at-home mother). The
two relationship maps highlighted how the participants were linked to their
significant others. Also, the maps reflected how their relationships influenced the
participant’s sense of self. The participants were asked to complete this task
between stage one and stage three of data collection and were reminded to bring

39 The actual, anonymised relationship maps drawn by the participants are included in the Appendix E.
the completed drawings to the second interview session (with the maps explored in detail at stage three of data collection).

Stage 3 of Data Collection: Relationships and Reflections Interview (Modified Phenomenological Interview)

There was a purposeful break of several weeks between the first and the second interviews. This passage of time was designed in order to allow for an initial analysis of the first conversation with each participant, and was used to help identify follow up areas to discuss in the second interview with each participant. By the same token, the in-between time afforded the participants time to reflect on their experiences (based on the first interview) and helped stimulate other topic areas to discuss in their second interview. The gap in-between stage one and three of data collection was not overly lengthy, however, so as not to lose research momentum or the interest and motivation of the participants in completing all phases of data collection.

The Relationships & Reflections conversation represents the third (and final) stage of data collection; the interviews lasted from 62 to 90 minutes. This final interview session explored the participants’ relationships with key persons in their previous (paid employment) and present (stay-at-home mother) roles. The participants were asked to elaborate on the relationship maps that were already prepared beforehand, with the relationship maps used to help stimulate discussions. The interpretation of the drawings was jointly worked out to bring out the meaning embedded in the illustrations (Gordon & Langmaid, 1988). In addition, the session encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning their life transitions held for them and revisited previous conversation topics to gain further insights into their narrative account.

At the end of the final interview meeting (or stage three of data collection), participants were asked if they were willing to be contacted should further
clarification be required. In view of this, five (of the ten) participants were contacted once again in order to seek clarity on several minor topics from the prior interviews. All five of these participants were happy to provide such clarification by email (participants were offered a range of methods – telephone, email, or another face-to-face meeting – to help clarify certain points, with the participants opting to provide such additional insights by email correspondence). Again, the participants were assured of their anonymity throughout the email clarification process (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006) and all participants responded within several days of email contact being made, helping the data analysis progress well (which also signals the women’s commitment to the research process, and the rapport that was built up between researcher and participant).

Conducting the conversations within the home of the participants (in both stage one and three of data collection) exposed me to vast cultural and environmental nuances that helped situate the lives of the participants, helping me see the worlds contextually, through the eyes of the participants (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). For instance, a few participants displayed photographs around their house prominently, showcasing their relationships with important others and family members. A participant, furthermore, brought some pictures of herself during a conversation, to show what she looked like in a working uniform during her prior, professional life. In addition to photographs, at points within the conversations, some participants referred to specific physical objects around their home, serving to highlight the significance of the objects to their stories. The participants gained access to these objects with special meaning (Belk, 1991; Belk, 1990) from around the house in a convenient manner, making the conversations more relaxed, evident, and natural (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013).

Collectively, the combined methods (of modified phenomenological interview and visual construction) in the three-stage of data collection allowed the participants to reconstruct, reflect, make meaning of, and express their narrative accounts through diverse avenues of, conversation and drawing exercise. Following a discussion of the data collection methods, the next section will
provide an account of how the research participants were considered and selected. It will cover the practicalities of the sampling and selection, detailing how the participants were identified and selected for this study.

3.6 Sampling and Selection

This thesis aims to explore the co-constructed nature of consumer identity, responding to the research call to recognise the heterogeneous identity types (Epp & Price, 2008; Epp & Price, 2011). In addition, it also investigates the life transition experience of consumers who moved from the work life domain to the home-based environment. This research theme informed the process of identifying, selecting, and gaining access to the appropriate research participants. The next sections detail the manner in which the participants were considered (section 3.6.1) and how the recruitment was carried out in this study (section 3.6.2).

3.6.1 Sampling Considerations

The participants in this study were chosen purposively (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to make sure that women were recruited who had experience of paid employment, but had then made the decision to become a stay-at-home mother (refer to Kuperberg & Stone (2008) who discuss this phenomenon in society). Participants were career women who have (often temporarily) withdrawn from paid employment following the birth of a child for duration beyond regular\textsuperscript{40} maternity leave (Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010). Based at home, the mothers engage in the more traditional gender role of family caregiver replacing their prior dual-breadwinner role (Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). A recent Singapore Census of Population (2011) indicates that such women are likely to be aged between their late 20s and early 40s. The relevant sample

\textsuperscript{40} Singaporean working mothers are entitled to 16 weeks of government-paid maternity leave (Maternity leave eligibility and entitlement).
attributes, therefore, included women in this approximate age group, who possessed prior paid work experience, and who currently stay at home to perform maternal responsibilities.

The sample was fairly homogeneous by design, specifically focusing on mothers who have chosen to replace their professional careers with home-based maternal responsibilities; in Singaporean context, these women would generally be described *middle-class*. This social stratification represents the large majority in Singapore (Tan, 2015). However, in order to “maximise potential insights” (Moore, Wilkie & Alder, 2001, p. 288), participants were recruited from diverse professional and education backgrounds. The sample included a former public relations manager, school teacher, hospital nurse, flight attendant, banker, social service worker, mechanical engineer, and civil servant. These participants had diversified academic backgrounds, largely associated with their former employment and career.

This study sought to provide a detailed exploration of participants’ life stories, thoughts, and feelings, and adhered to the rationale summarised by McCracken (1988, p. 17) as follows:

> “The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristics. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world...qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in its objectives.”

In this light, ten female participants were initially recruited. This number of participants was (later) considered appropriate given that qualitative research rests on relatively *small* sample sizes to ensure that depth, as opposed to breadth, of

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41 The term “*middle-class*”, in describing the sample profile, is not used in a statistical sense; it broadly refers to the participants’ social location with Singaporean cultural meanings attached to it (Tan, 2015). The term “*middle class*” generally characterises a household where one of the members is gainfully employed, has access to a higher standard of living beyond the basic food and shelter, and has the potential for self-actualisation; this represents “*a large majority of Singaporeans*” (Tan, 2015, p. 9). This social stratification label became popular in the late 1980s, when the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said that “*Singapore is a middle-class society*” based primarily on the criterion that more than 80 percent of Singaporeans owned the property they lived in (Tan, 2004, p. 2).
research is generated (see for instance, Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1996). Furthermore, this sample size is similar to another existential phenomenological study that explored the (consumer) experiences of contemporary married women (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990). With this sample size, sufficient attention can be devoted to individual participants to ensure that their lived experiences are described with adequate details (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013).

Given the relative homogeneity of the sample, this size was considered reasonable to allow thick descriptions to emerge through the collective use of the multiple phenomenological interview sessions and the visual construction technique (as illustrated earlier in Figure 3.1). Using the combined data collection methods such a sample size enabled this thesis to focus intimately on the participants’ life histories and reflections on their former roles and sense of selves, generating sufficiently detailed accounts of the research phenomena (see for example, Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1996; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990).

3.6.2 Recruitment and Selection

The participants were recruited in Singapore, initially and partially through personal contacts – a technique frequently used in family studies within consumer research (see for instance, Kerrane & Hogg, 2010; Kerrane & Hogg, 2011; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012). This study subsequently used a modified snowball-sampling approach (Hays, 1996), asking the women recruited through personal contacts to refer other women they may know with similar experiences to their own. In order to avoid becoming enmeshed in a group of like-minded women, this thesis limited the number of women referred by each participant to one (for instance, see Hays, 1996). This recruitment approach (relying on

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42 Later in the process of data collection, this number of participants was reaffirmed to be appropriate, because the study has reached data saturation, and the subsequent new interview sessions did not generate fresh or new insights.
personal contacts, and then personal referrals) was, at a later stage, complemented with an online advertisement\textsuperscript{43} to secure the needed sample size.

The recruitment appeal did not attract participation through payment, as this form of incentive could have the potential to drive participants to be involved for a reason not related to the research objectives. As a token of appreciation, however, this study recognised the participant’s time invested throughout the data collection period, with a thank you gesture in the form of a shopping voucher worth S$100 (or equivalent to £47)\textsuperscript{44} offered to each participant.

The participants were sought based on the sampling considerations (discussed in section 3.6.1), and on the basis that they would be available to be interviewed at least twice within their home or at a mutually agreed location. Furthermore, they were selected also because of their interest in engaging with a visual construction technique and willingness for potential conversations to be audio recorded for transcription purposes. Keen participants were initially followed up, either by telephone or email. The purpose of the research was then introduced verbally during a telephone conversation with each potential participant before formal data collection began. Subsequently, interested candidates were then sent a formal, written and detailed information sheet which described the research project, \textit{Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form}, to aid their decision as to whether to take part (Silverman, 2012).

The participants were given approximately a week to consider their participation in the research project after showing their initial willingness to participate. Participants were encouraged to discuss their involvement with their partner, husband, or family members (as they deemed necessary). The participants were then asked to return a signed copy of the consent form, and to indicate a preferred time for the first interview meeting to take place. A number of elements of informed consent were highlighted to participants, including their right to

\textsuperscript{43} The advertisement was placed on the \textit{Singapore Motherhood and Parenting Forum}. It will further be discussed in this section.

\textsuperscript{44} Use of incentives in participant recruitment is further discussed and reflected upon in section 3.9.3 (Use of Incentives in Recruitment).
withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period, without giving a specific reason (prior to the anonymisation of their data).

Three participants decided to withdraw from the study during this process of collecting their informed consent. One participant felt uneasy with the use of audio recording the conversations; the second candidate was constrained by her family’s conditions; and the third participant declined to participate without stating a specific reason. The withdrawal issue, while not unforeseen, caused recruitment to progress at a slower pace than hoped.

In order to meet the planned sample size, an online advertisement was then placed in a local motherhood website, The Singapore Motherhood and Parenting Forum45. Within a week, the online appeal attracted five further enquiries which eventually led to recruitment of three additional participants, yielding an overall sample size of ten. An important aspect to note is that while recruitment was ongoing, the data collection process also began; this was necessary in order to complete the data collection in a time efficient manner.

Now that appropriate consideration has been devoted to explaining how this thesis selected and recruited the appropriate research participants (section 3.6) and the way data collection was conducted (section 3.5), the next section documents how their narrative accounts were interpreted following phenomenological guidelines.

3.7 Contextualisation of the Participant Stories

In the phenomenological tradition, the term analysis (see for instance Fournier, 1998; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003) is used to refer to the contextualisation of the participant stories to study the “constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hycner, 1999, p. 161). The participant stories, emerging from the life-world in which the research participants

45 The website address was http://www.mummysg.com/forums/forum.php. The advertisement copy is included in the Appendix C.
live (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), were explored in a holistic manner in the data interpretation stages, in line with a phenomenological inquiry (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The following sections present a form of phenomenological data analysis utilised in this study (section 3.7.1) and outline the steps taken through which the participant stories were interpreted (section 3.7.2).

### 3.7.1 Modified Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

“At the outset, it is important to bear in mind that ‘doing’ such [IPA] analysis is inevitably a complex process. It may be an experience which is collaborative, personal, intuitive, difficult, creative, intense, and conceptually demanding... There is no clear right or wrong way of conducting this sort of analysis, and we encourage IPA researchers to be innovative in the ways that they approach it”. (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013, p. 80)

The essence of phenomenological research is to describe the human experience as it is experienced by the research participants themselves (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Informed by this orientation, the present study adopts a version of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a method to explore the participant narratives (as highlighted in the section 3.4.6 earlier).

Originating in psychology and appearing in the mid-1990s, IPA is a qualitative research approach employed to investigate how people make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). The use of IPA concerns with the exploration of the human experience in its own term, following the Husserlian’s maxim of going back to the things themselves (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

As a data analysis method, IPA is distinguished by its analytic focus towards the personal meaning-making in specific or particular life-world contexts (Smith,

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46 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) can be referred to as either a methodology (a theoretically-grounded orientation of conducting research) or a method (an approach of collecting data or analysing data) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). The term IPA in this thesis describes it as a method of data analysis.
Flowers & Larkin, 2013). In this regard, IPA is defined by its commitment to idiography as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013, p. 29) elaborate:

“IPA’s commitment to the particular operates at two levels. Firstly, there is a commitment to the particular, in the sense of detail, and therefore the depth of analysis. As a consequence, analysis must be thorough and systematic. Secondly, IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process, or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context”.

Driven by its idiographic-focus, IPA involves a “highly intensive” analysis and rich examination of human lived experience (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006, p. 103). Since its primary concern is on the detailed account of individual experience, and given the complex nature of the human phenomena, IPA typically benefits from “a concentrated focus on a small number of cases” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013, p. 51). Although IPA does not prescribe a certain sample size, due to its emphasis on idiography, however, IPA researchers often make effective use of single case analyses. A “reasonable” sample size may generally range from between three and six participants (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013, p. 51).

Since phenomenology is not a prescriptive philosophic tradition (Moran, 2000), and as the opening quote of this section highlights, IPA does not recommend a single approach or definitive account for working with data. The use of IPA has been characterised by a “healthy flexibility” in how data analysis may be carried out (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013, p. 79).

Aiming to understand the co-constructed nature of consumer identity and recognise the heterogeneous identity types (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006), this thesis aimed to look for patterns within and across individual elements of the purposively-chosen participants of stay-at-home mothers who possess diverse professional work experiences. Unlike a typical IPA

The term *idiography* is traditionally associated with the study of *individual* persons in psychology, although it was originally meant to distinguish the study of *specifics* (or particular) from the study of *things in general* (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006, p. 103).
study (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006), the present study did not centrally emphasise on idiography. It selected a larger sample size (in IPA terms, at least) to allow the development of a meaningful range of similarities and differences across the participants. In effect, meeting the IPA’s commitment to a detailed account of participant experience with a relatively large sample size of 10 participants was proven difficult to achieve (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013).

Instead, this research explored the participant stories at two levels, that is, within the individual participants and then across the participants (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). It places the importance of context and analysis to help make sense of particular experiences against the backdrop of a participant’s full account, and across the full data set. To balance between within-case and cross-case exploration, this thesis performed analysis at two levels, similar to the method utilised by Fournier (1998), Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989), Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1990), and Thomsen and Sørensen (2006).

The first level of analysis was conducted with each participant at the idiographic level; this involved a review of the individual interview transcripts of each participant to seek an idiographic understanding of each participant (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989). Subsequently, after the individual transcripts had been idiographically analysed, individual participant stories were related to each other to identify data patterns; this moved the analytic development from part to whole, from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive account to the interpretive account (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013).

Initially, an emic understanding of each participant was sought in order to “articulate a system of meanings that compose the worldviews of the participants”, followed afterward by an etic interpretation which aimed to “link these emic meanings to more global theoretical terms” (Thompson, 1996, p. 390; see also Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). A more detailed account of how this data contextualisation worked is outlined in the next section.
3.7.2 Steps in Data Analysis

Phenomenology is not a rigid philosophic tradition (Moran, 2000); it does not prescribe a systematic approach to how data is to be interpreted. The presentation of the step-by-step account of how the data were contextualised aims to clarify (rather than systemise) the process; this is but one way in analysing data, as informed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013). Based on the two levels of data interpretation (firstly, within-case, and secondly at the across-case level), the following steps (one through to five) describe the analysis at the idiographic level, while step six explains the analysis at the cross-case level.

Step 1: Transcription

Converting the recorded material\textsuperscript{48} into text is a precursor to working with the interview data (King & Horrocks, 2011). Verbatim (or word-for-word) transcription was carried out by an appointed professional consumer research company in Singapore who had been thoroughly briefed about the research objectives and given specific transcription guidelines (Silverman, 2012) to follow, in order to produce a consistent transcription format with notations indicating the features of verbal interactions (King & Horrocks, 2011). Every completed transcript was checked rigorously against the audio recording to assure transcription quality before data interpretation was initiated (King & Horrocks, 2011).

Furthermore, the transcribed text was treated as an autonomous body of data, meaning that a participant’s description of her experiences was regarded as sufficient in itself without further (external) validation. This also means that the transcription was approached as is, purely based on the audio recording and without consulting with pre-existing theories or hypothesis (Thompson, Locander

\textsuperscript{48} All interviews were conducted in English.
& Pollio, 1989, p. 140). The verbatim transcription generated 407 single-spaced typed pages of interview transcripts, including the relationship-map drawing exercise used to stimulate the conversations in the data collection stage.

**Step 2: Reading and re-reading the transcription**

Reading a transcript signifies entering into a participant’s world. The transcripts were read in the order that the participants were interviewed. The first reading of the transcript was accompanied with listening to the audio recording of the interview. The combination of the participant’s voice and the written text created a more holistic sense of the narratives, placing the participants at the centre of focus and analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). For active engagement and deeper immersion with the data, each transcript was read again after the first reading was completed.

During the repeated reading of a transcript, handwritten descriptive comments were made to capture the interesting or significant points about what the participant said; the notes were placed in the right-hand margin of the page or on the relevant section of the text itself (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This initial noting helped ensure a growing familiarity with the participant’s story (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013, p. 83).

**Step 3: Coding**

Following the creation of the marginal, descriptive notes in the previous step, the transcript was read again from the beginning to evolve the comments in the right-hand margin into concise and interpretive phrases placed in the left-hand margin; these concise phrases are known as *codes* (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 139). The codes captured the essential quality of the comments in the right-hand

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49 Of this number, 19 pages relate to the relationship-map drawing materials generated from the visual construction technique (stage two of data collection).
margin. Fundamentally, this coding process (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 139) reduced segments of the interview text into meaningful parts and assigned names for the parts (Creswell, 2007). The codes were assigned to a sentence, a paragraph, or a chunk of the text (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). The whole coding process was iterative, taking place as the transcripts were re-read and re-interpreted, to uncover the meanings within the participants’ narratives.

Step 4: Developing Themes

As a basic “unit of data” (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 141), the codes were subsequently listed in chronological order, that is, in the order that they emerged (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). This step generated a code list, highlighting all the most interesting and significant aspects of the participant’s story (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). The codes were refined, and subsequently grouped together under more “abstract categories” (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 141) to create what Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013, p. 91) term as “emergent themes”.

The emergent themes contained both particularity about the psychological essence of the text and conceptual abstraction grounded on the text (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). Effectively, the themes blended the participant’s original words with my interpretative understanding, reflecting a synergy between description and interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013). The theme development was approached openly in conjunction with the review of relevant literature (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 188).

Step 5: Writing up a case and moving to the next case

Guided by the list of codes and the emergent themes, the case of a participant was then written up individually. While coding (in step three) and theme development
(in step four) involved fragmenting the data into meaningful segments, writing up the individual case reorganised the data segments back and reintegrated them into a new whole. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2013) explain: “The original whole of the interview becomes a set of parts as you conduct your analysis, but these then come together in another new whole at the end of the analysis in the write-up” (p. 90). Once the write-up of an individual case was completed, the next step was to move to the next interview transcript, and the steps from two to five were then repeated for the following participant.

**Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases**

While the steps one through to five explored the participant stories at the within-case level, step six looked for patterns across the cases. The analysis at the cross-case level involved comparing the emergent themes and asking such questions as: What are the connections across the cases? How does a theme in one case illuminate a different case? Which are the most dominant themes? (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013).

From connecting the emergent themes across the individual cases, provisional understandings were developed, challenged, revised, and redeveloped through an iterative process of moving back and forth between the interview texts and relevant literature (Thompson, 2005). Concepts and insights gradually emerged in relation to the broader set of theoretical concerns forming global themes (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990). These global themes captured the commonalities across the individual participant narratives; it is a synthesis of the continuous interpretations described in the preceding steps two through to five of the analytical process. The on-going process of understanding the within, and across the individual cases enabled larger patterns of thematic relationships to emerge, rendering “essential dimensions common to all the participants’ interviews” (Thompson, 1996, p. 393).
The previous section has documented a detailed account of the manner in which the data were *analysed*. The next section discusses ethical concerns associated with the study and the decisions that were taken in order to protect the quality of the research and to safeguard the participants and the researcher.

### 3.8 Research Ethics

"Ethics concern the morality of human conduct. In relation to social research, it refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process". (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, p. 16)

Ethical issues in research may arise because of the complexity of researching the private experiences of individuals and by sharing their accounts in the public arena (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop & Miller, 2002). Ethics is not only relevant in fieldwork, but concerns all the stages of the research process (Kvale, 1996). This section, accordingly, discusses the ethical considerations taken throughout the process of working with the research participants, including after data collection was successfully completed.

Prior to data collection, it was a requirement from Alliance Manchester Business School to submit an Application for Research Ethics Approval. This research ethics application was to clarify the research objectives, the research methods utilised, the sampling and recruitment procedures, data protection and confidentiality, and other ethical considerations of the study undertaken. Following the review process, the Director of the Postgraduate Research Programme granted its approval, clearing the way for data collection to begin.

Building an ethical field relationship with participants is critical to successful interviewing (Silverman, 2012). To protect the quality of the research and to safeguard the participants and the researcher, the research emphasised the practice

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50 The actual form of the Application for Research Ethics Approval is included in the Appendix A.
of transparency and professionalism from the beginning of the study (King & Horrocks, 2011). For instance, in addition to sharing the research-related information, I offered every potential participant access to my online professional profile at LinkedIn\(^{51}\) when the participants asked about my background; my LinkedIn profile contains only basic information about my work experience and education background. This was a form of two-way *personal* introduction in order to establish rapport early on in the research process and signals the importance of maintaining professionalism and openness as a basis of the research relationship (Punch, 1994).

Furthermore, participants were given detailed information about the study in the *Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form*. They were given option to discuss participation with their significant others, and were granted sufficient time to help make the decision to participate (so as not to rush them or coerce them to opt in to the research process). It was also highlighted to each participant that she was free to withdraw at any point of time during the research process, without giving a reason as to why she did not wish to be involved any more.

The participants were asked at the end of the project whether they would like to receive a summarised copy of the (anonymised) research findings; and each participant expressed interest to receive this report. The participants were also reassured of the confidential and anonymous nature of the research as already expressed in the *Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form* which they had reviewed during the recruitment and selection process. This document provided the participants with the school details and my contact information for their future reference.

During phenomenological interviews, interactions with informants could take unexpected turns (Ryen, 2012). It was difficult to fully pre-empt how participants would respond to certain questions, given the emergent nature of the questioning. There was the possibility that for some participants, certain questions could

\(^{51}\) LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) is an online-based, professional and business social networking service.
engage with sensitive issues (however unintended). In this respect, the participants were informed they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to. Also given the setting of the interview, the fleeting presence of a family member may have had the potential to cause difficulties for participants. I considered such scenarios in advance and prepared for appropriate responses. For example, I emphasised the voluntary nature of participation and brought relevant support information (such as details of a family-related problems helpline, community support, and also counselling services) to the interviews in order to signpost the participants should this be helpful.

While the interactions throughout the data collection went without any major issues, there were two instances where conversations had to be discontinued midway, due to prolonged disruption from the participants’ children (who were left alone and needed their mothers’ attention). Responding to this, I politely offered to the participants to attend to their children, and subsequently I asked if the meeting should be rescheduled at the participant's convenience; the two participants gratefully accepted the offers to continue the interviews at a later date.

While the interests of the participants were safeguarded through the ethical practices employed, the physical welfare and safety of the researcher can sometimes be overlooked when considering research ethics (King & Horrocks, 2011). Given the interviews took place within participants’ homes, necessary precautions were taken to mitigate personal risks (Ingham, Vanwesenbeeck & Kirkland, 2000; King & Horrocks, 2011). For example, I informed my spouse of the venue location and estimated duration of the meeting; and she was told to contact me if I did not contact her at the agreed time following each interview. I also carried a fully-charged smart phone storing emergency helplines and my spouse’s contact information to the interview locations. In addition, the interviews were always conducted in common areas within the house, such as living room or dining room.
At all times, the data collected from the interviews were stored in a password-protected computer accessible only for the transcription and data analysis purposes. Upon completion of this study and its related research writing projects, the audio recording will be destroyed.

As this section has outlined, the ethical practice of interviewing in this research project was wide-ranging. The trust-based, field relationships established with every participant was a cornerstone to the success of this research initiative. To this end, appropriate considerations have been given to documenting the research methods and ethical practices which guided how the participants’ stories were collected. The next section offers personal reflections on methodological aspects of this thesis.

3.9 Methodological Reflections

Interviewing and managing field relations with the study participants introduced a number of concerns. This section offers personal reflections that wrestle with the data collection issues, surrounding the perceived gender-related issues of a male researcher conducting research relating to motherhood and the lives of at-home mothers (section 3.9.1), the intrinsic problems associated with the phenomenological interview method (section 3.9.2), and the use of incentives in the recruitment and selection (section 3.9.3). These personal accounts respond to the methodological challenges and provide insights that may be relevant for future research.

3.9.1 Gender Relations and Transparency

The first two participants, at the beginning of their first interview sessions, courteously asked what made me interested in conducting research relating to motherhood. The question indicated that the women found it uncommon for a
male researcher to have a keen interest in the lives of stay-at-home mothers. Indeed Ryen (2012) notes that interviews involving participants of opposite gender may, sometimes, be ridden with delicate situations. Ryen (2012) shares from her experience, for example, that in order to build smooth field relations between people of either genders, flirting is sometimes mobilised as part of a rapport-building mechanism. Moreover, there have reportedly been occasions where an invitation (which is unrelated to the interview itself, and may be private in nature) is extended by one person to another, immediately before or after an interview meeting (Ryen, 2012). These (which never occurred during the process of this research) may create uncomfortable situations, which could jeopardise the interview progress if they are not properly handled.

The question raised by the two participants, I feel, was sincere; and, addressing it transparently, led to a more trusting research relationship to develop. I clarified to them that although the interviews involved stay-at-home mothers, the research theme essentially covered consumer identity, which, in my case, is situated in the lives of participants with such a background. This answer appeared to move the focus away from the women, making them feel more relaxed. Henceforth, in the subsequent interviews with the other participants, I voluntarily offered a few words about the research topic, to proactively address similar (but unarticulated) questions.

In another conversation, I was asked to give advice about how to deal with (the participants’) difficult children. As a doctoral student doing research within the context of family and motherhood, I might have been seen as an expert in the parenting subject. In response, I politely dispelled the participant’s notion about my expertise in this family matter. In addition, to maintain a professional distance, I refrained from giving personal advice about a participant’s domestic issues (but, if appropriate, I would gladly refer them to professional help available in the community).
In order to encourage participants to open up in the conversations, I sometimes voluntarily shared my own family stories in a selective manner (after all, I have asked about their family lives as well). In order to create a natural and interactive engagement, I sensitively disclosed to them about my personal background (for instance, how many children I have and what I do for a living) in a general manner that would not create a potential bias in a participant’s response. Such reciprocal comments on my part were intended to stimulate the conversation and took place only in a few conversations.

At times, I also introduced myself to the participants’ family members (such as their husbands and children) who were present at the time of my arrival at their homes; conversations developed with the participants’ family members before the interview started. The self-introduction and small conversations with other family members appeared to warm up the atmosphere, leading to a more natural entry to the interview. Building productive field relations with the participants required sincerity in managing tricky situations as well as reciprocity in self-disclosure; this led to increased trust, and eventually, a broadened access to the lives of the data.

3.9.2 Phenomenological Risk

The existential phenomenological interview method (as highlighted in the section 3.5.1) is a participant-led conversation, meaning that interaction (and the direction of the conversation) is primarily set by participants (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). In addition, the interview method is not guided by a predefined questionnaire or a priori framework on the interview process. As a consequence, this method is known to contain a “methodological risk” (Cope, 2005, p. 180) because the participant is given a free rein to set the course of the dialogue.

With the aim to conduct a strictly existential phenomenological interview as defined by Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989), I initially approached the first
two interviews (with the first participant) without any written notes or questions to ask the participant. I was concerned that having written notes may distract (or contaminate) the flow of the conversations that would naturally unfold. After all, the participant was the subject matter expert of her own experience; thus, she needed to be rightly given the unbounded freedom to express herself on the topics of motherhood, identity, and life transitions. At the end of my first interviews, I was pleased with the natural flow of the dialogue and the wide-ranging topics that the first participant touched upon. At the same time, however, I knew the conversations had glaringly missed a few points related to my research questions\textsuperscript{52} (as earlier mentioned in section 3.5.2) which I felt needed to be probed across each interview.

After discussing this situation with my Academic Advisors, I decided to modify the method by using notes in the conversations, highlighting the core interview themes\textsuperscript{53}. Known to the interpretive consumer researchers as a research interview “protocol” (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013, p. 35), the notes outlined the four major research themes that I needed to cover in each interview. Additionally, the research protocol also served to remind that, while it was important for the participants to have some freedom in articulating their personal accounts, the overall engagement also needed to be purposeful. Doing a so-called strict existential phenomenological interview was not tenable, because (as evidenced in my first two interviews) the dialogue evolved in the way that was not fully in line with the research objectives.

While every research method has its strengths and limitations (Seidman, 2013), the use of the notes outlining the core themes to cover in the conversations aimed to retain the phenomenological interview features (allowing scope for participants to discuss issues they felt pertinent to raise) while mitigating any risks associated with the approach (ensuring that broad topics were covered in each interview, keeping participants on track). The modified existential phenomenological

\textsuperscript{52} This was the primary reason why the first participant had a third interview (as highlighted earlier in section 3.5.2).

\textsuperscript{53} Please refer to section 3.5.1 (Modified Phenomenological Interview) for detail about the core interview themes.
interview method (see for instance, Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013) created both a conducive environment for the participants to share their life stories freely and a sense of the broader purpose linked to the research themes that needed to be discussed (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Meanwhile, I also returned to the first participant (who willingly agreed to have another interview) to cover several discussion themes, and with greater depth.

3.9.3 Use of Incentives in Recruitment

Using incentives to recruit participants can represent something of a dilemma (Rudy, Estok, Kerr & Menzel, 1994). Giving an incentive in return for research participation can be seen as both a type of bargain and a common practice at the same time (Silverman, 2012). The appropriateness of offering an incentive is largely dependent on the social norm and cultural setting (Ryen, 2012; Silverman, 2012).

This study did not rely on giving incentives to attract participation. Participants were chosen based on well-defined criteria, and were recruited through a combination of personal contacts (Kerrane & Hogg, 2010; Kerrane & Hogg, 2011; Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012), referrals (Hays, 1996) and an online advertisement. The emphasis of the recruitment (as represented on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form) primarily was on whether the participants had interest in the research themes and, thus, were motivated to be part of a group of interviewees whose voices would be heard and taken into academic account at postgraduate level. Moreover, I informed the participants that it was an opportunity for them to advance knowledge in the domain that they care about (that is, the lives of the professional career women who have made the decision to give up their paid work to prioritise their family role).

54 Participant’s interest was assessed during the recruitment; one of the assessments was whether they were keen to get the summarised findings of the study. All participants indicated a good level of interest in the study, and looked forward to receiving the summarised version of the study findings.
In the selection discussion, it was mentioned that the research offered a gesture of appreciation in the form of a shopping voucher worth S$100 (or equivalent to £47) to recognise the contribution of the women who took part; the incentive amount was not considered excessive (given the participants’ middle-class background), and yet was deemed meaningful (see for instance Fournier, 1998; Silverman, 2012) to thank the women for their participation (rather than an incentive to contribute).

As a researcher, I stand to gain from eventually earning my doctorate through this study. But I doubted whether the participants felt the same way, given that they had to commit a certain amount of time and effort to go through the three-stage data collection process. Hence, I was not completely certain whether the stay-at-home mothers (who are time-poor55) may readily be agreeable to participate in the time-consuming, multiple interviews without an incentive. Indeed, the practice of giving incentives in research to express appreciation is not uncommon (Kerrane, 2008; Silverman, 2012).

While debates of whether incentives should be momentos rather than monetary continue (Rudy, Estok, Kerr & Menzel, 1994), I deliberately had to avoid both options. Payment (of money) could be viewed as direct interference with the voluntariness of choice by these women (Ackerman, 1989); on the other hand, selecting a momento that may suit the preference of the individual participants could be unpractical. The choice of the shopping voucher (from Singapore’s largest chain of supermarkets) as an incentive provides flexibility for the participants to use for their personal or family needs.

In addition, I feel strongly that a researcher needs to affirm participants’ dignity by providing intangible research benefits (such as making them feel heard, making them see that they contributed to the knowledge they care about, and giving access to the study findings when the research is completed) (Seidman, 2013). At the same time, as consumer research scholars have already practiced, it

55This is evidenced in the interviews with all the participants.
is also appropriate to reciprocate the participants’ contribution through giving an incentive (for instance, see Fournier, 1998; Hamilton & Catterall, 2006).

### 3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has clarified the ontological position, epistemological perspective, and methodological considerations adopted in this thesis. Grounded in the existential phenomenological paradigm, this research seeks to describe the first-hand experience from the participants’ point of view, acknowledging the totality of the human-being-in-the-world.

Furthermore, this thesis employed the existential phenomenological interview method complemented with the use of a projective technique, to construct the relevant knowledge about the lived experiences of the 10 participants. Based on interpretative phenomenological guidelines, data contextualisation was performed to yield global themes that captured the larger patterns of the thematic relationships across the individual participant narratives.

The next chapter presents the research findings. It begins by introducing the individual participants at the idiographic level (section 4.2) to highlight the interrelationships of the emerging themes across the individual participant stories, yielding the global themes. These global themes are then presented to reveal the insights relating to the way in which the participants frame stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career (section 4.3.1); how the participants highlighted the commercialisation of family life at home (section 4.3.2); and how the participants use symbolic, occupation-related resources to professionalise their maternal roles within their family (section 4.3.3).
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

“Experience does not automatically assume a narrative form. Rather, it is reflecting on experience that we construct stories. The stories we make are accounts, attempts to explain and understand experience”. (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p. 111)

In this chapter, the accounts of the participants are initially presented as single cases, in order to provide an overview of each participant’s story and signpost the main characteristics of the participants’ narratives. This development of the individual stories was necessary to form an initial understanding of the data at the idiographic, individual, level before moving to the holistic level, following the part-to-whole process of analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2013) as detailed in the methodology section (Chapter 3). In the same manner, the interview texts were first interpreted in terms of the personal and socio-cultural contexts at the idiographic level, and later, in terms of the common themes emerging from across the participants’ narratives; an approach that is quite common in consumer research (for examples of this approach, see Fournier, 1998; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Thompson, 2005). Interpretation, as Robinson and Hawpe (1986) state in the opening quote, plays a critical role within this approach to construct the research findings.

The ongoing process of understanding from within and across the individual cases, in concert with the relevant literature reviewed, enables the global themes (or the larger patterns of thematic relationships) to emerge. The global themes, rendering the commonalities across the individual participant stories (Thompson, 1996), are then introduced following the presentation of the individual short cases of each participant’s story.

This chapter begins by presenting each of the individual cases (section 4.2) followed by the global themes (section 4.3). The chapter ends with a concluding discussion (section 4.4) summarising the overall research findings. An overview
of this chapter and the main sections is illustrated in Figure 4.0. Further discussion about how the research findings contribute to consumer and sociological research, and the resulting implications this research project offers for business and policy makers, will be discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion).

Figure 4.0: Map of Chapter 4 – Research Findings
4.2 The Individual Cases

The individual cases introduce the characteristics and circumstances of the 10 participants in this study. These 10 participants are middle-class Singaporean women with varied life histories, academic education, and professional work experiences (see Table 4.0).

4.2.1 Case 1: Adele

Adele lives with her husband, Michael, and their two daughters in a three-bedroom Housing and Development Board (HDB)\(^{56}\) apartment in the centre of Singapore. Adele grew up feeling “resentful” towards her own (working) mother because Adele often missed her mother’s presence; this childhood experience, coupled with Adele’s belief that good mothers need to constantly “be there” for their children, prompted Adele to become a stay-at-home parent, a decision that Adele considers runs against the ethos of Singaporean society:

“There is so much news about mums going back to work. That is what the government wants to promote right? They want to bring all the mums from home back to work, so that our workforce would be full again. But they don’t realise that, first of all, childcare is not amazing. Secondly, we would rather be home with our kids. It is not that we homemakers have no choice. Lots of mums are now at home with their kids because they want to be home with their kids. And they want to look for all these flexible opportunities to earn income even when they are home with their kids”.

\(^{56}\) Housing and Development Board (HDB) is a statutory board of the Singapore government’s Ministry of National Development which is responsible for providing Singaporeans with public housing. The term “HDB” is synonymous and used interchangeably with the state-built, public apartment. It is where more than 80% of Singaporeans live in Singapore today (Ministry of National Development Singapore, n.d.).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family situation at time of interviews</th>
<th>Years at home</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Professional career background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 1: Adele</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married with 2 daughters aged 5 and 16 months</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>BSc in business</td>
<td>Worked for 8 years; 7 years as a Public Relations Manager within a global furniture company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2: Nikki</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married with a son and a daughter aged 7 and 2</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>BSc in education</td>
<td>Worked for 15 years; 12 years as a Teacher with a childcare company and other schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3: Nova</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married with 2 sons aged 4 and 3</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
<td>BSc in engineering</td>
<td>Worked for 5 years as a Mechanical Design Engineer with a global mobile technology firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 4: Tiffany</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married with 2 daughters aged 11 and 8</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>BSc in business</td>
<td>Worked for 15 years in business development roles within several international banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 5: Sonia</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married with a son and a daughter aged 4 and 20 months</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>BSc in nursing</td>
<td>Worked for 4 years as a Nurse at a major private hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 6: Estelle</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married with a son and a daughter aged 15 and 13</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Diploma in business</td>
<td>Worked for 19 years, mainly as a Financial Advisor at a global bank, and then as an Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 7: Inez</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married with a son aged 1</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>BSc in engineering</td>
<td>Worked for 10 years; 6 years as a Clinical Research Project Manager with a pharmaceutical firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 8: Yvette</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married with a son and a daughter aged 3 and 8 months</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>BSc in social sciences</td>
<td>Worked for 7 years as a Social Worker with a government institution and local volunteer welfare companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 9: Ingrid</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Married with a daughter aged 7 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>BSc in business</td>
<td>Worked for 10 years; 6 years as a Flight Attendant with an international airline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 10: Stella</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married with a son and a daughter aged 3 and 10 months</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>BSc in social sciences</td>
<td>Worked for 8 years as a Civil Servant with a government’s welfare division and within an international volunteer welfare organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Adele feels “contented” with her home-based role, she also increasingly feels the urgency to reclaim her productive sense of self that she achieved through her previous paid work career (“I do not regret leaving my job and being with my kids full time…but I have committed career suicide. And this is my sixth year not working full time’’). To regain her sense of self-reliance (“I am not the kind who asks money from my husband”), Adele (like many of the women interviewed) started a home-based business venture; currently, she runs a high-profile family blog that generates a small, but steady, stream of income from advertisement revenue. Adele feels upbeat about her change in financial circumstances (“it is nice for me to feel like a person again, not just a mum, but an adult who contributes”). To juggle her work and home commitments, Adele places her children at a local childcare in the neighbourhood for a few hours each day, and hires a part-time maid to help with the household chores.

4.2.2 Case 2: Nikki

A self-professed “CEO of the family”, Nikki worked professionally for 15 years before assuming her current home-based maternal role. Light-heartedly summing up her familial duties of “cleaning” (the house), “educating” (her children), and “operating” (the home) in the corporate acronym and title of “CEO”, Nikki views that “a period from zero to three” is “prime time” for a mother to be at home with her child; such a parenting belief drove Nikki to leave her paid job for stay-at-home motherhood (“I would not want to miss this golden period”).

Living with her family in a four-bedroom HDB apartment, Nikki has set up an online shop that sells her own handmade jewellery, but she has recently taken a

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57 Participant’s quotes are presented in the individual cases to support the respective participant’s story (following Fournier, 1998).
58 Preschool education in Singapore is offered through childcare and kindergarten. Childcare caters for children from two months up to six years old, providing developmentally and age-appropriate activities and programmes, and involving routine care (naptime, outdoor, and tea break). The care arrangement is flexible (from three-hourly to full day). Meanwhile, in nearly the same way, kindergarten caters to children between three- and six-year old, offering subject-based learning activities generally for academic skills acquisition. Both childcare and kindergarten are under the purview of the state’s Early Childhood Development Agency (Difference between Kindergarten and Childcare Centre, 2015).
break from this given what she terms her two “difficult” children. Nonetheless, earning her home-based income has provided Nikki with a sense of worth (“I used to spend my own money and it felt good. Though now my husband gives me allowance every month, it is not the same. Perhaps you can say it is pride”).

While at home, Nikki devotes time to exploring several personal interests, such as learning how to cook and bake; these hobbies give Nikki a sense of satisfaction and personal growth (“I see the progress in me...the growth is in me as a mother”). Nikki is currently contemplating launching a blog about “beauty and fitness”. Nikki feels that her body needs “reforming” to stay in shape (to regain her former self) after giving birth to two children and having sustained a “tough” motherhood period (“I am 24/7 busy. I am very sleep-deprived”). Having exercised regularly in her premarital days, Nikki plans to eventually become a professional personal trainer, a paid role which hopefully will allow her to both regain her sense of (financial) independence and perform her home-based motherhood at the same time.

4.2.3 Case 3: Nova

Nova is married to Ben; the couple and their two children live in a three-bedroom HDB apartment. Following the birth of her first child four years ago, Nova decided to leave the workforce in order to become a stay-at-home mother.

Nova had worked for an international mobile communications company for five years as a Mechanical Engineer. Nova finds her past work experience “applicable” in helping her to manage her family affairs. Nova’s project management skills and methodical thought process (“I think mechanically”) are put to good use at home (“...from doing a lot of projects in my company before, I know how to plan”). Nova frequently refers to tools from her work life such as
the “Fishbone diagram” and “timetable”, which help her to systematically organise her maternal tasks as well as some commercial ventures. To bring in some money of her own, Nova has initiated several business ventures, including running an online bakery shop, performing project-based (part-time) work from home, and most recently, launching a thriving online children’s educational store.

In juggling her familial duties and projects, Nova is dependent on a neighbourhood childcare institution to look after her two young children (for a few hours during the day, two days a week). Nova also employs a domestic maid to take care of cleaning the house, cooking, and washing. Nova feels this outsourcing arrangement provides her with the necessary support to let her perform motherhood well (“We do have our limitation. The aspect that is not our strength will be done by external parties”).

4.2.4 Case 4: Tiffany

Tiffany and her husband, Shawn, live with their two children in a two-storey house in the north side of Singapore. Tiffany described herself as a “hard-working” career woman (“I love to work...My picture of career woman was like those women in power suits, who are aggressive”), having worked previously as a banker for 15 years within several multinational financial institutions. But compelled by her maternal duty, Tiffany “reluctantly” decided to quit her successful career to assume a full-time caregiving role to her family two years ago.

Tiffany has always prioritised the educational development of her children. For example, they were enrolled in childcare once they were of preschool age for more “effective” learning (“I feel I would not be able to engage them as

59 The Fishbone Diagram, also known as causal diagram, is an analytical tool often used in the Engineering field for purpose of product design and quality defect prevention. It identifies possible factors causing an overall issue.

60 Preschool age refers to pre-primary school age of below six (2015 Primary One Registration, 2015).
effectively as the childcare professionals who are trained in early childhood\textsuperscript{61} education”). At the same time, like many other middle-class Singaporeans, Tiffany “outsources” her domestic chores to a live-in domestic helper to allow Tiffany to focus on the “more essential” mothering work, such as planning her children’s “nutrition” and food intake and providing home tuition on certain school subjects.

Once her children are in primary school, Tiffany also teaches them with the formal skills that she acquired from her prior professional life, such as imparting personal communications skills (“how to present themselves in front of different groups of people”), “telephone skill”, “self-awareness”, and “human psychology”. Tiffany wants to impart her professional experience and skills on her two children so they can be life-ready (“...all these skills will help them in their life next time”). As her children become “more independent”, what features prominently in Tiffany’s mind is her plan to return to paid work (“So I would eventually go back to work... I need to get myself mentally prepared when I step out later on”).

4.2.5 Case 5: Sonia

Sonia is married to David; they have two children and live in the north-eastern side of Singapore. A registered nurse with a bachelor’s degree in nursing, Sonia worked in a private hospital within the children’s clinic and other departments.

Sonia was “passionate” about her profession, so giving up her job to become a stay-at-home mother was initially “difficult”; but Sonia wanted her children to have their mother care for them full time at home, a family experience that Sonia reflected she missed out on in her own childhood (“...I have no parents living close to me...somehow it caused me to lack a sense of security...”).

\textsuperscript{61} Early childhood denotes a period of childhood below the age of seven (Early Childhood Development Agency, 2005); Primary school entrance starts from the age of six in Singapore (2015 Primary One Registration, 2015).
Moreover, without an income of her own Sonia feels vulnerable ("...when you do not have your own income, you somehow feel like there is no power left"). As a "believer in God" Sonia wants to fulfil her "higher calling" to be her family’s main caregiver, albeit within a pre-specified duration of six years, as she reports:

"...I read in the books that the first six years are very important in children’s life. That makes me like, okay, I really want to invest in these six years. So I say okay, to be able to invest in the six years, I need to quit the job. And I want to create a sense of security and confidence in the children”.

In order to cope with the birth of her second child, Sonia sent her three-year old son to preschool for three hours each day ("This arrangement helped me manage the house chore and workload at home"). Sonia engages a part-time maid, who comes once a week to perform the "heavier" chores when she needs help or when the children fall sick. Sonia also hired a catering service at one time (who cooked all of the family meals), but she soon ended this arrangement because the food "does not suit the family’s palate”. Outsourcing some of her housework helps Sonia manage her time better to allow her to perform “holistic” parenting (a term that Sonia learnt about during her nursing career, referring to a mothering approach that covers aspects of her children’s physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing).

4.2.6 Case 6: Estelle

Estelle is married to Bill with two children. The family lives in an HDB apartment in the east of Singapore. Prior to becoming a stay-at-home parent, Estelle worked for close to two decades within several international financial institutions and local firms; Estelle was busy “making money” and she was hardly at home; she later realised the need to spend more time with her children, and subsequently decided to quit her paid work.
The transition and adjustment to the home-based role was initially “tough” for her, as Estelle comments:

“...and also, psychologically, because who I used to be (professionally), when I bump into my ex-colleagues and friends, they would ask “What are you doing?” You know, that kind of question about my identity, you know. It triggers me to search again, who am I? Am I, am I decent? So a lot of soul searching and it recurs often”.

Estelle claims her prior life ran “efficiently” with the help of a PA. Although such paid help would be cost-inhibitive for Estelle at home, she continues elements of professional organisation at home through the use of an electronic planner to help organise the many activities within and outside her family unit. Estelle also encourages her children to check her online calendar when they wish to “reserve” her time for specific events (“The children will check my schedule...then they will block out my time”).

Estelle acknowledges that this time management “habit” helps her pull the family together, given that her grown-up children now spend most of their time with their school friends outside, and that she increasingly becomes more engaged with community activities in her neighbourhood. As her children become more independent, Estelle is considering returning to the labour market to regain her sense of professional self.

4.2.7 Case 7: Inez

Inez lives in a three-bedroom public apartment in the west of Singapore, together with her husband, Tony, and their son. Inez has a bachelor’s degree in engineering and has worked for 10 years (primarily as a Research Manager with a global pharmaceutical firm). “Pressure” at her workplace and demanding work commitments were perceived to have impacted negatively on her marriage; this prompted Inez, three years ago, to leave the workforce with great hesitation in order to focus more on her family.
Becoming a full-time, stay-at-home mother was a difficult journey for Inez; she had to initially reassess her new identity without the job status (“...after I leave the office, after this how I should tell people? I am not working anymore? Now stay at home?”). In addition, Inez continually has to deal with lingering thoughts that question her self-worth (“am I still valuable?” and “am I still competitive enough to fight with others for work in the workforce?”).

Inez, however, dutifully performs her home-based mothering role, seeing it as a “calling” and “job” she needs to complete. While Inez has “no regret” in leaving her paid job for her family (which she sees as “rewarding”), she feels her home-based maternal role has gradually become “very tiring” and “very boring”. Inez, therefore, is considering returning to the workforce when her child enters primary school. At the same time, Inez is also contemplating returning to education herself to pick up new skills in counselling; Inez desires to make valuable “contributions” to other people and believes such experience will be rewarding (“It is a journey to find myself...Personally it could be rewarding, and help yourself and your family”).

4.2.8 Case 8: Yvette

Yvette is a stay-at-home mother of two children, and she is married to Jonathan. The family lives in a three-bedroom public apartment in the northern suburb of Singapore. Prior to her stay-at-home maternal role, Yvette worked as a social service professional for seven years with a number of charities. But Yvette reluctantly – due to the high cost of childcare in Singapore – had to interrupt her career to care for her young children at home, initially planning to stay at home only for a relatively short timeframe (“We started off with very little money. That is why we decided I will go back to work after giving birth. We invest minimally 18 months at home”).
Due to the early arrival of her second child, Yvette felt that she needed extra help at home and placed her first child in preschool (for several hours a day). This allowed Yvette to give her undivided attention to her second child whilst her first child was at school during the day. Moreover, in order to keep her house “dust-free” (because her first child suffers from “chronic eczema and allergies”), Yvette hires a part-time maid to clean her house regularly.

While Yvette appears to find meaning in motherhood, she gradually feels uncomfortable because of her move from paid employment (“I am feeling a bit aimless, and then I do not feel like I gave added value in my life, or I could value add to anyone else”). Yvette is particularly annoyed with the negative undertone she feels society casts on stay-at-home mothers (“But they always have this view that staying home means like I can sleep anytime I want and I do not have work to do”).

To restore her sense of value, Yvette recently set up an online business selling her self-made handicrafts; Yvette does not generate much profit from this venture, but earning her own income makes her feel (economically) “productive” once more. Furthermore, ahead of her plan to return to the labour market, Yvette aims to pursue a master’s degree in social work in order to help equip her for a return to full-time paid employment (“Because of the fear of not being relevant, I told my husband maybe I should go and pursue something, like a master’s degree”).

4.2.9 Case 9: Ingrid

Ingrid lives in a five-bedroom HDB apartment in the centre of Singapore with her husband, Randy, and the couple’s baby girl. Ingrid had forged a stable career with an international airlines company and a local bank before transitioning to become a stay-at-home mother following the birth of her child, to focus on caregiving full time (“...early childhood is very important...I feel I am the best person who can take care of my child”).
Based on the advice of early childhood professionals, Ingrid decided to place her child in a “right-brain development” programme to optimally nurture her baby. The weekly infant enrichment class (which Ingrid attends together with her child) is designed to equip (new) mothers with the necessary knowledge to be able to replicate the class activities at home with their babies; Ingrid feels empowered by the lessons (because she feels she often “runs out of things to do” with her baby at home). At home for two years now, Ingrid begins to “miss the freedom” of her working years and wants to “find a life outside the home”, as she says:

“I mean, I am happy as a stay-at-home mom. But I want to find something else to do…I feel like, yes, I am a mother, but I should still have an identity outside of the home. Why I am choosing to be a yoga instructor, it is because, first, of course I like yoga, and second it gives me the flexibility. I can just teach part time, because to me now what is important is still my daughter, right? But I also want an identity”.

A previously avid yoga practitioner, Ingrid is considering becoming a yoga trainer. Recently Ingrid has registered for a place on a yoga teacher training course; she intends to leave her child in the care of her live-in maid whilst attending the weekly training programme. Meanwhile, Ingrid also delegates the majority of the household chores to her domestic helper (“…looking after baby full-time is very tiring so sometimes you really need a breather”). Ingrid hopes her potential yoga trainer profession will generate her own income, maintain her physical well-being (to keep the “glamour look” she used to adorn in her premarital life), and afford time for her baby at home at the same time.

4.2.10 Case 10: Stella

Stella and her husband, Anthony, live with their two children in a three-bedroom HDB apartment in the east of Singapore. While it was a struggle for Stella to leave her paid job of eight years as a social worker (“I love my job”), she believes that it is important for mothers to be around their children during early childhood;
it is something that Stella herself missed when she was growing up ("My mother got divorced...so I don’t have much recollection about living with both of my parents"). Also, motherhood for Stella is a special calling ("...my religion plays a part...somehow I felt this motherhood was a greater calling"). Stella also sees her stay-at-home maternal role as an "investment" on her part, in order to immunise her children from future problems (due to a lack of parental care during their formative years). The transition to home-based parenthood was, according to Stella, "quite terrible" as she could not afford to pay for any commercial care resources to help her perform her domestic work.

Occasionally, Stella gets vexed when people refer to her as a "housewife", a negative term she feels society uses to describe a home-based mother who is not economically productive and "out of touch with the world" ("...I do not like the word "housewife", because I do not think I am a housewife"). Instead, Stella prefers to see herself as someone presently working in "the Ministry of Home Affairs", a term similar to the state’s Ministry in charge of the country’s domestic affairs, her former employer ("...and sometimes, when people ask, I tell people that I work in the Ministry of Home Affairs, my own home affairs [laughs]"). This self-assigned title gives Stella a sense of productivity that aligns more with the social expectations for educated women (like Stella) to be economically productive. The title, furthermore, reminds Stella of her days at the Ministry, where she perceives she held "power" and "authority" in her former profession. Having stayed at home for three years, Stella plans to return to the work she loved, to be a social worker; Stella foresees this intention to materialise when her children start primary school.

4.2.11 Conclusion to this Section

The individual participant stories highlight the women’s varied personal backgrounds and life circumstances (such as academic education histories, family

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62 The Ministry of Home Affairs is a Singapore government’s ministry that works with the domestic communities to promote the country’s safety and security.
situations, and professional career histories). These women generally possess a number of years of paid work experience and have then assumed the stay-at-home mother role. They live in concert with social discourses and gendered cultural expectations (which will be explained in the next sections) about women’s paradoxical roles in society, as both (paid) worker and stay-at-home (unpaid) mother.

Furthermore, the individual participant narratives suggest that the women’s transition from paid work to stay-at-home motherhood represents a major life event. They experience a number of identity-related changes at the personal, relational, and collective levels. Many of the participants go through the process of questioning and disengaging from a central (paid) work identity, while exploring and constructing a new self-definition at home. The next section discusses the ways in which these participants reframe their home-based motherhood as a transitional career. In the midst of adjusting to the new work setting at home, moreover, several participants engage in self-development and commercial projects. Many of the women assimilate the professionally-inspired resources into their performance of their familial roles. These phenomena are linked to the overall research objective, which is to explore the fluid interplay of diverse, but interrelated, sense of selves.

The next section presents the emergent global themes of stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career, commercialisation of family life at home, and professionalisation of motherhood. These common themes, collectively, bring to light the confluence of the socio-political discourses and cultural ideologies in Singapore that influence the construction of good motherhood.

4.3 The Global Themes

The preceding section (4.2 The Individual Cases) presented the 10 stay-at-home mother participants in this study. The section served to describe the participants
at the idiographic, individual level (Fournier, 1988). After each individual story has been interpreted at the idiographic level, a part-to-whole phase began in which comparisons across the distinct 10 participant narratives were made to generate global themes (Fournier, 1988; Kvale, 1983; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Reflecting patterns of commonalities across the participant narratives, these global themes (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1990) help structure an interpretation of the collective dataset.

In presenting the phenomenological accounts of the participants, this thesis aims to preserve the holistic quality that characterises the participants’ descriptions, while at the same time, providing a sense of analytic clarity. To this end, this section will first present the overall structure of the global themes framework that emerged from the interpretation of the interview texts, as guided by the process of interpretative phenomenological analysis (or IPA). Depicted by Figure 4.1, this framework presents the system of thematic relations of the global meanings common to all participants. This overview is intended to provide a frame of reference for better understanding the emergent patterns of relationships as highlighted by the global themes, and the socio-cultural and life context of the participants (Thompson, 1996).

The framework (presented in Figure 4.1) describes how the participants live within the contradicting societal expectations of domesticity63 (as depicted in the left side of the figure) and productivity64 (shown on the right side of the diagram). The dialectical socio-cultural forces of domesticity and productivity – as highlighted earlier in section 1.3 (Historical and Social Context of Singapore) – call women to be productive employees, while at the same time, expect them to perform a more traditional role as a home-based mother (Chan, 2000; Stivens,

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63 Domesticity refers to a motherhood ideology that is defined through stay-at-home and intensive motherhood (Gerson, 2010; Hays, 1996; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999).
64 Productivity is a term widely used in the economic sense, describing the Singapore government’s effort to achieve continued prosperity through the nation’s limited resources (for instance, refer to Sun, 2016). This translates to socio-political expectations for women to be economically productive through participation in the labour market (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). While caring for, and rearing, one’s child at home requires extraordinary talents and time, this domestic labour receives little recognition in society. In a culture that measures worth and achievement primarily in terms of money (Barr & Skrbis, 2008), women’s domestic labour counts less than their contribution to the economy (or their productivity in the labour market) (Crittenden, 2010; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999).
In other words, women are called to fulfil both economic role (through paid work) and caregiving duty at home.

In response to these prevalent societal discourses, the participants seek to balance these dialectical socio-cultural pulls to reclaim their sense of self-reliance (from the domesticity expectation) and their sense of duty as a good mother (from the productivity expectation). The women’s balancing strategies against the competing socio-cultural forces of domesticity and productivity create tensions leading to the conception of an identity that strives to reconcile between self-reliance and home-based maternal duty; this dynamic signifies the identity interplay and navigation process (as positioned in the centre of the figure) that in turn manifests in three global themes (depicted in the lower element of the figure) highlighting the women’s enactments of good motherhood at home.

These three global themes elucidate how the participants frame their stay-at-home mother role as a transitional career (global theme 1, described in section 4.3.1); the ways many of the women incorporate self-development projects during their time spent at home into their family lives to reclaim their sense of autonomy and retain their skillsets for possible future re-employment (global theme 2, as outlined in section 4.3.2); and how the participants cope with role strains at home, by assimilating their previous paid work experiences with their familial work, in a process of professionalisation of the motherhood role (global theme 3, described in section 4.3.3). Collectively, these global themes present an understanding of the interplay of diverse and interlocked identities of the stay-at-home mothers in their construction of good motherhood; this illuminates how diverse identity goals coexist and compete in the everyday experiences of doing motherhood, which moves away from the “traditional” paradigm of conceiving identity as an individuated entity (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 65). The framework, as a whole, demonstrates how confluence of the competing socio-cultural forces shapes the identity construction processes and practices of good motherhood.
Figure 4.1: Socio-Cultural Construction of Good Motherhood

Conflicts & Continuities in Everyday Enactments of Stay-at-Home Motherhood

Global Theme 1
*Stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career*
- Early childhood influence on motherhood
- Stay-at-home motherhood as a duty
- Negotiation in stay-at-home motherhood
- Juggling lifestyle in motherhood

Global Theme 2
*Commercialisation of family life at home*
- Monetisation of maternity at home
- Self-development projects in motherhood
- Delegation of familial caregiving at home

Global Theme 3
*Professionalisation of motherhood*
- Centrality of professional identity
- Use of occupational titles at home
- Use of occupational techniques at home
- Use of occupational terminologies at home
4.3.1 Global Theme 1: Stay-at-Home Motherhood as a Transitional Career

This first global theme highlights how the majority of the participants transition from paid work to their home-based childrearing roles with a sense of both maternal duty and ambivalence at the same time. In adopting their stay-at-home mother role, many participants are primarily guided by their own childhood experiences (section 4.3.1.1: Early Childhood Influence on Motherhood). All of the participants left their careers to become a home-based parent, believing that such a role is their duty (section 4.3.1.2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood as a Duty). However, a number of the women construct their stay-at-home motherhood role as a time-bound (and therefore, temporary) assignment, seeking to balance their sense of duty as a mother with a focus on their longer-term career goals and re-entry into paid work at a later point (section 4.3.1.3: Negotiation in Stay-at-Home Motherhood). In their enactment of their home-based motherhood identity, several participants struggle to fit in everything that needs to be done within the constraints of time; some of the women sustain the tension between caring for their families and their own welfare by juggling maternal and non-maternal work at home (section 4.3.1.4: Juggling Lifestyle in Motherhood).

4.3.1.1 Early Childhood Influence on Motherhood. For all of the participants, not surprisingly, the birth of their child(ren) represents a time of major change in their life. Most of the participants experience ambivalence about their decision to leave behind their professional careers in order to become a stay-at-home mother. A number of the women reported that the decision to assume a more home-based role was influenced primarily by reflecting on their own early childhood experiences and the role played by their own mother. Stella, for instance, recalls how her experiences with her own mother (alongside other significant family members) during her formative years guided her decision to be a good home-based parent; as Stella explains:

“When my number one child came along, I was still pretty much undecided whether I should stop working fully or I should entrust the care of my son to somebody. But having worked in places whereby children came from...”
dysfunctional families or we see how young people offended and do things that are wrong because of the lack of care from their family, that get me worried a bit. So that was, I would say, one factor that I want to spend as much time as I could with my children, my own children... because I myself, my family, I was brought up by my grandparents, grandmother. My mom got divorced with her husband, my father, so I don’t have much recollection about my own parents. Yeah, so I guess that is something that I want to tell my kids, you know. I want to have time spent with my children, instead of them not knowing or not having the time with their parents, when both parents are working, which I think a lot of parents, a lot Singaporeans are like that”.

Here, Stella realises that her decision to leave full-time, paid employment and to become a home-based mother goes against the grain of Singaporean society, where both parents generally are expected to engage in paid work outside the home - with dual income households quite common in Singapore. It was a “difficult” decision for Stella to give up her paid job because her family needed the extra income. Given the strength of this need, Stella had earlier considered delegating her caregiving work to someone she could trust in order to maintain her paid employment outside the home; but in the end, Stella was not able to find a suitable person. In addition, upon the birth of her child, Stella strongly felt that it was her job (as a mother) to care for her child personally; Stella saw her maternal role as a sacred work that only a mother should perform (Hays, 1996).

As Stella highlights, she did not live with her (divorced) parents during her childhood; she was, instead, looked after by her grandparents. Stella reflects on yearning for the presence of her biological mother during her childhood. Furthermore, Stella’s previous work experiences in dealing with young adults with behavioural problems (who she feels did not have complete parental supervision when they were growing up) informs her belief of the importance of a mother’s presence during a child’s formative years in order to insulate the child from future problems. These relational experiences between Stella and her significant others (both at work, and through her early family experiences) guide Stella’s belief that good motherhood calls for constant physical presence of a mother around the life of her young child (Hays, 1996). Similarly, Adele’s
childhood experiences also inform her motherhood approach, with Adele also reflecting on the absence of her mother during her childhood:

“My parents had me very young...they were very poor to begin with and my mum definitely could not stay home to take care of me because she needed all the money she could get. So my grandmother took care of me...my grandmother was a typical housewife...she took good care of the house, took good care of the kids, she fed us well, and I had a very happy childhood. So growing up there was a bit of resentment towards my mother because I wanted to be brought up by my mum. I wanted to spend more time with her. However, that plus the point that my grandmother was very good, brought me up well, both contribute to the decision for me to stay home with my two kids, because I wanted to give them time with their mother. And I wanted to give them a warm home to grow up in. So that is how I came to this decision”.

Because both her parents had to work outside the home, Adele was cared for by her grandmother during the day. Despite being well taken care of by her grandparent, however, Adele felt the “resentment” (in her growing up years) towards her mother for not “being there” with her. It is the absence of Adele’s mother during her childhood that fuelled her decision to be a stay-at-home mother. Notably, Adele does not include her father in this criticism; like Stella, Adele assumed that there were aspects of childrearing that only mothers could suitably perform for their young children (Hays, 1996).

Seeing her grandmother (who, to Adele, exemplifies “a typical housewife”, who performed familial roles adeptly at home) as a role model of a good caregiver, Adele wants to emulate this positive example as she entered first-time motherhood. Adele feels that her physical presence at home helps to create a “warm home”. Together, the positive and negative role models (grandmother and own mother) helps Adele to forge her own mother identity that she thinks is ideal.

In a similar manner to Stella and Adele, Nikki’s decision to become a stay-at-home parent is also guided by her early-life experiences:
“...because my relationship with my mother was quite strained, that is a reason why I did not look at motherhood as something that I wanted to touch on until later...And I think, there is also something in me that says that I wanted to be a better mother than my own mother. Perhaps that is a challenge, I am not sure. I know deep down inside I felt that. I felt that I now have the confidence to be a better mother than my own mother. So we want a child. So all these factors did shape me into wanting to be a mother”.

Given the lack of time spent between Nikki and her mother during childhood, Nikki was earlier unsure whether she was ready to become a mother because of her negative childhood experiences. Nikki’s disappointment towards her own mother appears to fuel Nikki’s desire to become a “better mother” than that enacted by her mother; and becoming a stay-at-home parent is part of Nikki’s construction of a good mother identity. Referring to “we” in her plan to have a child, Nikki’s decision to become a mother was mutually constructed with her husband.

In a similar vein as Stella, Adele, and Nikki, Sonia’s adoption of her home-based mother role is strongly influenced by her childhood years:

“Okay, my approach to motherhood is somehow affected much by my aunt. My mum and dad needed to work outside of our home for the whole day, from morning to evening, when I was young. I spent a lot of time at my cousin’s place, where my cousin has her mother, who is my aunt. She is a full-time housewife. And from spending much time in their family, somehow, I saw a different motherhood approach...a mother’s role different than my own mother. I saw how things were done differently there. It gave me another perspective and experience of another kind of motherhood approach. She influenced me a lot through her good cooking skill. She cooked a lot of good stuffs for her family. She sews my cousin's clothes and dress...And as I grew up, I realised early in my teenage years that I wish to become a full-time mum. So she affected me, and influenced me quite a lot in terms of parenting. As the passion and longing is already in me, I also read a lot of parenting books now”.

Sonia gained an early impression about the role of a stay-at-home motherhood during her formative years. She draws from the complex map of her childhood recollections and, more recently, popular parenting books, an image of what a
good mother should be like (hands on, child-centred, spending lots of quality time with her own children).

The conversations with these participants highlight that the birth of a child often initiates a major transition in their lives. It is a moment of change in these women’s role and identity, as they have to consider whether to move from paid work to a more home-centred, unpaid maternal role. These participants construct their first-time motherhood identity by weaving together memories of their relationships with their significant others in their childhood as reference points.

In conceiving a good mother identity, Stella, Adele, Nikki, and Sonia look to their own parents and important others as positive and negative identity models, drawing lessons as the participants grew in age and exploring their “possible selves” (Banister & Hogg, 2006, p. 343). These participants’ positive recollections inspire them to adopt stay-at-home motherhood (Epp & Price, 2008). Meanwhile, the women’s negative emotions (about their own mothers) “functions as an incentive” for the participants to reject a maternal practice that they perceive to be similar to their own mothers, in favour of the contrary (home-based) mothering ideal (Hogg & Banister, 2001, p. 73; Karanika & Hogg, 2010).

Children are indeed active observers, not passive absorbers of the information their social environment transmits (Gerson, 2010). The sense of intergenerational family experiences helping to co-construct the participants’ sense of self as a mother (Epp & Price, 2008) parallels a study of new fatherhood (Bettany, Kerrane & Hogg, 2014). Within this fatherhood study, new fathers heavily reflected on the roles played by their own fathers when they were children as a means through which their own fatherhood performances were shaped (Bettany, Kerrane & Hogg, 2014).

In addition to drawing upon their childhood memories, the participants are informed by socio-cultural expectations as they enter first-time motherhood (Voice Group, 2010b). The next section will discuss how gender role ideologies
of motherhood permeate in society, shaping the participants’ understandings about what good mothering means.

4.3.1.2 Stay-at-Home Motherhood as a Duty. The participants’ enactment of a good mother identity is mutually constructed through cultural ideals, social expectation, and interactions with the women’s significant others. Many of the participants’ understandings of good motherhood do not align with the rigid reality of the women’s paid employment situation. In view of this, these participants felt the need to reconcile their stay-at-home motherhood choice with their need of being self-reliant (financially) through paid work, as Adele describes:

“When I first had my first child, the original plan was to go back to work after the maternity leave. So at that point, it was a three month maternity leave. We were supposed to get a babysitter, but it did not work out so we decided one of us would stay home, so it was quite obvious it would be me instead of my husband. So I stayed back with her...It was obvious yet difficult, because I liked my job very much. I was working at a multinational company, and I was doing public relations for them. It was my dream job, and I waited, and waited for years and years for it. But also, we decided that having a mum figure at home would be more beneficial for younger babies”.

Because Adele and her husband were not able to find a reliable nanny to look after their new-born baby, the couple decided that Adele would need to become a home-based parent. Referring to “we” in the decision-making process, Adele hints that her transition was mutually constructed with her husband. The couple also jointly reached the conclusion that a “mum figure at home would be more beneficial for younger babies”. Seeing Adele (rather than her husband) as the “obvious” choice to stay at home reflects a patriarchal conception of women’s role as a “natural” caregiver within their family (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b, p. 3; Stivens, 2007). It also reflects decisions around infant feeding (“...it is because of breastfeeding, my husband cannot do that [laugh]”) and the view that there exist aspects of childrearing that only women can perform, in line with the intensive motherhood discourse (Hays, 1996).
During Adele’s early experiences of stay-at-home motherhood, at one point she returned to the workforce (to support her family’s finances, when her husband was in-between jobs). The work culture in Adele’s new workplace, however, made it problematic for her to be *good worker* and *good mother* at the same time, as Adele comments:

“At work, it was not easy, because not everyone can understand. People always say if you don’t have children you don’t understand; it is very true! My boss did not have any children. She has two dogs and it was very difficult to say, ‘Can I have a day off to do this for my child, to do that for my child?’ Of course, I tried not to interfere too much with my work. But everybody was given six days of childcare leave, and they could take for whatever they want in a year, and it shouldn’t be questioned. Of course, I didn’t take it when it was the busiest time. I made sure the project that I was handling was taken care of. But she never made me feel good about leaving because of my family”.

While Adele was legitimately entitled to childcare leave, her work environment was not family-friendly and this impacted her. Because of such a difficult work culture, Adele often had “frictions” with her boss and peers (who seemingly did not share Adele’s family-friendly work ethos). Adele eventually left the company unhappily less than a year into her job (when her husband subsequently found a job and re-entered the paid workforce). Like Adele, when Sonia became a mother she had to make a difficult trade-off between home-based motherhood and paid work:

“Okay, this is what my husband wrote when we were contemplating whether I should quit working. When he saw me really got stressed out and crying, I did not know what to do, whether I should quit my job, then he said, ‘Okay, let us sit down. Let us write down what is in your mind. Let us see the pros and cons. We can decide from here’. From this writing, which I still keep until now, it has become my vision, my motherhood vision for the kids. But I find, in my daily life, I tend to forget about this vision because there are so many mundane activities like house cleaning, chores. Somehow the chores make me forget about my higher calling in motherhood. So there were times, when my husband says, ‘Remember, you are not a maid, you are a mother’ [laugh]. Sometimes in our daily life, we concentrate more in cleaning and cooking. It is really basically more like a maid than a mother. So maybe I will share this vision with you why I chose to be a full-time mother [looking at the paper she and her husband wrote]”.
Sonia’s husband – just like Adele’s - plays a strong role in helping guide Sonia’s decision to become a home-based parent. Sonia’s “vision of motherhood” was co-constructed with her husband; yet the involvement of Sonia’s husband in parenting appears missing in the vision. This is possibly due to the couple’s view that childrearing was primarily a mother’s job (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b). Sonia further describes her conception of good motherhood:

“As I shared earlier, I read in the books that the first six years are very important in children’s life...so I need to quit the job. And I want to create a sense of security and confidence in the children. In my own childhood experience, when I had no parents living close to me, somehow it caused me to lack a sense of security and confidence...Do you spend enough time with them? Do you teach them good stuff at the good time? And since a lot of times they said that zero to six years is the most important stage of life, do you really use it well to build the foundation, to teach the kids how to see the world?”

While her childhood experiences also play a vital role in Sonia’s decision to become a stay-at-home mother, it is from contemporary parenting resources (such as books) that Sonia comes to learn that “the first six years are very important in children’s life”. Like Adele and Sonia, Nikki also shares the same view about the importance of stay-at-home motherhood in the early years of a child’s life:

“I know that it is prime-time during this period from zero to three years old, to teach a child. So I wouldn’t want to miss this golden period. So I got myself very busy because I have an agenda in my head. I know I have to guide my son. I have to spend time with my girl. And I know the way to stimulate my girl. So there are a lot of things to do... I plan the meals. I plan a lot of things that is pertaining to the family”.

Perceiving the period “zero to three” as a “prime time” and a “golden period” in a child’s life, Nikki feels duty-bound to be present for her children physically and psychologically at home, spending time with them during this precious, yet fleeting window of her children’s early development.
The narratives of Adele, Nikki, and Sonia in this section reflect certain mothering ideals, co-constructed through the women’s childhood experiences, social expectations, the popular media (such as parenting books), and goals of the women’s significant others (such as their male partners). The confluence of these factors leads the participants to give up their professional jobs in order to become a stay-at-home mother. These participants perceive that stay-at-home motherhood positively influences a child’s development because mother-child interactions are seen as particularly critical during the child’s formative years. The women view that their involvement with the children’s early skills acquisition, such as providing “stimulation” (as in the case of Nikki), “teaching good stuff” (as in the case of Sonia), and choosing the right preschool (as in the case of many of the participants), will have positive effects on the children’s longer term development (Bornstein & Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; Bruner, 1975; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Wall, 2010).65

Stay-at-home motherhood, indeed, is often characterised as a “traditional” and good mothering practice (Arendell, 2000; Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 440); such a practice is defined through intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996, p. 8), which places primacy on a mother’s role to “recognise and conscientiously respond to all the child’s needs and desires, and to every stage of the child’s emotional and intellectual development”.

Essentially, the intensive motherhood ideology is founded on the assumptions that child care is primarily the duty of the mother and the maternal job exists “outside of market valuation; children are sacred, innocent, and pure, their price immeasurable, and decisions regarding their rearing completely distinct from questions of efficiency or financial profitability” (Hays, 1996, p. 54). The participants’ construction of good motherhood through their performance of home-centred maternal roles, therefore, presupposes the mother to constantly be present at home and forgo any income-generating engagements that may distract

65 This intensive mothering ideal, however, has more recently been challenged by the Singapore government’s push to help mothers better balance work and family life through, for example, the introduction of Shared Parental Leave, where a father is allowed to use a portion of a mother’s maternity leave entitlement (for example, see Leong, 2016).
the mother from childrearing activities (Hays, 1996; Russo, 1976). Seeing a mother as the “natural” caregiver to her child represents a patriarchal belief of motherhood (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b, p. 3). This (patriarchal) approach of mothering is increasingly at odds with a trend that sees more paternal involvement with childcare, especially in western societies (see for instance, Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2014; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2015; Miller, 2011).

Home-based caregiving in turn is construed as the antithesis of professional employment outside the home. The women’s decisions about stay-at-home motherhood and paid work are, thus, dialectically constructed (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Johnston & Swanson, 2007). The next section will present how a number of the participants negotiate their home-based motherhood and reframe it as a positive choice to regain a sense of control in their life at home.

**4.3.1.3 Negotiation in Stay-at-Home Motherhood.** While most of the participants feel a sense of duty towards enacting stay-at-home motherhood (as the earlier section has discussed), the majority of the women in this study view this familial role as only a temporary assignment to help construct their sense of self as a good mother (in their children’s early years). Despite their varied backgrounds and personal circumstances, participants such as Sonia, Yvette, Inez, and Stella all frame their home-based maternal role as a positive and temporal period of their lives. In negotiating their familial duties at home, the women describe their maternal role using words such as an “investment”, a “calling”, and a “job”.

Sonia decided to let go of her nursing career because she views motherhood as her “top priority” but, somewhat contradictorily, she is only prepared to perform her home-based maternal role for a limited period of six years:

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66 Such a mothering ideology is also referred to as “full-time” motherhood by the participants (see also Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 442).
“...I really want to invest in these six years. So I agree to invest in the six years, and I need to quit the job...And for nursing work, I love the job. I enjoyed it very much. But it is not really hard for me to let go at that time, because I think I am really convinced that the kids are my top priority. As for job wise, I know that in a few years time, when the kids are more independent, I can go back to the hospital, which I am actually thinking right now. But I do not know when will be the right moment to return. It is in the back of my mind”.

Sonia regards her departure from her profession, and subsequently, her six-year caregiving role at home, as a form of “investment” in her children’s development. At the same time, Sonia has already thought about returning to nursing once her children become “more independent” (deemed by Sonia to be around the time when her children enter primary one67). Similarly, Yvette perceives her decision to temporarily assume the role of stay-at-home mother as an “investment” in the early years of her children. Yvette (like Sonia) also plans to “invest” for a fixed period of time, in Yvette’s case 18 months, as she explains:

“So our agreement was actually for me to stay home until Sean (son) is 18 months. But right now, the decision has changed because we found out that Sean is highly allergic to dairy and egg, which can be life threatening. Yeah, so now our decision is to stay home fully, I mean not fully, more like there is no ending point, on long term now. That is why we decided I will not go back to work for now. We invest minimally for 18 months”.

Describing her transition from the workplace to the home-centred maternal role as “our agreement” and “our decision”, Yvette implies that her move was the result of a joint decision-making process involving her husband. With the unexpected illness (allergy) of her son, Yvette feels, however, the need to extend her stay-home duration to help her son’s condition stabilise before she can return to the paid workforce. Like Sonia and Yvette, Stella, too, sees her decision to be a stay-at-home mother as an “intangible investment”:

“I guess my religion plays a part because I go to church. So somehow I felt this motherhood was a greater calling, this was like a ministry for me

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67 Under the Compulsory Education Act, Singapore citizens who reside in Singapore are required to attend national primary school regularly, starting from the age of six (equivalent to primary one level) (2015 Primary One Registration, 2015).
whereby God has called me to serve his children who are my children who he has blessed me with...stay-at-home mother does a lot of important things which actually comes with the rewards. The time and the thing that we invest in something that cannot be seen now. It is not tangible. It is probably tangible many years later when we see how our children grow up”.

The use of the word “investment” by the participants portrays the dual nature of their decision, as both sacrificial and rewarding; it casts their stay-at-home motherhood in a positive and negative light at the same time. It is a sacrifice because once these mothers are out of the labour market for some time they feel that they may not be able to secure the same (let alone better) professional position when they return to the workforce, as Tiffany comments:

“So I would eventually go back to work. But of course, my expectation would have to be realistic, right, after a few years forgone, the opportunity cost, and loss is quite high, right? And I would have to start all over again. So I must be mentally prepared that I have to start all over again. But I think that is fine, that is life. You cannot have the best of both worlds (of motherhood and professional career)”.

While several participants reflect that their motherhood role is enjoyable and immediately gratifying, Tiffany sees her maternal labour as a sacrificial effort. In the future, however, Tiffany hopes that her present efforts in nurturing her children will reap a positive return. The use of the term “investment” by some participants seems to neutralise the inconvenience of motherhood (with the participants working to make sense of – and justify – their stay-at-home role).

Meanwhile, as a believer in God, Stella sees her maternal role as a sacred vocation, positioning her parenting task at home as a “greater calling” (from God) to minister to the needs of her children full-time. This is similar to how Yvette and Inez (both of whom are Christian) perceive their familial role through the lens of their religious beliefs. These women believe that God has blessed them with children; they see it is necessary to respond to the divine calling through their familial role at home, as Yvette further clarifies:
“A lot of moms have come to ask me why I chose to stay at home, and asked me if I ever get bored [laugh]. Usually, I tell them, if she is a Christian, I will just say, I will share with them my conviction, when God has given and blessed us with children, they are our first, most important disciples of Christ. I mean, that is my first calling in ministry now, to be a servant of my children”.

In the same vein, Inez interprets her maternal duty at home through her religious orientation – viewing her role as a “calling”. When asked how she would share her experiences with other women who are also considering adopting the role of stay-at-home mother, Inez explains:

“So given my experience, I will tell them that stay-at-home motherhood will be very tough, it will be very boring, it can be very stressful, but if you can overcome those things, I think the reward is good. So you should think carefully and if you can, try to explore moving towards that. But if you are not given the opportunity to choose, don’t feel bad, because each of us has our own calling, our own job to complete”.

For Inez, the home-based maternal role could mean a situation where a woman has no other choice but to carry on with (what she calls) the “tough”, “boring”, and “stressful” motherhood work. In seeing their home-based motherhood as a “calling”, these (Christian) women reinterpret their maternal role through the lens of their doctrinal belief systems (Stevens, 1999), engaging in a process of sacralising their (secular) familial role (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; O’Guinn & Belk, 1989) to repel the sense of “boredom” and “stress” associated with their stay-at-home motherhood. A “calling” in Christianity is more than a career; it is understood as the empowering summons of God for the Christians to participate in God’s grand plan (Stevens, 1999). In framing their stay-at-home motherhood as a “calling”, these participants feel duty-bound to complete their maternal mission, and in the process, see their domestic role as drudgery.

In addition, as these participants make the transition towards home-based motherhood, they feel their sense of control is diminished. This is a time of great uncertainty (especially in the case of encountering unexpected events, such as Yvette’s discovery of her child’s acute allergy), as established future plans of
returning to work and other priorities may be suspended; the thoughtful and
deliberate workstyles once adopted by the women in their former careers clash
with the ambiguous and uncontrollable situations motherhood poses. In such
circumstances, several of the participants use their religious capital not only to
strive to creatively reenchant the mundane realities of their familial role, but also
to seek to reconcile the inevitability of their maternal inconveniency with a sense
of control.

In addition to seeing their domestic role as an “investment” and a “calling”,
several participants infer that the transitory phase of their stay-at-home mother
role is very much a “job” (the term that Inez actually uses). A “job” is defined as
a “building block of careers” (Wilton, 2013, p. 305); it is an intermediating
profession within one’s career lifespan (Louis, 1982). The participants conceive
the home-based childrearing responsibilities as a career choice that they commit
to for a season of time, and in the context of their lifetime career perspectives.

To reconcile the dialectical forces of stay-at-home motherhood and paid work,
these participants cope by finding agency in a space between reality and fantasy,
blurred and made ambiguous through the use of such negotiating terms as
“investment”, “calling”, and “job” to approach their home-based motherhood
with a sense of autonomy (James, Handelman & Taylor, 2011). This helps the
women reframe the role change as a positive choice, dealing with the
inconveniency of motherhood by restoring their sense of self-reliance (Pavia &
Mason, 2004).

As the subsequent global themes will later present, these participants intertwine
their home-based mothering duty with a world of work, and frame the family role
as a career “building block” (Wilton, 2013, p. 305) that can be reconnected to
their next professional endeavours. While performing motherhood at home, these
women look forward to reclaiming their sense of status and importance (through
paid work) by seeking to stay relevant to the world of work, in preparation for
their return to the workforce. This is portrayed in how these participants engage
in both the complex juggling of familial responsibilities and self-development projects, as the next section highlights.

4.3.1.4 Juggling Lifestyle in Motherhood. Several participants, such as Adele, Nikki, Sonia, and Nova report that they struggled to face the realities of motherhood, a new role and identity that is starkly different from their former professional lives. They weave their home-based role with numerous entrepreneurial projects for both pecuniary gain and skill retention in light of their future career plans (and their eventual aim of returning to paid employment). For example, Adele comments how she experiences her life at home as she balances motherhood and commercial activities:

“I didn’t really know what to do cause it’s a new situation for everybody. A new-born baby!...With a baby, she does not follow schedules like my office, so it was a new situation for me to be home, and to have a baby, and to take care of the home, and to change my work style because I also took on freelance writing jobs. So that meant that I have to squeeze in my writing, my work in between all the other things. The first year was very, very tough. After that, it got easier, and Priscilla (daughter) went to school. When she went to school, from 10 o’clock to three o’clock, during that time I could go out and do my work”.

In addition to dealing with the “new situation” of motherhood, Adele also took on small income-generating work, such as freelance writing. She describes such paid work as keeping her on her toes. Meanwhile, similar to Adele’s domestic life, Nova blends caregiving and housework with paid projects in her daily routine:

“I wake up in the morning to prepare them for breakfast and school. Both of them go to schools at slightly different timings. So I prepare for the first one to go to school first, and then bring him down to the school bus. Next, prepare for the second one at home, and then bring him to the school. In between, while they are in school, I clean up the house, cook for lunch, do grocery, pick up the kids from schools, help them with their lunch, naptime, play with them, bring them to tuition centre, review the study with them, and after that, help them to sleep at night... And at a time, I was trying to get a part-time job as mechanical engineer, and found one. I tried it, doing two or three projects...I locked myself inside the room, and do all the designing. I didn’t interact with the children, because the requirement was rather
urgent. It took a long period to complete. I discussed with my husband, if this is the way I work, I might as well I go back to full-time job [laugh]”.

A mechanical engineer, Nova secured flexible, project-based paid work that she could undertake from home alongside taking care of her children. Such work arrangements did, however, interfere with her maternal duties, and later had to be stopped so that Nova could concentrate solely on her motherhood role. As Nova indicates, the process of getting part-time work and, later, stopping such work was negotiated in consultation with her husband.

Unlike Adele and Nova who decided to integrate income-generating projects into their maternal duties, Nikki and Sonia feel that they are fully occupied with their parenthood responsibilities (and as such, do not pursue additional paid work). For Nikki, it is her two “difficult” children who drain her energies that make such paid work almost impossible for her to consider:

“My son is a special need child. He was diagnosed as having Asperger’s syndrome at the age two and a half...so I become his therapist as well. So that means I am really very, very busy. I am 24/7 busy. And it does not help that my girl is a difficult child. I am breastfeeding her, and she wakes up so many times in the night. So I really lack of sleep. I have not been sleeping through the night for two years now. I am very, very sleep-deprived. Waking up to breastfeed her, and even, if she did not demand for milk in the middle of the night, she would still wake up...I don’t really have ‘me’ time. I mean it is really a battle between sleeping and ‘me’ time. At night when the kids are asleep, that is really a good quiet ‘me’ time for me to catch up on reading. But sometimes, I catch up on housework instead. And when they are asleep, if I were to do my own things, this also means that I would be one or two hours short of sleep. So it is always a battle”.

Nikki feels that she needs to be hands-on given her son’s illness and her daughter’s demanding character, leading Nikki with the sense that she needs to be alert around the clock to respond to the needs of her children. Having been “sleep deprived” for the last two years, Nikki feels that she is weary. With so many things to do in so little time, Nikki feels that it is a constant “battle” at home in managing her many conflicting priorities. Nikki finds her maternal role extremely exhausting as she is consumed largely by her relational identity goals (as a mother
to two “difficult” children), at the expense of her own personal needs (of “me
time”).

Sonia’s life at home also appears as frantic as Nikki’s. Sonia, like Nikki, is
equally as involved in devoting her time between her two children and the
housework from morning to evening, as Sonia discusses:

“In the morning, I usually do the chores that I cannot do when the kids are
around, like mopping the floor...Then I prepare breakfast for my husband
and for the kids. After that, I send Andrew (son) down stairs where he
usually takes the school bus to his school... After that, when I come back to
the house, I will continue with the chores, usually cooking for lunch and the
dinner. After my second child wakes up, I prepare her for breakfast, and
entertain her. Sometimes, we go to the park for some morning outdoor
play... I usually let her take her morning nap. But sometimes, I will hold
her until her brother comes back home from school, so they can nap
together. So when they nap, I have more time to continue with my
household chores. Sometimes, I have my ‘me’ time usually during their nap
hours. Usually what I do is have my coffee, my daily coffee, while browsing
the internet, and check Facebook, and have some book readings. Then
when they wake up, I am ready to play. During their nap time, I normally
catch up with my ironing... After that, it is dinner time, play time in the
evening, and put them to sleep”.

Sonia’s schedule at home revolves around her two children and housework with
occasional “me time” in between the seemingly never-ending cycle of her
maternal routine. Similar to Nikki, Sonia constantly wrestles with reconciling
meeting her own personal needs and caring for her children. All of these
participants have to juggle the countless tasks and conflicting priorities within the
constraints of their time at home.

In consumer research, the juggling lifestyle is not a new phenomenon, especially
within the context of working women. As women’s labour participation rate has
steadily increased over the past decades, they must find ways to “cobble together
a compromise” (Thompson, 1996, p. 388) between competing cultural ideals of
traditional motherhood and the demands of professional, paid work (Hochschild
While the stresses and strains that women experience when balancing their roles as working mothers have become the subject of numerous studies (for instance, refer to Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Liu, Bowers & Conn, 2005; Christopher, 2012; Thompson, 1996), the challenges of the professional career women who have made the decision to give up their paid work to prioritise their familial roles remain under reported (Rubin & Wooten, 2007). These women, devoting themselves to stay-at-home motherhood, continue to sustain a juggling lifestyle which contrasts with the working mothers depicted in Thompson’s (1996) study. The participants feel the need to reconcile their (more traditional) caregiving role at home with the call for every Singaporean resident, both men and women, to be economically productive (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999).

This section has highlighted that a juggling lifestyle is common across working and stay-at-home mothers, as these participants seek to balance their own well-being with their children’s welfare in the context of the dialectical socio-political forces within the Singaporean society.

The first global theme has discussed how the participants have to decide whether to make mothering their sole role upon the birth of their child(ren) or work for pay while mothering (Dillaway & Paré, 2008). The rigid reality of the labour market (where part-time work is not widely available in Singapore, as many participants infer) and the workplace culture (which is not family-friendly, as Adele highlights) compels the women to have to choose between motherhood and a (paid) career (see for example, Lee, 2015; Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). Women’s decisions about home-based motherhood and paid work are typically also dichotomised along with their physical locations – either they are at home or at work, not both (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Johnston & Swanson, 2007). The rigid binary in women’s roles and the dichotomy of their physical locations in society portray certain definitions of home that manifests in how their family members perform activities within the home space (Dillaway & Paré, 2008), which will further be discussed in the second global theme.
Similar to Garey’s (1995) study of mothers who occupy the position of night-shift nurses by night, and stay-at-home mothers by day, some participants seek to challenge the home-work boundary by making themselves visibly available at home to perform symbolically-invested familial activities (such as preparing meals and playing outdoors with their children); all the while, working on their self-development and commercial initiatives. Many participants position themselves in the culturally appropriate place (at home) as part of their strategy in constructing the good mother identity (Garey, 1995).

While stay-at-home mothers are typically depicted as mothers who focus mainly on their childrearing duties, and who are ultimately fulfilled by performing the familial role of the selfless caregiver (Hays, 1996; Russo, 1976; Woollett & Marshall, 2000), these participants conceive their version of good motherhood by deconstructing the good motherhood ideal. For example, a number of participants impose a set duration of time in which they will stay at home. Several participants weave commercial projects into their enactment of stay-at-home motherhood. Many participants, in addition, also outsource their caregiving work to childcare institutions in order to carve out personal time at home. These women are not prepared to completely abandon their sense of being a productive citizen (through professional, paid work) when transitioning towards stay-at-home motherhood (Gerson, 2010).

In the process, these participants are faced with the dilemma between their own need for self-actualisation (through performing paid work) and caring for their family members, manifesting in how they juggle the familial and non-familial work at home. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the second global theme, which will further highlight how a number of participants pursue their self-development and pecuniary-oriented projects while assuming their stay-at-home mother role, in a process of the commercialisation of family life.
4.3.2 Global Theme 2: Commercialisation of Family Life at Home

When the participants transition to stay-at-home motherhood, they reflect on having to adjust from being an economically productive individual to a recipient of some form of allowance from their breadwinning spouse. To reconcile the dialectical forces between domesticity and self-reliance, several participants engage in processes that blend their caregiving activities at home with their personal pursuits for autonomy and financial gain to restore, in some way, their (perceived) diminishing status as an income earner (section 4.3.2.1: Monetisation of Maternity at Home). Viewing home-based motherhood as an intermediating vocation, many of the participants, moreover, engage in self-improvement projects to recover their sense of autonomy to help them prepare for possible career continuation (section 4.3.2.2: Self-Development Projects in Motherhood). In juggling their childrearing with the self-development work at home, these participants access the marketplace to procure care resources located outside of their home to help them enact their good mother identity (section 4.3.2.3: Delegation of Familial Caregiving at Home). The system of these thematic relations is portrayed in Figure 4.2.

4.3.2.1 Monetisation of Maternity at Home. The majority of the participants feel duty bound to perform their stay-at-home motherhood role; at the same time though, they are not fully prepared to dismiss completely their sense of contribution to their family’s financial well-being and security. These women face a predicament in putting their professional (paid) career on hold, feeling that they are somewhat “cut off” from their source of “power” (obtained through their personal income and contributions to the family income). Adele describes this dilemmatic experience:
Figure 4.2: Dilemmatic Tensions and Resolution between Domesticity and Self-Reliance

Conflicts & Continuities in Everyday Enactments of Stay-at-Home Motherhood

Global Theme 1
Stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career
   a. Early childhood influence on motherhood
   b. Stay-at-home motherhood as a duty
   c. Negotiation in stay-at-home motherhood
   d. Juggling lifestyle in motherhood

Global Theme 2
Commercialisation of family life at home
   a. Monetisation of maternity at home
   b. Self-development projects in motherhood
   c. Delegation of familial caregiving at home

Global Theme 3
Professionalisation of motherhood
   a. Centrality of professional identity
   b. Use of occupational titles at home
   c. Use of occupational techniques at home
   d. Use of occupational terminologies at home
“In Singapore, once you are married, and once you have kids, your finances are pretty much wiped out. You buy a house, you renovate, no more savings! So the only way to get the savings for me then is to work. And once that was cut off, I have no savings. And I am not the kind who asks for money from my husband. However, we worked it out, because, every month he puts a little bit into the joint account. So I never have to ask, and he never has to give. So I will just take from our account. And from there, I pay the bills, and if I need to buy anything, it is from there”.

As a stay-at-home mother, Adele feels financially vulnerable since she now has to rely on her husband for regular monetary sustenance to run the household as well as to support her own needs. Instead of regularly asking her husband for an allowance, Adele and her husband work out a fund-transfer arrangement through their joint bank account. Adele’s sense of “insecurity” at home is also apparent in Sonia’s reflection:

“Motherhood is also about how we support our husband when we are a mother. Do we nag on them, do we scream? As a mother, somehow, your insecurity will come back when you stay at home most of the time. And you know your husband is outside and sees many more attractive women who dress up, prettier, have make up on. Then the insecurity can set in again. And when you do not have your own income, you somehow feel like there is no power left. As a mother at home, we need to struggle how to not allow this insecurity to set in to make women grumbling [laugh]”.

Without her own income, Sonia feels a sense of powerlessness due to her reliance on an allowance provided by her husband. In addition, Sonia has no choice but to trust that her husband would be faithful to their marriage as he potentially meets with women who are “more attractive” than herself in visual appearance term (at his workplace). Thinking that her role includes providing (emotional) support to her husband, Sonia appears to define husband-wife roles through a gendered discourse, where the husband is seen as a breadwinner and the wife is regarded as the family’s caregiver (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b). Adele’s dilemmatic experience at home and Sonia’s sense of helplessness is also echoed in Nikki’s experiences:

“My personal expenditure has to be more prudent because I am no longer working. Of course, before I became a mother, I was married for seven
years without kids, and I was working. I used to spend my own money and it feels good. Though now my husband gives me allowance every month, it is not the same. Perhaps you can say it is pride, but it’s just not the same. However, I weigh on the consequences of me wanting to achieve self-actualization by working, I just cannot let go of my children... And I know that I can give them the best as a mother. I can give them the best childhood”.

“It feels good” to be able to earn her own income, Nikki says. But as Nikki decided to choose full-time caregiving over her professional career, she perceives her sense of “pride” was eroded because she has now become a financially dependent individual. This sense of compromised self-worth is also shared by Inez and Yvette.

Inez was worried about her financial stability when she resigned from the pharmaceutical firm where she worked for six years. Her female manager advised Inez against becoming a stay-at-home mother, saying to her (in Inez’s words): “…in Singapore, how can you have only one person working? How are you going to manage your loan? And you won’t be happy at home, and also, financially. And you will feel very bored”. After reluctantly resigning from her professional career, Inez reveals that family finances was one major “fear” she wrestled with when assuming her stay-at-home mother role:

“The worry, of course, is financially you will need to rely on your spouse. ...and then about this fear, about the need to rely on the spouse’s support”.

Stay-at-home motherhood takes away these women’s sense of autonomy and “power”, leaving them feeling inferior for not being able to make a “valuable” contribution, as Yvette comments:

“Because I, on and off, I still struggle with staying at home. I am feeling a bit aimless, and then I don’t feel like I have added value in my life, or I could value add to anyone else”.

Here Adele, Sonia, Nikki, Inez, and Yvette experience a sense of power imbalance as the women – in transitioning into stay-at-home motherhood –
relinquish their paid work (and their individual earning potential); many participants have to rely on their husbands’ “allowance” (rather than on a jointly-shared bank account). Women’s unpaid labour within family is not as well recognised as their paid work commitments (Crittenden, 2010). In a patriarchal society such as Singapore (Chan, 2000), it is women – not men – who are expected to be the family’s main caregiver (Stivens, 2007). Indeed, while fathers in general within Western society are believed to become increasingly involved in childrearing (Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2014; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2015), they continue to see themselves as the primary breadwinners for their family and, thus, are hesitant to be stay-at-home fathers and be dependent on their wives for financial sustenance (Tan, 2015a; Tan, 2015b).

As stay-at-home motherhood appears to reduce the women’s sense of self-esteem, they seek to reclaim an element of control and independence through initiating work that generates a financial return. Adele, for example, offers her services as a freelance writer working from home alongside her mother role (as she shared in the earlier section), and she also set up a small business in her early motherhood period; as Adele recounts:

“During that time when Priscilla (daughter) was two, I set up a small business as well. So I taught children how to do craft with recycled materials. I would go to their homes and would do things with maybe glass bottles or toilet rolls, so it was a small income for me, but it is also nice for me to feel like a person again, not just a mum, but an adult who contributes (financially). It was interesting for me to move around and work with other children. Working with other kids also helped me understand my own children”.

Adele feels her value as “a person” is reaffirmed by the income she earns through her home-based commercial enterprises (see for instance, Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014). Casting away her guilt for being sometimes absent from home (as a result of her part-time paid work commitments), Adele rationalises her paid work outside the house through the good motherhood lens; for example, Adele feels that her dealings with other children helps her to understand her own children’s needs in a better way. In addition to working on freelance writing projects and her craft
tuition business, Adele also manages to put her editorial aptitude to use by running a popular, award-winning family-oriented weblog. Adele describes how her initially personal online diary has transformed over the years to become a commercial venture:

“I started writing, more to document things that the children go through, things that I don’t mind to share publicly. The more private things I write to the girls in a journal that I have for them...So the blog is sailing along for five years now. It was quiet for a long time, just me writing, a few people reading. Then suddenly, out of the blue, it got shortlisted for a prestigious Blog Award. So I was a finalist for the Family Blog Award ...I have done a lot of editorial works from my blog as well. And I have grown the portfolio to a good business...Ok, so I share through the blog, and I organize giveaways. And that is how I bring more people into my blog as well because people like giveaways right? And they like it. I manage to do advertisement without sounding pushy and making it overly advertisement-ish... And it is also wonderful that a hobby can, in turn, churn some income for you (laugh). And I think this has worked very nicely for me. I am writing. I love it. And it is bringing in income. So, perfect!”

Over time, Adele has managed to turn her blog into a “business portfolio”, getting commercial organisations to place advertisements there and increasing viewership. Blogging has become for Adele not only a way to express her personal viewpoints about a range of family and motherhood issues, but also a means to establish her reputation as an expert mother (Schau & Gilly, 2003), especially as a result of winning the Family Blog Award last year. For Adele, blogging represents a site to co-construct her maternal identity, where she expresses her stay-at-home mothering role digitally (by sharing online her family photos, family stories, and children-related advice) and she interacts with the viewers and visitors through online discussions on diverse parenting and family topics (Belk, 2013b; Schau & Gilly, 2003). In effect, blogging provides Adele with a sense of self-actualisation.

While Adele’s desire for reclaiming her sense of making a “valuable” contribution manifests in her blogging, Nova finds that her new interest in baking has grown into a home-based baking business; and she receives cake orders from her circle of mother friends through Facebook:
“Actually, it started when my boy was having his second birthday. He started to show his interest in things, like animals. So I was thinking of baking him a special cake that he likes. My goal was to have an elephant cake. Buying a fondant cake here in Singapore is expensive, and I am a hands-on person. So I decided to try baking myself. I started to bake a cake for him and for his friends, whose birthday just next to his. Of course, I need to invest in tools. That is why I think it is better to make more than one cake, for him and also his friends... Then I started to think, okay maybe I can try to do cake business. So I started to do home baking. I accept order of cakes from friends. After that, I started to open it to public via Facebook. So I become a home baker.”

Along the way, Nova realised that her baking takes much of her focus away from her family. Nova is keen to be financially gainful, but not at the significant expense of her children. While winding down her bakery business, Nova, together with her four stay-at-home mother acquaintances, decided to start an online store selling children’s educational products. This new venture, Nova feels, requires less commitment on her part, enabling her to be productive and successful at both home and work:

“For me, to have time for my children, I have to limit the cake orders. Now it is only about one to two cakes a month. I don’t know how much longer I can handle this business. So now we are trying to branch out to another project. I try to sell clothes with my friend. We are trying to set up something small that we can do daily without much maintenance. Now we are trying to sell toys because we are buying toys, book, and educational things for my son and their sons. There are four friends that grouped together, and we have children with roughly the same age. While we are buying for the kids, we are trying to sell it at the same time. It is in the Facebook. It is called Bright Little Boys.”

Nova’s switch between her commercial ventures (from the home-based bakery to the online business) reflects the dilemma that many of the participants live through in balancing their caregiving and self-development activities to restore their sense of (economic) contribution. Similarly to Nova, Yvette has also been weighing up her paid work options on the back of her home-based maternal role:

68 Pseudonym is used for confidentiality.
“We do not want the children to come home to an empty house. We still want to be available and around for them...My next question would be, “Should I go back to work?” I think eventually when the children go to primary school, I may still continue with my online business. I have a very small, mini business...I did tell you about the sewing before, right? Yeah, I started this sewing thing because of interest, because I wanted to sew for my children. I sell decorative flags...And I make plush toys, basically, anything I think I can make, I will make...I only do it if it is not at the expense of my children and if I feel that I like to do it...Actually I do not earn a lot. It will be two hundred dollars, and then I will use it to buy his formula. So one of the possibilities is to expand this if I want to do (paid) work, which means, maybe to expand this online business so that I can still be home and do what I like to do, given that I will have more time when they are in primary school, rather than going back to the workforce. I am not sure maybe I will go back to run (social work) programmes”.

Yvette gains a positive sense of being productive from selling her handmade crafts online (despite the small income it generates); this started out of her pastime and grew into a more steady enterprise. Meanwhile (like Adele, Nova, and Yvette), Nikki runs a small commercial enterprise alongside her maternal responsibilities. The online jewellery business that Nikki set up grew out of a creative hobby in her premarital days:

“I am rather creative. I set up my own online jewellery shop to sell the jewellery that I created...I make jewellery and I sell online. It is actually a blog shop, but I have stopped operating it because, let me just put it this way, I started making this before my son came along. At that time, I got to know some of the clients through my advertisement in magazines and they would ask me to customise jewellery for them. So that was my part-time work because, but then, it was a happy thing to do, because I do not look at it as work. It is a place where I could display my creative juice and my creation is a reflection of my life as well. For example, this particular piece (showing her handmade jewellery)...After my son was a little older, about three years old, I started to operate this again. I started to be active in selling my jewellery and I had one or two clients coming to my home, and I do custom jewellery for them. Okay, because my son was already three years old so it was easy for me”.

The narratives of Nikki and the women in this section illustrate the participants’ unwavering endeavour to squeeze into their already-hectic domestic life, their entrepreneurial ventures; this balancing strategy seeks to reclaim the participants’ sense of self-reliance in their adoption of their home-based childrearing role.
These women appear to yearn for, and struggle to conceive, a sense of worth by engaging in the commercial projects while fulfilling their familial duties at home.

In a contemporary culture that measures worth and achievement almost solely in terms of material wealth (Barr & Skrbis, 2008), the intensive work of rearing children at home is often viewed by people as unproductive (Crittenden, 2010). This leads the participants to launch their home-based enterprises, enabling them to “feel like a person” again (as Adele says earlier) who can “add value” (as Yvette highlights) to their family. Despite the relatively meagre incomes that businesses yield (as Adele and Yvette both recognise), the commercial activities project the women with a supermum image, a coping mechanism (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999) that offers the participants a sense of control and independence.

In order to have it all, a number of studies have investigated how married women strive to weave a path between the discourses of intensive mothering and enterprise (Carrigan & Duberley, 2013; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Lee, 1996; Lee & Choo, 2001). Like the UK, Singapore is considered as conducive for small businesses to operate69 (Doing Business 2015, 2015), and has seen increasing numbers of mumpreneurs (Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014). These small-scale entrepreneurial activities are seen as viable alternatives to the (more traditional) labour market, allowing stay-at-home mothers to combine income generation and childcare responsibilities (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012; Seow, 2014; Tai, 2014). This version of good motherhood enables a certain lifestyle and identity which allows these participants to reconcile the demands of traditional motherhood with the women’s aspiration to be economically productive once more, giving rise to a process of monetising their intimate family time at home.

In addition to embarking on various business ventures, the participants, in conceiving stay-at-home motherhood as an intermediating career, also seek to retain their skillsets in the light of the possibility of re-entering the workforce at a

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69 Singapore, along with many other advanced economies, is considered by the World Bank as a place where small- and medium-sized companies can thrive relatively more easily due to supportive rules and regulation (Doing Business 2015, 2015).
later time. Integral to the notion of career management is the pursuit of self-development (Bridgstock, 2009; Wilton, 2013). The next section discusses several participants’ efforts in developing their knowledge and competencies while performing their maternal duties.

4.3.2.2 Self-Development Projects in Motherhood. Amidst their hectic and juggling lifestyle at home, a number of the participants also engage in learning for their own self-improvement, to develop new knowledge and skills, which, as highlighted in the earlier sections, the women will utilise when they eventually decide to return to the paid workforce. In a society that promotes advancement through lifelong learning to adapt to the constantly evolving market needs (Shanmugaratnam, 2014b), many participants see the urgency to do something in order to retain their capabilities while managing their familial life; as Inez reports:

“When you are working, you have your routine everyday…but now you stay at home. So what do you need to do? You have to set up your own routine, and sometimes you still think am I still valuable? Am I still competitive enough to fight with others for work in the workforce? So I occasionally still flip the newspapers and then see if there is vacancy that suits my profile. And I do send my resume. I recall a head-hunter found my profile through Linkedin, and they called me. They wanted to schedule teleconference, and I was okay. It is not because I am going to go back to work, but I just want to make sure that, hey, I still have the value, you see. So I attend to the call. But when they ask me for a face to face, ah so sorry, I said that I have other commitment [laugh]. Yeah, that kind of things happened”.

At home, Inez has to deal with a nagging thought which leads her to question her own worth, and whether her formerly acquired professional aptitude and skills, when left without use, will deteriorate and depreciate in value. Inez, thus, could not resist the urge to reconnect with some executive search firms to gauge her “market value”. Inez’s anxiety about losing her skills resonates with Adele’s experiences. On the one hand, Adele finds great contentment in her home-based maternal role, witnessing many important milestones in her children’s growth. But on the other hand, Adele feels a role strain:
“One part of me feels that I do not regret leaving my job and being with my kids full time. I would feel horrible if I miss all these things with them: first step, first this, first that, first kiss, first word. On the other hand, I know that by doing that I have committed career suicide. And this is my sixth year of not working full time”.

Adele’s and other women’s disquiet about losing their capabilities and skillsets motivate them to pursue self-development projects in-between their demanding familial responsibilities. Many of the participants, including Nikki, Yvette, Inez, and Ingrid, seek further learning opportunities in diverse areas while caring for their children. For example, Nikki, who picks up baking “for fun”, elaborates:

“So you asked me what is the difference in my phases of life right? When I was a lady, a maiden, before I got married, I did not know how to cook, not at all...And now, I bake my family members birthday cake every year. I promised my children I will bake their cakes till they want me to stop [laugh]. Self-learnt. Sure, so you see, when I was a maiden, I was not able to cook, but now I am able to cook a lot of dishes. And I am able to bake their birthday cakes. So I see the progress in me. I see the improvement in me as well. The growth is in me as a mother”.

For Nikki, baking represents a pursuit of self-development. Furthering her passion for something and being able to make a contribution in one way or another, baking offers Nikki a sense of satisfaction and personal growth. While Nikki pursues baking for her own personal fulfilment, Yvette and Inez contemplate furthering their academic studies in the midst of their demanding mothering duties. Yvette and Inez aim to pursue higher education but for different rationales; whilst Yvette is concerned with her career progression in the social work sector, Inez turns to further education for a sense of self-fulfilment.

Having worked in social work previously and possessing an undergraduate degree in that area, Yvette feels “insecure” about re-entering the working world. Here she discusses the possibility of pursuing a graduate qualification in order to improve her professional credentials:

“...I have struggled recently. A few weeks ago, I went to my sister and ask her, what her thoughts are if I want to pursue a master’s degree in social
Then she asked me why I am thinking of it. I said because I am afraid that I will not be needed in the working world anymore when I return to the workforce. If I go back now, I do not think I am relevant to the working world already. Because of the fear of not being relevant, I told my husband maybe I should go and pursue something, like a master’s degree”. 

Yvette’s anxiety about her skills becoming outdated is also reflected in the conversations with Inez. While Yvette looks to higher education as a means for re-employment, Inez seeks to further her academic training to diversify her skillset in a different field. Possessing an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering, Inez contemplates learning a totally new counselling skill:

“I do have a plan to go back to the workforce. That is one of the options, but if not, I will do things at my own pace. I can also do things that I have been thinking to do before but I cannot...Maybe not financially rewarding, but it could be something that invests in my life, which is going back to school to learn about counselling. It is a journey to find myself [laugh]...Personally it could be rewarding, and help yourself and your family”.

Inez plans to return to school to broaden her capabilities for the sake of her own self-improvement, embarking on a journey to find her new self; the counselling skill symbolically represents Inez’s self-growth that could also be used to make herself practically more useful.

Meanwhile, as Yvette and Inez consider pursuing further education to enhance their academic credentials, Nikki and Ingrid are interested in developing themselves physically as personal and fitness trainers, a role that can potentially open up future paid work opportunities. Nikki, having laboured intensively as a stay-at-home mother for her two children (and thus, she feels, “neglecting” her own well-being), intends to start a “beauty and fitness” business in the near future:

“I would like to start a blog about beauty and fitness, because this is where my interest is, especially fitness. And I see that once my girl enters the primary school next year, I am going to embark on a more active effort in reforming my body. Having two child births at this late age has taken its
toll, not having sleep, not having a good sleep for 28 months has also taken its toll on my health...So, I have intended to embark on a more active effort in reforming my body. Yes, I will go into fitness and probably I plan to get the certificate in Pilates or any fitness. Perhaps, there is a chance that I can become a personal trainer”.

Nikki plans to nurture her physical well-being once her second child enters preschool next year. Nikki intends to initially “reform” her physical fitness with a goal to perhaps take on a new paid role as a personal trainer. Similarly, Ingrid, who previously worked in customer services within an airline and financial services company, aims to revisit her (former) interest in Yoga more seriously. Ingrid wishes to juggle her mothering responsibilities at home with enrolling on a Yoga teacher-training programme:

“The plan is, I told you about the yoga teacher training. I really hope I can make it, but it is going to be in September. I am looking, I am planning to, I have not confirmed my attendance, but it is something that I have been thinking about and trying to prepare the people around me already, like my helper, I told her, “Oh! There would be like these 20 days which I will be away full time.” I mean I am still in Singapore, but because I need to do the teacher training”.

Ingrid hopes that the Yoga teacher-training programme will equip her with the skills needed to be a Yoga instructor in the near future. This outside-home engagement is intended to provide Ingrid with a regular “breather”, helping her to balance her intensive childrearing duties at home with a non-mothering activity outside her family life.

Nikki’s and Ingrid’s ambition to train their physical bodies reflects a contemporary fitness discourse, encouraging mothers to regain their pre-pregnancy physical form through bodily practices of fitness and exercise (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). “Letting the body go” (postnatal and without proper exercise) may constitute failed womanhood and motherhood in society; so fitness is carried out by Nikki and Ingrid not simply for health reasons, but also to normalise their appearances to align with an idealised feminine form (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004, p. 616). It becomes a self-improvement project for Nikki and
Ingrid in preparation for their next roles when their children become more independent.

Many participants build on their hobbies and passions to pursue a diverse range of self-development programmes (such as baking, academic training, and physical fitness regimes) to restore their sense of worth and self-reliance as stay-at-home mothers. The women engage in *the projects of the self* as they explore their personal interests and reflect on their possible future career choices alongside performing their motherhood role. It is a counteracting reaction to domesticity, which induces a major uneasiness to many participants as it means they may lose their previously-gained professional experiences and waste away their academic training. By attending to their ongoing self-development projects while away from the labour market, they hope to keep their professional skills updated and relevant to assure their future employability in the Singapore labour market (which is portrayed to be competitive and demanding; see for example Lee, 1997; Shanmugaratnam, 2014a).

Meanwhile, the participants’ self-development projects represent consumption in a liminal stage, as the women view their domestic caregiving role as an intermediating stage of their life. The participants engage in self-examination and reflection in order to identify what is lacking, and thus, strive towards self-improvement. Their sense of incompleteness drives the women to pursue self-improvement activities to help facilitate their role transition from the familial to the likely professional work in the future (Banister & Hogg, 2006; Hogg, Curasi & Maclaran, 2004; Noble & Walker, 1997; Schau, Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 2009). How such consumption phenomena supports consumers transitioning from one life stage to another has been studied to a great extent by consumer researchers, including how consumption helps in transporting the self during a geographic move (Belk, 1992; Mehta & Belk, 1991) and how consumption sustains consumers in transitioning into new roles and redefining their sense of selves following major life events (Mick, DeMoss & Faber, 1992; Schouten, 1991a; Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006).
This mothering orientation, assimilating childrearing with self-development activities at home, departs from the traditional good mother identity (Hays, 1996) which these women sought to construct initially when adopting the home-centred mothering role. Integrating the commercial activities and self-improvement projects into their version of stay-at-home motherhood appears to support the women’s conception of a mother identity that blends outwardly traditional caregiving duties with a sense of self-confidence; this opens the door for care resources made available by commercial institutions in the marketplace to help sustain the participants’ (juggling) lifestyle. The next section will discuss how the participants organise their familial responsibilities with help from care resources located outside of their home, in the women’s enactment of good mother identity.

4.3.2.3 Delegation of Familial Caregiving at Home. Having experienced feeling time poor at home, many participants discuss feeling the need to draw support from external commercial establishments in order to address the care gap within their families. Many of the participants (such as Yvette, Nova, Adele, Tiffany, Sonia, and Ingrid) discuss how their difficulty in adjusting to the new home-based role exhausts their energy. The participants, in response, procure from the marketplace family care resources, such as preschool education, domestic maids or helpers, and catering services in order to better balance their maternal duties with non-maternal work. Yvette comments:

“My first child now attends a kindergarten class two to four hours a day... We started to send him (son) to a two hourly infant care at a young age of 18 months old, because my second child was arriving sooner than planned. At that time, I had no help at home to adjust to the new role as at-home mom of two kids at the same time. So the preschool allows me to have some me time to maintain sanity at home and to deal with only one child for two hours than two children for the whole day”.

Because her second child arrived sooner than she planned, Yvette felt overwhelmed at having to deal with her two young children at the same time. Referring to “we” in relation to how she and her husband jointly decided to place their first child in preschool, Yvette implies that this decision was co-constructed
with her husband. Furthermore, to help manage her household chores, Yvette also employs a part-time domestic helper and (recently) has started to use a catering service to help prepare family meals; she elaborates:

“I also engage a part-time helper to come in once a week to do thorough cleaning of the furniture, kitchen, stove, toilets, fans and windows... My husband and I often argue a lot about household chores. So we decided to delegate that aspect to external parties to create less tension between us. We prefer to delegate the household chores externally so that I can be freed of that responsibility and focus on the growth and childcare at home, such as bathing them, cooking their meals, laundry and bringing them to school, and educating them at home... Previously, we also engaged a catering service for dinner so that I could focus fully on managing two kids on my own. After my second child turned 1 year old, we stopped the catering service and I started cooking three times a day for the family”.

Yvette segregates the household chores between herself and the “external parties” (referring to her maid and the catering service) in such a way that enables Yvette to attend to her two young children more responsively at home. Moreover, Yvette’s maid is tasked with handling the heavier cleaning duties around the house. Yvette also finds the use of such “external parties” beneficial in promoting a better marital relationship with her husband since the line of domestic responsibilities (between Yvette and her maid) has been clearly drawn.

Meanwhile, in a similar way as Yvette, Nova also decides to send her young children to preschool, and Nova also hires a domestic helper to manage the housework:

“They (sons) attended infant care. The boys started schooling at two years old. They attended a two-hour class two days in a week. The frequency progresses as they grow older. The main reason to start them at this playgroup is for their social development. When the children were younger, we have regular playdate one to two times a week. But the frequency got lesser as the kid started to go to school or their mom has less mobility due to my second pregnancy... We hired domestic maid when my second boy was two weeks old to help me with housework. She did cooking, cleaning up, washing clothes, ironing. As the children grow bigger, we decided not to extend her service... We used a maid so their father can focus on his job, and mommy can focus with kids, and the maid help on the housework. Every
Nova, like Yvette, chooses to delegate the housework (such as cleaning, cooking, and washing) to what she calls the “external party”, enabling Nova to concentrate on childrearing and her husband to focus on his career. Through a gendered discourse, Nova neatly defines her husband’s role as breadwinner and her own role as the family’s primary caregiver. Using “we” in her decision to hire a paid domestic helper and her ways to parent her children, Nova inferences that her parenting approach is mutually constituted with her husband (although Nova’s husband appears to have little involvement in parenting).

Meanwhile, in the same way as Yvette, Nova enacts a division of labour seeing that parenting is an intimate maternal responsibility that needs to be kept within her private space, away from the household chores which can be outsourced to an “external party”. These mothers, furthermore, enlist the help of preschool institutions to help manage their time while providing their children learning opportunities to aid their development.

In referring to their domestic help resource as the “external party”, Yvette and Nova appear to locate this care support in the periphery of their family life; this is in contrast with the intensive mothering perspective whereby childcare and familial responsibilities are often positioned as mother-like and family-like (Hays, 1996). Yvette and Nova define a boundary that separates the internal (or their family) from the external (or non-family) spheres within their home, to keep the caregiving of their children within the intimate, familial space.

Consumer research and sociological studies have explored how families manage their identity enactment as they outsource part of their caregiving activities to paid service providers (for example, see Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Hochschild, 2012). To varying degrees, families include paid caregivers in the construction of family by positioning the paid caregiver as a
family member; others may exclude the paid caregiver from the construction of family by limiting family membership to formal family members alone (as in the cases of Yvette and Nova) (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014).

In the meantime, Adele also decides to send her children to preschool and she employs a domestic helper to manage her daily familial responsibilities:

“My first daughter went to a childcare centre...We had a live-in domestic helper for about five weeks after the first child was born. I think it was just that everything was so overwhelming and new; new baby, new routines, new lifestyle, and because I had just stopped full-time work. Plus my post-birth brain was not functioning too well, and I had post-natal depression...We now employ an irregular, part-time cleaner; the plan was to have her come fortnightly but now it is as and when we need help, and it is irregular. But I would say we had her maybe three times in the past 12 months to help when things get out of hand at home in terms of mess...The children go to preschool to socialise, and because I do not feel capable enough to fully home school them...I understand that every mother is different and makes different choices; that doesn't make them bad mothers, or by that count, me a "better" one. But this is what works for me, and I think it works well for my family”.

To cope with a chaotic situation during her early motherhood period, Adele sought assistance by hiring a live-in maid to provide her with some help on a short-term basis. In addition, Adele reframes – and rationalises – her decision to use a childcare service through positioning this as supporting her children’s well-being; Adele looks up to the professional (childcare) experts to meet her children’s foundational learning needs.

Meanwhile, like Adele, Tiffany neutralises her decision to send her children to preschool through their enhanced welfare. While Tiffany understands that it is good for a mother to spend time with her young children at home, she, however, rationalises that her maternal contributions would not be as significant – or even beneficial – to her young children as those provided at the childcare centre (working to position the childcare providers as expert in the area of child development):
“Both girls (daughters) attend childcare from three to six years old. I was still working during the period of their pre-school days. This explains the need of engaging childcare assistance, too. As much as I believe that a mother’s presence makes a difference, I feel that I would not be able to engage them as effectively as the childcare professionals who are trained in early childhood education. In my opinion, it is not easy to engage a young kid and teach them how to learn compared to an older child. I decided to stay home when they started primary school. I also believe that I could more effectively engage them intellectually and more importantly, impart values”.

Like Yvette, Nova, and Adele, Tiffany also hires a live-in domestic maid. Tiffany delegates the non-maternal chores to her maid, and chooses to keep the more intricate and intimate maternal work (such as nurturing her children’s psychological and emotional development, planning their nutritional intake, and guiding their studies) within her maternal domain, as Tiffany comments:

“I provide psychological support, emotional support. Otherwise, it defeats the purpose of me staying at home. If I am just at home washing up and cook, I don’t think I can take it. All these, I feel, I will outsource to my helper. The only thing that I will take care myself is their food. Nutrition, right? I will plan their meals for them, to make sure that there is appropriate nutrition...I also have to take care of their emotional, psychological part... I have to teach them both, in many aspects of education...School work aside, values, mannerism, and human behaviour”.

Tiffany, furthermore, utilises the term “outsourcing” to refer to the process of thoughtful exercise of, and consideration in, differentiating the essential (maternal) work from the non-essential (household) chores, in assembling care support that helps Tiffany run her family affairs. This approach is similar to the division of labour which Yvette and Nova initiate with their respective maids. Similarly, Sonia, like many other participants, feels the need for help at home so she decides to send her son to preschool:

“Andrew (son) attended preschool when he was three years old. It was a three hour learning session from Monday to Friday. However, Ely (daughter) turns three this year, and we still keep her at home. At the moment, we do not know yet whether we will send her to school. We decided to send Andrew (son) to pre-school when I just gave birth to Ely. This arrangement helped me manage the household chores and the
workload at home. We purposely chose a play-based preschool for him...and we thought that he would enjoy himself playing and learning with friends for a few hours in the morning, while I take care of Ely at home, did most of the household chores, and cooked his lunch...We are not using any part-time maid at the moment. But I used to have one part-time maid who came to our house once a week for few months. I used her service for heavier chores that I could not manage to do at that period of time, or when the kids fell sick. There was a period of time when I used catering service for few months too, but the food was not suitable for our palate, so we quit and I started cooking myself since then”.

In placing her son in preschool, Sonia (like Adele and Tiffany) justifies her decision through the learning benefits (of “socialisation”) her son could reap from the childcare centre; this decision, however, appears to be a retrospective argument for Sonia to cope with her tasks at home, since Sonia now chooses to keep her daughter at home (instead of sending her to preschool). Meanwhile, as and when the need arises at home, Sonia occasionally hires additional paid care resources (such as a part-time maid and temporary catering services) to deal with difficult situations at home when Sonia feels even more time-pressured. While many of the participants decided to send their children (aged around two years or above) to preschool, Ingrid arranges to have her daughter attend a brain development programme from the age of seven months old:

“Okay, there are so many enrichment classes for baby like My Gym, The Little Gym, and stuff. But I find it better if the school incorporates right-brain training...So what these founders (of the right-brain development institutions) believe is, from zero to six years old, we should expose our kids to right-brain training, and thereafter, they will naturally be better at left brain things...So why I choose Gymnacademics because somehow I like Glenn Doman (its founder) the most...Although I try to engage my daughter as much as possible throughout the day at home, sometimes I run out of things to do with her. So that is why I think I need to actually attend this class...In fact, at school they also will tell me, okay, what you can practice with her at home. If I don’t bring her for the classes, I run out of things to do with her”.

Being a first-time mother, Ingrid does not always feel adequately equipped to care for her infant, especially in the area of brain development; Ingrid chanced upon a “right-brain programme” in her search of early childhood education programmes
in the marketplace. The training, according to the proponents\textsuperscript{70} of the right-brain theories, is helpful in developing a child’s overall brain capacity. The programme which Ingrid attends together with her baby (for a few hours per week) provides Ingrid with ideas (from the classroom) that she can then replicate at home with her child. To help juggle her familial responsibilities, Ingrid also employs a live-in maid who mainly performs house cleaning, and occasionally also helps Ingrid to look after her baby. Ingrid explains how she and her maid collaborate at home:

“So housework I totally don’t do...My maid is more in charge of the house cleaning. So I am more in charge of taking care of the baby. But actually, looking after baby full-time is very tiring so sometimes you really need a breather. So sometimes, I swap roles with my maid. So I let the helper play with her. She (maid) helps me care for my baby, look after the baby for a while, while I either rest or do other things...But the basic housework like sweeping, mopping the floor this sort of things, it is automatic for my maid”.

For Ingrid, stay-at-home motherhood has been very exhausting. Unlike a number of the participants who choose to perform caregiving personally, Ingrid has a shared caregiving arrangement with her maid which affords Ingrid regular breaks.

The conversations with the participants reveal how these women manage their familial responsibilities by variably outsourcing to commercial establishments and paid care providers elements of familial care traditionally performed by parents, formal kin, or family members (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Lair, 2007). Driven by dual-income households and often distance from extended family members – coupled with rising consumerism – an expanding array of available services in the marketplace allow individuals to hire almost any caregiving activity or personal assistance (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Hochschild, 2012). While the participants in this study regularly use domestic helpers, catering (meal preparation) services, and paid childcare, it is not unknown for Singaporean residents to also hire people to perform a number of varying duties. For instance, it is possible to hire a dining companion, someone to hold a

\textsuperscript{70} Some authorities and proponents of the programme, as mentioned by Ingrid during the interviews, include \textit{Glenn Doman} (from the US), \textit{Heguru} (from Japan), and \textit{Shichida} (from Japan).
telephone conversation with, an “exercise buddy” for a workout session, and even a fake groomsman (to act as a brother or close friend) for a wedding party71 (Ang, 2016, p. C2).

In integrating the domestic helpers into their home-based motherhood, the women seek to safeguard their private (maternal) territory from the invasion of the “external parties” (as some of the participants refer in relation to their maids) through the division of labour arrangements between the participants and their paid helpers. In the process, the participants also institute maternal gatekeeping (which is normally deployed to restrict fathers’ involvement with their children) and redefine it to control and facilitate the maids’ interactions with the participants’ children (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). The maids, furthermore, are excluded from the participants’ construction of family identity (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014).

The participants’ use of the mix of care resources is necessary to sustain their time crunches and juggling lifestyles, departing from the traditional motherhood ideal (Hays, 1996; Russo, 1976) these participants endeavour to practice when leaving their professional careers. In some way, the women’s outsourcing of the familial care resembles the “extensive mothering” practice (Christopher, 2012, p. 73). In extensive motherhood, employed mothers navigate between “intensive mother” and “good worker” ideologies by reframing good mothering as being “in charge” of their children’s happiness (Christopher, 2012, p. 73). The extensive mothers maintain their employment outside of home and draw support from nannies and other paid familial resources to help care for their children; although the mothers get “parachuted in” occasionally and hold the ultimate responsibility for their children’s well-being (Christopher, 2012, p. 73).

Many of the participants rationalise that the integration of such commercial care resources into the women’s homes is necessary for the well-being of their children as well as being important to increase the participants’ sense of effectiveness as a

71 More recently, companies (such as Pally Asia) have been setup in Singapore to offer “friends-for hire” services to meet growing demands for companionship and personal assistance (Ang, 2016, p. C2).
mother; this, it could be argued, is to neutralise the participants’ sense of guilt (Piacentini, Chatzidakis & Banister, 2012) as a result of moving away from the predominant ideal of intensive motherhood (Hays, 1996).

The narratives of the participants in this second global theme reflect how the women, in negotiating the dialectic of domesticity and self-reliance, blur the boundary between home and work. The traditional attributes that typically characterise home and work become transposed as many participants variably seek to (almost) become “work-at-home mothers”, or mothers who engage in profitable work without leaving the home (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 454). In maintaining caregiving and commercial (or self-development) activities within the private space of their homes, the participants in turn open the door for paid services to supplement their parental resources at home. In the process, home, an embracing notion for family, privacy, and warmth (Hochschild, 2012; Smith, 1994), evolves to become an increasingly commercialised space. Home has also become a place where some “external parties” (as some participants term their maid and other paid service providers) come together to support the participants’ enactment of good motherhood.

Home life, which carries intimate associations of sanctuary and relief (Bailey, 2000), turns into an efficient and office-like site, where the women rush around, trying to squeeze innumerable tasks into a limited timeframe. Home, thus, appears to become work-like, and work may become home-like (Hochschild, 1997), as Adele comments:

“I will be very honest with you, going back to work was an escape for me. Because it meant, that the minute I stepped out of the house to the time I get home again, it is my time. No matter how busy, I just had to take care of me. If there is a meeting, if there is a project, if there is an event or anything to prepare for, I just have to take care of myself and manage my own time. I can eat with two hands during lunch. I can have lunch [laugh]. But at home I always have to watch them (children), to make sure that they are not jumping out of the window, or bouncing on the sofas, or climbing on the tables. It may be a job to be a full-time mum. But it is one where you have to use all your senses all the time [exhale and laugh]. It is one where there are no boundaries and no rules, no definition - just make things up as
you go. There are people who don’t respect the rules even when there are rules. So the difference is that, it is very defined at the office. It is very tricky at home”.

Adele, whose experience resonates with many other participants, feels that she has less control and stability at home as Adele wrestles with the physical and emotional demands of her felt maternal duty, whereas, paradoxically, she feels more relaxed and appreciated whilst at paid work (Hays, 1996). Adele and many other participants consider returning to the workforce as an “escape” (as Adele puts it) from the frenzied and fatiguing life at home; this sentiment is echoed by the first-time fathers who discuss “feeling freedom” and “being glad” to be back at work following their laborious paternity leave (Bettany, Kerrane & Hogg, 2014, p. 1548).

The research encounters indicate that home, known as a haven for warm and caring relationships, faces intrusion from the market which typically is viewed as cold and motivated by profit (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Hochschild, 2012). Traditionally regarded as a site for sacred bonding and intimacy among family members, home is no longer safe from, and immune to, market forces and economic calculations as the participants weave paid care resources into their domestic and maternal care regimes (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Hochschild, 2012) in support of their involvement with commercial ventures and self-development projects. Home, thus, is no longer defined by its actual physical structure and location, but rather its content (the individuals and activities that exist within this space) (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 451). As a result of the participants’ time-poor, overworked, and overbooked lifestyles, their families are forced to replace family-produced care with paid care, leading to the commercialisation of family life at home (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014; Hochschild, 2003; Hochschild, 2012).

In contrast, some other participants (such as Sonia and Ingrid) find motherhood a moment intertwined with joyful experiences as they engage in a selfless act of bringing another human being into the world and care for them (Hays, 1996, p. 8).
In addition to working on the entrepreneurial and self-development projects, many participants assimilate their former working selves into their home-based maternal role, projecting images of a mother who is skilled and effective. The next global theme will, thus, discuss the ways a number of participants enact their stay-at-home motherhood in paid work-related terms, which in turn, works to professionalise their family life and enactment of motherhood.

4.3.3 Global Theme 3: Professionalisation of Motherhood

This third global theme concerns the participants’ performance of their day-to-day maternal roles in terms of how their prior paid work experience (acquired during varying periods of paid employment) influences their motherhood identity construction and enactment at home. Coping with the dialectic pressures of productivity and maternal duty, the participants calibrate their sense of selves and reframe the nature of their domestic responsibilities to align more with the (paid) working world; a framework of these thematic relations is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Across the interviews, the participants discuss how their professional backgrounds have influenced their self-definition as stay-at-home mothers. For instance, some of the women use office titles at home to help make sense of their familial roles. A number of participants discuss how they employ specialist techniques acquired during their former corporate lives to help them to manage their household more efficiently. Furthermore, several participants use professional terminologies from their former workplace to help describe their parenting approach better.
Figure 4.3: Dialectic Tensions and Resolution between Home-Bound Duty and Productivity

Conflicts & Continuities in Everyday Enactments of Stay-at-Home Motherhood

Global Theme 1
Stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career
- a. Early childhood influence on motherhood
- b. Stay-at-home motherhood as a duty
- c. Negotiation in stay-at-home motherhood
- d. Juggling lifestyle in motherhood

Global Theme 2
Commercialisation of family life at home
- a. Monetisation of maternity at home
- b. Self-development projects in motherhood
- c. Delegation of familial caregiving at home

Global Theme 3
Professionalisation of motherhood
- a. Centrality of professional identity
- b. Use of occupational titles at home
- c. Use of occupational techniques at home
- d. Use of occupational terminologies at home
The next sections highlight significance of the participants’ professional sense of self acquired during their past employment (section 4.3.3.1: Centrality of Professional Identity) and how the women navigate the new family roles and manage their professional identity construction at home through the use of occupation-related titles (section 4.3.3.2: Use of Occupational Titles at Home), techniques (section 4.3.3.3: Use of Occupational Techniques at Home), and terminologies (section 4.3.3.4: Use of Occupational Terminologies at Home). The adoption of these symbolic professional resources by the participants enables them to transition, adjust, and become more readily assimilated, to their new (unpaid) work environment and perform their maternal duties with a sense of effectiveness.

4.3.3.1 Centrality of Professional Identity. Given the participants’ professional work experience, many of them were accustomed to viewing and describing themselves through their (former) occupational attributes, including office titles and specialised skills. These professional attributes provide the participants with a wealth of identity-related meanings, as Adele highlights:

“I will be very frank with you. In the first year, I was very depressed. Because, for as long as I remember, my identity has been pegged to how well I succeed at the workplace. So, you know how it is in Singapore. You are Executive. You are the Assistant Manager. You are Manager. And then you are Director. It seems that the only way that people would give you any credit is when you have a name card that says something impressive. So it was always the next promotion, the next pay raise, the next bonus. Having that taken away, all being taken away at once, really was a big blow to me. And I think I am not the only one who feels this way. There are many, many of my friends who have gone through the same thing. So it is clear to see that they are depressed, even if they don’t admit it. It is a very big difference in your esteem level. It took me one year to get over it”.

Leaving her corporate role for stay-at-home motherhood was “a big blow” to Adele’s self-esteem, as Adele could no longer identify herself through the characteristics related to her paid work role and workplace. In the same manner as Adele, Inez was deeply troubled by how her move to the home-based parent role would alter, or potentially abolish, her sense of self:
“You see, people who have all the while been working, their identity is as close as her office title. So you tell people that you are a project manager or a purchasing officer. At that time, I told myself, if I leave the office, after this how I should tell people? I am not working anymore? Now stay at home? So I think that is the first, the biggest fear...the biggest fear is how am I going to project myself the next time I meet people? Yes that is the first worry”.

Working previously as a project manager and as a purchasing officer for various large firms, Inez comes to define herself through her former corporate roles; her office titles become synonymous with her identity. In making the decision to leave her paid job, Inez felt deeply distressed, concerned with how people might judge her after she had left paid employment:

“When I have made the decision to resign from work, some of my cell group friends, some of them are working mom, working wives, I start to tell them that I will stay at home, so I will tell the person: “Hey, I won’t be like you anymore! I will be at home now, because I am resigning from the work”. And from this smaller group, I tried to move on to the bigger group, like my church friends and pastor. I tell my pastor: “Pastor, I will stay at home now. But I think these people are very nice. They can understand my situation well. But if you meet not-so-close friends, that is another challenge. Am I confident enough to tell that I am not working anymore? Or do I feel very shy, very shameful that I am not working anymore? I needed time. As time passes, I think I am okay...Sometimes, I can feel inferior when meeting someone especially working mother, who is like very strong, who projects a successful or professional image, like all is successful and everything seems to be okay in her family”.

In her liminality, Inez dealt and wrestled with a sense of “shame” for living without her professional identification, and she began to seek approval of her new (non-work) identity from her acquaintances. Occasionally, Inez recalls that her sense of “inferiority” sets in, especially when meeting with working mothers who appear to successfully juggle between paid work and familial responsibilities. In the same way, having left her professional role for stay-at-home motherhood, Estelle feels a sense of indignity when people start asking what she now does for a living:
“...and also, psychologically, because who I used to be (professionally), when I bump into my ex-colleagues and friends, they would ask “What are you doing?” You know, that kind of question about my identity, you know. It triggers me to search again, who am I? Am I, am I decent? So a lot of soul searching and it recurs often”.

Moreover, Nova, a Christian, shares that she derives her sense of self through both her religion and work role:

“Actually, probably, I will say, it is a smaller font for “Christian” but a bigger font for “Engineer”. I will put the font size six for “Christian”, and maybe font size 12 for “Engineer”. Probably the proportion (between professional identity and religion) is like that in terms of my time spent on both. I tried to be more Christian in my work life, which I think I did by holding onto my integrity at work. But in terms of time spent, yes, my work identity is bigger. Yeah, it is not a good testimony (of my Christian faith)

The two main sources of Nova’s identity (religion and occupation) coexist and often compete with one another. Nova uses a “font size” metaphor to mechanically describe the prominence of her engineer role over her Christianity. Feeling apologetic that she has not prioritised her Christian faith, Nova admits that her occupational identity has taken centre stage in her life.

The narratives of Adele, Inez, Estelle, and Nikki highlight the centrality of their professional identities in helping them make sense of, and enact, their environments (see Weick, 1995). These women have defined themselves in the context of their (former) occupational lives, through their office titles, work roles, and professional capabilities; these threads from which the fabric of the women’s occupational identification is woven offer them a significant sense of self-worth. Professional identity, thus, is central to the women’s self-definition; it is characterised by a great degree of intensity in terms of the effort the women have invested in their paid work roles and the integration between the women’s sense of self and the roles (Ebaugh, 1988).

Research in organisational identification has examined the importance of organisational membership in worker’s self-definition (Ashford & Mael, 1989)
and the significance of paid work in giving workers a sense of purpose in life and a feeling of being connected to the larger social environment (Morse & Weiss, 1955). Paid work provides people with identity and meaning beyond monetary reward. Organisation literature also affirms that professional identity is relatively stable and enduring (Ibarra, 2007; Schein, 1978) that moves with workers as they change work roles and organisations, as part of the workers’ strategies to adjust to new jobs and new work settings (Beyer & Hannah, 2002).

While the participants are expected to be economically productive (through paid work), they are also compelled to construct a good mother identity in line with the intensive mothering ideal (Hays, 1996). As Singaporean society values working women more highly than stay-at-home mothers (Etaugh & Petroski, 1985; Etaugh & Poertner, 1991; Zheng, 2014), this evokes in many participants a sense of “shame” (as Inez shares earlier) in carrying out their maternal duties. Many of the participants in turn feel the need to utilise their former occupational capital to project a sense of prestige in their enactment of motherhood at home. The following section will highlight the ways in which a number of participants assimilate their occupational self-definitions with their home-based mother role.

4.3.3.2 Use of Occupational Titles at Home. As the women integrate themselves into stay-at-home motherhood, they begin exploiting their professional capital accumulated during their (paid) work life to help construct a new self-definition that amalgamates their past work experience with their new role setting at home. In discussing their home-centred maternal life, several women describe their identity essentially through formal-sounding, corporate designations to clarify – and even professionalise – their (unpaid) job within the family. Nikki, for example, comments:

“...my everyday duty would be taking care of my children, feeding my family, doing the household chores, grocery shopping, ferrying my son to extra-curricular activities like piano and swimming. Also, I guide him with his homework and piano practice. So basically I call myself CEO of the family. I am a Cleaner. I am an Educator. I am an Operator of the home...I think I am trying to say that CEO is a very important person in the
company. I think I am the pivot of my family. I am very important. But at the same time, this CEO is not really in the sense of the Chief Executive Officer...Well, I am in charge of the house....Without me, I don't think my family members can really survive [laugh].

Nikki light-heartedly introduces herself and her domestic responsibility in the terms of her being the “CEO of the family”. Nikki conceives the mundane tasks associated with house work (like cleaning the house, caring for her children, and managing the household) through the high-status, business title of “CEO” that, for her personally, means “Cleaner-Educator-Operator”, instead of Chief Executive Officer. While she has never held the corporate position of CEO during the 15 years of her professional career, Nikki seems to be well-versed with a CEO’s role and she has given good thought about how to best describe her (mundane) familial duties in an extravagant, professional-sounding manner, as she further describes:

“I came up with this term because I understand that a real CEO in the company takes charge of a lot of things. He has major responsibilities on his shoulders. So I think, if I look at my family as an entity, as a company, I am definitely the CEO. Because yes, my husband brings back the bacon. But without me distributing the bacon carefully and putting them aside, I mean, it would be meaningless”.

Nikki also draws a sharp, gendered contrast between the roles played by “he” (in the public, paid role) and her (in the private, unpaid role at home); she seems to accept the gendered division of labour in her family, but this does not go without issue:

“Upon the arrival of my second child, my girl, I stopped working completely. And this is the beginning of the toughest journey in my life: To be a hundred percent housewife and stay home mother to the two children”.

To be “a hundred percent housewife” has been “tough” on Nikki; a “housewife” brings to Nikki’s mind an image of a woman confined to solely performing mundane caregiving activities, such as “sewing” and “ironing” (examples Nikki provides in the conversations) for her family. Like Nikki, Stella finds the term
“housewife” an equally unappealing and inferior label to use; as a stay-at-home
mother, Stella feels that such a label does not adequately reflect the identity she
wants others to see (or the duties that she herself performs at home):

“I don’t like the word “housewife”, because I don’t think I am a housewife, because I don’t really do chores and cooking that much. But I would say I am a stay-at-home mother whereby I look after the children and play with the children. I spend time with the children. And sometimes, when people ask, I tell people that I work in the Ministry of Home Affairs, my own home affairs [laugh]...Because I don’t think I do that much of household chores enough to call myself a housewife. And I guess, it is a stigma that people give to housewife. It is like somebody who is old, somebody who doesn’t know anything about the society, or doesn’t know anything about the world [laugh]. But I don’t think it fits young moms like us. I think I would say the same for myself. As young moms, we are still quite up to date”.

Stella’s reference of “we” in her description of a group of “young mothers” (like her) points to the prevalence of how Asian culture commonly regards a stay-at-home mother as a “housewife” (Zheng, 2014), a label that is considered by many participants as containing negative meanings (conjuring images of an old lady who is isolated in her domestic responsibilities and who has limited knowledge of the external world, as Stella highlights). While Nikki rejects the “housewife” label by adopting her “CEO” title, Stella’s rejection (of the “housewife” name) is reflected in her reframing of her domestic job through her former corporate role at the Ministry of Home Affairs; she sees herself working in her own home affair. Holding such a position at home (and adopting such a corporate title) gives Stella a sense of the power that she used to feel in her former workplace:

“I don’t know why, I think I just feel that, I like being in such a work place, work environment, whereby I have the power in a way [laugh]. So working in the Home Affair Ministry at that time, it kind of gives me a mandate, kind of power. I feel a sense of authority over certain people. So the client who comes to me in a way, sees me working in the Ministry. And in the Ministry I am a public servant, a civil servant. And I feel quite proud to be called, to work as a civil servant”.

Like Nikki, Stella’s use of her former office position at home amalgamates the central attributes (such as “power” and “authority”) of her prior occupation to the
domestic role, creating a sense of empowerment in her current familial position. In addition, Stella’s reframing of her maternal identity also aims to correct the “misconception” society has in paralleling stay-at-home motherhood with a Tai-Tai (a woman who reportedly has lots of free time on her hands to enjoy herself and her own leisure pursuits):

“People may say things like, stay-at-home mothers, you are a Tai-Tai, spend time outside of home and all those things. Because a lot of them have a misconception about stay-at-home mother that we have a lot of time to do our own things...Basically, I just want to tell people, stay-at-home mother is like Ministry of Home Affairs, we do a lot of important things which actually comes with the reward”.

According to Stella, people view her maternal job with a sense of ridicule because a stay-at-home mother (or Tai-Tai) is perceived by many to have lots of free time on her hands. Singaporean culture measures worth and achievement almost solely in terms of material wealth (Barr & Skrbis, 2008) and the intensive work of rearing children at home is often viewed by many people as being unproductive (Crittenden, 2010; Zheng, 2014). Several participants, including Nikki and Stella as the above examples demonstrate, therefore, reject the housewife and Tai-Tai labels by accentuating the more productive dimension of their enactment of motherhood, through the use of professional-sounding titles at home.

Furthermore, in the same way as Nikki and Stella, Nova sees herself through the lens of a corporate title when describing her role at home:

“...I think, I know how to be an advisor to my husband. He works. He has a lot of things on his mind about career, about teamwork, about difficult bosses at his workplace, and all kind of things. So roughly, I know what he is talking about, and how to help him to go through that period...With my knowledge and past experience, I know how to position myself. I know when to stop saying things, or when I need to hug him, or even encourage him...My past experience helps me to be an equivalent partner to him. So I know what he is talking about, which direction, I think, he should take”.

Drawing on her past work experience, Nova seeks to qualify herself to be her husband’s “advisor”, a position that, as Nova sees it, signifies the possession of
professional experience and knowledge and that appreciates the intricacy of the working world. Nova’s use of the term “advisor”, meanwhile, implies that she holds an equal standing at home as, and is not subservient to, her husband.

Organisation research supports the view that individuals experience an “identity gap” when transitioning from one work role to another (Ibarra, 2007, p. 3). People dissolve their past identities, and in liminality, they immerse themselves in a process of identity construction when dealing with new work settings, as a necessary part of human adaptation to change (Alvesson, Lashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Becker & Carper, 1956b; Ibarra, 1999). Many participants discuss their experience of a loss of identity, of self-esteem, of external validation, and of independence as they move from a paid work role to that of the unpaid role of stay-at-home mother (Rubin & Wooten, 2007).

Organisation literature also asserts that societies grant professionals with a higher level of prestige than non-professionals, because the former is associated with the possession of unique knowledge and skill sets (Larson, 1977). Mothers with a paid employment background are also perceived to have more favourable personal traits and competencies than their unemployed mother counterparts (Etaugh & Petroski, 1985; Etaugh & Poertner, 1991). The participants’ adoption of the professional designations in their motherhood roles is a sign that the women were uneasy with being just a mom and were eager to let other people know that they were professionals. In adopting their professional work titles at home, the women demonstrate their desire to be recognised as mothers “who have been out in the world and have that experience to bring to the table” (Rubin & Wooten, 2007, p. 341).

Furthermore, the narratives of the participants highlight the women’s struggle in reconciling their positive elements of self (that is, their former professional work experiences) with negative aspects of self (such as the undesirable association with the housewife and Tai-Tai labels) by reframing their domestic role in the form of corporate titles and roles, moderating the negative nuances linked to stay-
at-home motherhood; this parallels a recent consumer study (Karanika & Hogg, 2010, p. 1091) that explores the interrelationships between desired and undesired selves, and how the interplay between the “conflicting” and “compatible” aspects of the selves contributes to consumer identity construction.

In addition to reframing themselves in professional terms during their maternal stay-at-home mother roles, several participants also employ professional techniques which they acquired through previous salaried employment to help them deal with caregiving at home. The next section will discuss how a number of participants exercise a range of occupational methods to navigate around motherhood affair and domestic issues.

4.3.3.3 Use of Occupational Techniques at Home. In the course of the interviews, a number of participants provide wide-ranging accounts of how their familial roles are supported through the techniques they learned in the workplace to help get things done at home. Many participants use their specialised approaches, such as the “Fishbone diagram”, “study methodology”, and “time management tool” (which will be clarified later), to aid the women in performing familial responsibilities and running the household more efficiently; Nova, Tiffany, Yvette, and Estelle, for example, discuss how their professional backgrounds influence the way they work at home (and thus their performance of motherhood). Nova, a former mechanical engineer, was trained to be goal-oriented by her former employer; such skills now help Nova to prioritise her tasks at home:

“*But my work experience and study help me to see what is important versus what is urgent. I know how to differentiate them. I know how to see daily needs versus future needs of, say, the children and start to have a diagram in my head, on what is needed now and what is needed later, and how to plan to achieve that goal*."

Moreover, Nova’s project management proficiency and skills (which she gained from her time working within a global mobile phone corporation) comes in handy
to assist her in managing a myriad of activities relating to childrearing and her home business:

“I am quite organised; that is what my husband actually calls me, “organised” [laugh]. So I plan ahead of time. Of course, from doing a lot of projects in my company before, I now know how to plan...We knew that, in one year, how many projects we wanted to do. Among those projects, how many is a daily programme versus regular project. Because we have a lot of projects and things in the company, I needed to have a diagram in my head, to see how we organise time. It can be a timetable. It can be a Fishbone diagram. Basically, I needed to be clear myself about what needed to be done and by when. So when handling the kids and all their activities, and also some baking activities at home, and now that we try to sell things online in my home business, basically, I need to have a plan, what I need to do, and how to achieve that”.

Nova often visualises a diagram in her head to methodically organise her children’s events and household affairs; she utilises an engineering concept called the “Fishbone diagram”, introduced to her at her previous workplace, to help untangle conflicting tasks and devise her family plans. Nova perceives that the use of such methods at home makes her a “better parent” because the techniques enable her to track her children’s learning and plan for their development more effectively:

“Now as a mother of two kids, two boys, besides planning their time, I also plan their tuition classes, let’s say what tuition I want them to go, and by when I want them to finish the activity. I want my son to be able to read before he attends kindergarten. In kindergarten, he will have to get other skills. At nursery, I pushed him in the phonic class since he has interest in reading. Basically, we are planning ahead, what kind of skills he needs to get and by when. Then at the same time at home, I can do more hands-on works. I know roughly how to build a prototype from Styrofoam or carton box. Also, how to make a robot or a play house. How to source for the equipment or material. I think mechanically. I can see and understand the concept quick. About fixing the kids’ toys, I am a better person than my husband [laugh]. When things drop and are broken, or when the mechanics of things suddenly stop working, my husband will pass it onto me, and say this is my job [laugh]”.

Nova’s mechanical thought process is as useful at home as Tiffany’s diverse corporate skillsets which she acquired while working as a banker. Tiffany’s
parenting approach is geared toward equipping her children with the necessary “life skills” in order to help them face the world, as Tiffany comments:

“So we can guide them along the way about how they deal with friendship, how they deal with other people, how they deal with human psychology, how they speak, how they present themselves in front of different groups of people, their telephone skills, the way they greet people, all these skills will help them in their life next time. But for me, whatever I know, I try my best to impart to them: telephone skills, little things like telephone skills. The way they pick up the call, I don’t like it, I will correct them on how you should pick up the phone, how you should greet people, how you should address people. I am not perfect, but nobody is perfect. We are all learning right? So children need constant reminders...How we teach them how to deal with this kind of situation in school, so that my children are better equipped with life skills to front the world”.

Tiffany’s mothering style also emphasises the use of the right methods to achieve desired results; these methods are intended to train Tiffany’s children in areas such as self-presentation, personal communications, and how to manage oneself and other people (which Tiffany also terms “human psychology”). Tiffany further says:

“In the event that I find a certain method doesn’t really work, I would have to change my method, methodology! And this aspect will help them. If they have a dispute at school, how we teach them how to deal with it, how to be emotionally detached from all this kind of things. That is silly if you look back after a while. Petty issues, and tell them to understand what is important to them. What they should hold to their heart and what comments from a person that tried to evoke a certain emotion, how do you deal with that kind of situation? Understanding people and understanding yourself; this is customer service basically. Understanding people and understanding yourself; it is nothing more than that, right”.

Like Nova who is highly organised in her approach to guiding her children in their learning, Tiffany’s way of supporting her children’s study is methodical and “process-oriented”. Tiffany also acknowledges that she is task-oriented when it comes to aiding her children with their schoolwork:

“There is this aspect in organisations we always talked about: process improvement. We talk about process, procedures. Same thing when I apply
to the children’s studies. There must be some kind of process, there is a study methodology. You have to feedback to me, and we can come up with new processes if that doesn’t work. And when in the office, we were constrained by time. We were supposed to be task-oriented, right? So in studying, you also need to manage your time. You need to be task-oriented, at what time I do this, at what time I must complete that. There must be timeline, deadline. And you must finish by what time. When they grow older, they will just be able to internalise it and understand that better”.

In the interviews, Tiffany also makes reference to how the work culture at her previous workplaces encouraged employees to manage their time efficiently in order to get tasks completed on time. Tiffany, moreover, reveals that her mothering orientation is influenced by how her previous work organisations managed time. Tiffany aims to instil the same time management principles and work ethic in her children to help develop such skills from an early age. Meanwhile, in a similar manner as Nova and Tiffany, Yvette incorporates her counselling experience (which she developed while working as a social worker) when interacting with her toddler son:

“With regards to counselling experience, when I was on the ground in the social service sector, when I was counselling youth, it helps now when I have to counsel Sean (son) at his age as a toddler...Yeah, so it really takes a lot of my experiences as a counsellor to see myself out of the situation when I am very angry, and ask him why you have to do that? We as counsellor, we have to bear in mind to use less of “you” statement and more of “I” statement. And then we have to use more of open ended question which I feel my skill is very rusty now. More open-ended question than closed ended question. And if I want to ask my son how his school is, I have to make sure that the question is not too broad for him to understand. And the experiences that I have as a counsellor help”.

In enacting her previous professional counsellor self at home, Yvette occasionally makes mistakes, and she feels the need to further refine her communication approach to help improve mother-son bonding; she reports:

“Yeah, so when he comes from school, sometimes I just ask, “How is school?” Then I am like, okay, this question is really bad. So I will revise and ask, “Did you go to the playground today?” Then he will say it. So I said, “Who was there?” Then he will say, “Donald” (son’s friend). Then I have to do a lot of thinking with him, and when he gets naughty, I will not
ask “why do you that”, because “why” is very condemning, so we have to use a lot of “what”. What makes you do this? What makes you do that? And then when he does something, so instead of saying too many “no” because it can get very depressing. I have to keep reminding myself not to use a lot of “no” or say the negative. Instead, I will say, “perhaps you can try doing this, you know”. But I don’t do that successfully. I don’t do it very well. I am still trying to learn. So my past work helps”.

Furthermore, Yvette also perceives that her prior counselling background helps her to see things “more objectively” and helps her to be more confident in dealing with higher authorities (such as her son’s school principal and teacher):

“When I was in my previous company, I learnt a lot from speaking to authorities, so with the confidence of speaking to the authorities now, I find that helps when I have to speak to the Principal and Sean’s (son’s) teachers. So with the issues that his teacher is calling me now, I have to sit back and then use the counselling experiences that I have to negotiate with the authority. I will say, okay, now this is the issue: He is not behaving in class; I will ask him, I am assuming and I am not sure if you want to resolve this behaviour issue. So I put it like presenting issue of my son...So I was just wondering if there are triggers or factors or antecedent events regarding this. So I think I need a lot of social skills when I have to manage this issue with the school, and I don’t know, but I feel that my work experience helps me to be a bit more objective”.

In the meantime, Estelle, who has work experience in the financial industry, is particular about managing her time at home as efficiently as how she used to operate in her workplace:

“I think the life we have in Singapore, being a productive nation it is, we have been trained to multitask and work in multiple roles. So I think I acquired this multitasking ability also [laugh]. Like this morning, I cooked hashbrown for you, and boiled water, and cut the fruit at the same time, all in 10 minutes, you know. So when I do house work, I wash, mop the floor, and cook something, all at the same time. So in a sense, I want to manage my time effectively. It is about time management”.

Having being used to have her office time planned systematically and organised electronically for her by a personal assistant (in her former paid work role), Estelle feels the need to now use an electronic planner at home to help her manage activities at home and outside the family site:
“I organise my schedule, my time slot, just like my personal assistant used to do, block my time for appointments with people and clients. Now at home, I also block my time, for people who want my time. If my children want to see me, they must block my time too [laugh]. So indirectly, that behaviour at my workplace is here with me now at home”.

Estelle acknowledges that her professional time management habits (of using the electronic planner) help her to run her household more efficiently, especially as Estelle becomes more involved in community activities. Through the use of the electronic-based time planning method, Estelle assembles a support system to give her a sense of order and control over her time, as Estelle highlights:

“Yeah, I have a planner which I adopt and I enjoy it. In fact, I share it with my children. I encourage them to adopt the same thing. In fact, we share the planner together. I have my planner. It is a mobile app, and once at home, I will place it there on the table. The children will check my schedule and they will let me know if they need my involvement. Then they will block my time or they will say like, “Mom, I have this activity at school, parent’s workshop or teacher wants to meet with parent”. So what day, what time, then I would say, I would tell them, “Yes” or “No”.”

Initially, this time management practice was used by her alone. But now, having felt the enormous benefits the time management system has brought her, Estelle has started to introduce the mobile application to her two (teenage) children. Her planner application is shared with her children so they can view Estelle’s available time slots to then book her time when they need their mother’s involvement (generally for school-related meetings and interactions).

The adoption of digital technology, such as the use of electronic devices, by women at home has been previously studied (Venkatraman, 2012); technologies are consumed at home for a variety of reasons, including to make life easier (Ustuner & Holt, 2007), to help run the household more efficiently (Venkatraman, 2012), or even for entertainment value (Arnould & Price, 1993). Estelle’s consumption of the online time planning system as a parenting tool resonates with a previous study which investigated the role of digital technologies at home and
how mothers use them to help organise their households (such as checking the weather online before dressing children for school and completing domestic chores using technology as a tool) (Venkatraman, 2012). At the same time, Estelle’s digital consumption charts the role of technology further in the construction of an efficient mother identity; that is, a mother who manages her time adeptly to juggle between maternal and non-maternal responsibilities at home, socialising her children into the future of the working world.

The discussion in this section presents the ways the stay-at-home mothers amalgamate a repertoire of work competencies (acquired during their former professional employment) into the new work role at home. Organisation researchers suggest that, when moving to a new job, experienced professionals carry with them the know-how that they have acquired through their previous roles to help them adjust to their new work environments (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). The use of the occupational methods by these participants authenticates their sense of professionalism in the process of enacting their work-based identity at home.

4.3.3.4 Use of Occupational Terminologies at Home. In discussing their maternal labour and family life, furthermore, several participants use corporate jargon to help explain their mundane domestic activities. Tiffany, Nikki, and Sonia describe their home life with certain occupational terms that they used and acquired in their previous workplace. For example, Tiffany explains what she wants to achieve as a stay-at-home mother using a business-like principle, “KPI”\(^{73}\), to explain her goals:

“...the at-home mother role is not easy because, that unknowingly becomes your own self-imposed KPIs. You may not have realised that you have set a KPIs for yourself, inside you, you have set certain KPIs which you want to achieve, right, unspoken KPIs that you need to meet. For me, it would be how to teach them well, how to instil the right values, how to be their mother, their counsellor, their tuition teacher”.

\(^{73}\) KPI stands for Key Performance Indicator, a metric used in business to assess factors that are critical to the success of the companies.
Furthermore, the form of language that Tiffany uses to illustrate the areas her children need to learn about sounds very formal; the adoption of such terminologies, she rationalises, is influenced by her professional background:

“Yes, because if I have been a homemaker all this while without work, I don’t think I will be able to help on this people management aspect. Not at all, I won’t be able to talk about responsiveness. I won’t be able to tell or teach them about how to analyse some human behaviour and mannerism”.

Throughout the conversations Tiffany frequently articulates business-sounding terms, including “people management”, “human psychology”, “customer service”, “EQ”74, and “self-awareness” – business concepts that appear clear to her – to describe the competencies she wants her children to learn from her, and to be good at. Tiffany infers that because of her (paid) work experience, she possesses advanced knowledge to make her mothering style more progressive than her own mother’s way of bringing her up.

Furthermore, like Tiffany, Nikki also utilises corporate terms to help elaborate some of her mundane domestic work. Drawing a parallel between her stay-at-home mother role and a company’s CEO, Nikki uses business-sounding jargon to describe how she runs her household:

“So it is like a real CEO in the company, he has to structure. He has to know how to delegate, and he has to structure and departmentalise. So it is in some way, in my house, I need to departmentalise things. I need to allocate funds. I need to do the right things at the right time”.

In the meantime, Sonia, a registered nurse who formerly worked for a private hospital, uses such terms such as, among others, “holistic approach” (a belief which, she says, is derived from her company) to refer to a mothering approach that covers aspects of her children’s physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing:

“When I was in the hospital, I was taught to use the holistic approach, which means we take care of the patients physically and mentally... we

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74 EQ stands for Emotional Quotient or is also known as emotional intelligence. It is the ability to be aware of one’s own emotion and other’s emotion state (Goleman, 1998).
don’t see the physical side only. Now at home, it’s the same approach that I use for the kids [laughs]. I see that I use the holistic approach. I take care of them physically… their physical needs. And I also want to make sure mentally they develop healthily, spiritually they are growing. So I use that same approach, too”.

Thus far, the participants, such as Tiffany, Nikki, and Sonia, utilise formal terminologies that they have learnt about in their former professional lives to describe – and help manage – their mundane homemaking and caregiving activities. Their corporate jargon encapsulates the professionally-situated recollections and meanings as coherent with the good mother identities that they want to construct. For these women, the use of occupation-related language seems to help constitute, manage, and enact their working sense of self in their new (unpaid) work setting at home. In Singapore, where stay-at-home, educated women are seen as “a waste” (as Adele comments) and home-based caregiving work is not valued by society as a whole (see also Crittenden, 2010; Zheng, 2014), describing their new familial role in a professional manner appears to help the women derive a sense of worth and meaning from their motherhood experiences.

Within organisational contexts, researchers find that professional workers engage in identity reconstruction when moving from one job to another (Ibarra, 2007; Ibarra, 1999). Veteran workers who change corporate roles bring with them a set of knowledge and behaviours learned from their prior workplace to the new role (Brim, 1968) to adapt to, and become better assimilated with, the new work setting (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). In the same manner, the participants do not transition to the home-based roles tabula rasa; they carry with them a repertoire of cognitions and behaviours learned from their past professional roles to their stay-at-home motherhood, a demanding duty that makes full use of the women’s (paid work) experiences, as Crum (2005, p. 40) describes:

“no paying job will ever be as difficult or rewarding as motherhood. No job will ever require and develop such a diversity of job skills: creativity, endurance, patience, fortitude, knowledge, intuition, and the ability to make snap decisions”.
Similar to how the experienced professionals adapt to their new work environments (Beyer & Hannah, 2002), at home the participants leverage on their former professional capital (such as occupation-related titles, techniques, and terminologies) to help reconstruct their sense of self that projects images of a mother who is competent, effective, and productive (Rubin & Wooten, 2007). The use of such corporate titles, techniques, and terminologies in the home environment, in addition, reveals the participants’ struggle to balance and reconcile the conflicting demands of stay-at-home motherhood and paid work. The professional-inspired work titles, techniques, and terminologies used by the participants, moreover, represent transitional consumption objects to help the women migrate from one work domain to another (Belk, 1992; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Noble & Walker, 1997; Schouten, 1991a; Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006).

4.3.4 Conclusion to this Section

The three global themes in the preceding sections collectively describe the ways in which the participants construct good motherhood in the context of the competing national discourses and socio-cultural forces surrounding women’s roles in Singapore. The first global theme (section 4.3.1) elucidates the participants’ conception of stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career; these participants feel obliged to perform home-based maternal duties, but have a pre-specified timeframe in mind to enable them to eventually return to paid work. In enacting their home-centred maternal role, the women engage in a balancing strategy to help reclaim their sense of independence by pursuing self-development and commercial projects (which in turn facilitates their self-development). In the process, the women delegate some of their familial responsibilities to third-party care providers located outside their home; this is discussed in the second global theme (section 4.3.2). Finally, the third global theme (section 4.3.3) presents how the participants adapt to, and reframe their stay-at-home motherhood identity through the professionally-derived capital to enact identities that seek to resolve
the women’s competing roles in the society as good mother and productive worker.

4.4 Conclusion

The stories from the 10 individual participants present a rich picture of identity construction processes in life transitions. The three global themes which emerge from the individual stories, *stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional career, commercialisation of family life at home*, and *professionalisation of motherhood*, shed light on the fluid interplay of the diverse, yet interrelated, sense of selves of the women in transition. What emerges from these themes are complex accounts of how heterogeneous identity goals coexist in the women’s motherhood practices, in the context of the wide-ranging socio-political forces within Singaporean society. In support of Epp and Price (2008), it is suggested that consumer identity should no longer be conceptualised as an individuated entity where its construction process resides within an individual mind alone; instead, consumer identity should be recognised as a diverse but interlocked entity (comprising of personal, relational, and collective selves) that compete and collaborate with one another, mutually constructed in action as discussed across the three global themes.

These research findings add new insights to consumer research and generate implications for marketers, organisation managers, and policymakers. These research contributions and implications in turn will be presented in the next Chapter 5 (Discussion and Conclusion).
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to explore the notion of identity as a mutually constructed concept, moving away from the traditional perspective that conceptualises identity as an individuated entity (Epp & Price, 2008). Set in the context of role transition, this thesis examines how the participants – professional career women who have taken the decision to give up their paid work to prioritise their family life and assume the role of stay-at-home mother – adapt to their (unpaid) caregiving roles at home. As presented in the previous chapter (Chapter 4: Research Findings), the findings unravel the complexities surrounding the women’s co-constitution processes of good motherhood, which have addressed the research questions as follows:

Research Question 1: How do the participants make sense of their role transition (and identity changes related to it) from their professional career life to home-based motherhood? The narratives of the participants (presented in Chapter 4: Research Findings) highlight how the women conceive their stay-at-home motherhood as a transitional role with a view of returning to paid work in the near future. The participants negotiate the dialectic ideological tension between stay-at-home motherhood and paid work through their involvement in commercial ventures and self-development initiatives within the private space of their homes. For instance, the women monetise their maternity at home by running a weblog-based business, home-based bakery, and online retail shop. The participants also seek to keep their professional skills updated at home by pursuing a diverse range of self-development programmes (such as baking, academic training, and physical fitness regimes) to help restore their sense of worth and self-reliance as stay-at-home mothers. The women, in reconciling the dialectic of domesticity and paid work, blur the boundary between home and work.

Furthermore, the participants see their stay-at-home mother role in the corporate light with the use of their occupational capital (including professional titles, techniques, and languages) to amalgamate the central characteristics of their
(former) professional self (such as power and effectiveness) with their home-based roles, creating a sense of empowerment and professionalism in their current familial position. The traditional attributes that generally characterise home and work are transposed as the women seek to construct good mothering by weaving a path between intensive motherhood and professional career.

**Research Question 2:** How do diverse identity goals interplay in the co-construction of the women’s identity? How does the confluence of socio-cultural forces shape the women’s identity constitution? The research findings (in Chapter 4: Research Findings) highlight that Singaporean women are expected to play an economically productive role outside their family and contribute to the national economy (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). At the same time, the patriarchal Singaporean society sees women as the primary caregiver within the family and they are encouraged to have more children to address the nation’s declining birth rate (Nasir & Turner, 2014; Stivens, 2007).

As Singaporean women are called to be productive both at (paid) work and at home (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999), the participants strive to frame a version of good motherhood that reconciles the oppositional nature of women’s simultaneous role as mother and worker. The participants – in the process of considering leaving their professional career for stay-at-home motherhood – were influenced by the advice of their colleagues (at their workplace) and their family members (at home). Alongside the pervasive intensive mothering ideology that is at play (Hays, 1996), the participants’ spouses, siblings, parents, children, and close acquaintances variously help shape the women’s performances and practices of good motherhood through everyday encounters and interactions. As the research findings have presented in the previous chapter, this highlights how the women’s relational self-definitions coexist, compete, and cooperate as they enact culturally-constructed good motherhood, in relation to a politically-induced struggle for gender equality within the patriarchal Singaporean society.
**Research Question 3:** What factors inform the assimilation of identity as the women transition from their professional careers into home-based motherhood?

The accounts of the participants (described in Chapter 4: Research Findings) elaborate how the women use occupational titles such as “CEO” (of the family) and “advisor” (to the husband) to describe their roles at home. The participants, in addition, adopt occupational techniques (such as electronic-based time management and problem-solving methods) in managing their households. The women also use business-sounding terminologies (such as “customer service” and “Key Performance Indicator”) to explain how they perform their caregiving roles. The participants carry with them a repertoire of cognitions and behaviours learned from their past professional careers which they assimilate into their stay-at-home motherhood. This professionally-inspired capital (such as occupational titles, techniques, and terminologies) forms a vessel which transports the women from one life domain to another.

Building on these research findings, this chapter discusses the contributions and implications of this thesis at three main levels: (1) theoretical contributions, (2) managerial implications, and (3) policy implications. Section 5.1 explores the theoretical significance of this thesis which rest on the contribution that this thesis makes towards conceiving consumer identity as a co-constructed entity (which moves away from the traditional view of identity as an individualistic notion). This section sheds greater light on the confluence of sociocultural forces in shaping identity construction processes (Epp & Price, 2008), highlighting the malleability of identity to help the participants enact their version of good motherhood, which in turn redefines the meaning of home and changes the relationship between mothers and the market.

Section 5.2 discusses how the findings of this thesis contribute towards marketing and human resource practices at a managerial level. The marketing implication concerns how marketing managers can shift their commercial thinking from individual to relational customer satisfaction, accounting for customers’ diverse identity goals in designing company solutions (Epp & Price, 2011). The human
resource implication, furthermore, highlights the need for talent managers to recognise the diversity of the workplace and the importance of family life by adopting more progressive employment practices to enable employees to realise their full potential (as employees and parents) and help employers achieve organisational excellence.

Section 5.3 reviews the contribution of this thesis from a public policy perspective; it reviews how the state of Singapore can foster social policies that are family-friendly, and how best to encourage mothers to be gainfully employed (or reemployed) to address the aging and shrinking population of skilled workers in Singapore (Wong, 2015c; Yap & Gee, 2015). Discussions of future research possibilities based on the research findings from this thesis and the limitations of this study are then presented in section 5.4. Figure 5.0 offers a map of this chapter and its major sections.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

Gaps exist in the current understanding of how consumer identity is conceived, and more specifically, how diverse identity goals coexist, cooperate, and compete in the co-construction of consumer identity (Epp & Price, 2008). This thesis has made progress in highlighting the interplay of heterogeneous identities (such as individual, relational, and collective sense of selves) and how the confluence of sociocultural factors influences the co-constitution of consumer identity (Epp & Price, 2008). This section offers three theoretical applications: it highlights the malleability of professional identity within the context of domain transition (section 5.1.1), points towards professional mothering as a good mother identity enacted by the participants in this study (section 5.1.2), and highlights the redefinition (and commercialisation) of home and the mother-market relationship (section 5.1.3).
5.1.1 Professional Identity as an Enduring Sense of Self in Domain Transition

Organisation research has investigated identity transitions that occur, for example, when a worker is promoted to a management role or an individual switches from one job to another within the realm of paid work (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2007). But the existing literature has paid little attention to domain identity transitions,
which is defined as the identity transitions that take place when a person’s established (paid) work identity must be adapted to be integrated with a change in a non-work identity (e.g., becoming a mother) (Ladge, Clair & Greenberg, 2012, p. 1449). This thesis, exploring role transition of the participants who engage in domain movement from professional work to stay-at-home motherhood, builds upon the insights from organisation research by shedding light on how the participants’ identity transition takes place and the elements that enable the process of identity migration.

The phrase “you are what you do” captures the significance of paid work activities to a person’s self-definition (Ibarra, 2007, p. 11). Existing literature in organisation research suggests that what people do professionally is an important means by which they construct their identities (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Becker & Carper, 1956a; Becker & Carper, 1956b). In the world of professional work, becoming is a matter of learning by doing; a person picks up a new craft by becoming involved in the practices of a social community rather than by getting immersed into an abstract body of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Literature in organisation research, furthermore, characterises professional identity as a relatively enduring entity, meaning the occupational sense of self is malleable and migrates with workers as they change employment and work organisations as part of the workers’ strategies to adjust to a new work environment (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Ibarra, 2007; Schein, 1978).

In this research project, professional identity (as a type of self-concept) was found to be relatively stable and enduring; this self-definition resists the change in social environments (as the participants transition from their workplace to their home environment). Professional identity was found central in, and important to, the participants’ lives. This identity has a high degree of continuity across time and situation (Ibarra, 2007). At the same time, professional identity is also seen as fluid and malleable; it adapts to, and assimilates with, the new (home) environment as the participants seek to enact their good mother identity (i.e., the women, to help them enact good motherhood, draw on their skills and practices
acquired earlier in their professional roles). While some change is possible to the elements of professional identity (such as occupational titles or techniques), the core of a person’s professional identity (i.e. ideologies associated with one’s profession or paid work role) does not change as easily. This finding aligns with existing research which claims that the self-concept is both stable and malleable (see for example, Markus & Kunda, 1986); this literature has documented that identity is a stable and enduring structure that protects itself against change; however, identity has also been acknowledged to change into different selves under different social environments (Markus & Kunda, 1986).

As the research findings have illustrated, the participants’ role transition from the workplace to home life initiates a process that sees the women retain certain elements of their central, behaviourally-anchored (paid work) sense of self while exploring a new (home-based maternal) identity as a personal strategy to adapt to, and assimilate into, their new environment at home (Ibarra, 2007). These elements of the participants’ paid work identity enable the women’s sense of self to migrate across to a new domain (from paid work to their home-based environment), which (in the cases of Nikki, Stella, Nova, Tiffany, Yvette, Estelle, and Sonia) variably includes the women drawing on former work titles, professional techniques and behaviours, and occupational terminologies learnt in the workplace to help manage motherhood at home. This professional capital, embodying special meanings and experiences, provide the participants with a sense of the past, without which they feel a sense of discontinuity and confusion (as in the cases of Adele, Inez, and Estelle).

In a similar way to how new employees deploy their professional resources (such as a sense of who they are and professional know-how) obtained from previous experiences in sense-making about their new work role and organisation (Beyer & Hannah, 2002), the participants in this study gained a sense of familiarity and security in their new (home-based) role by utilising their repertoire of professional cognitions and behaviours obtained from their paid work experiences (with the women drawing on former occupational titles, techniques, and terminologies,
acquired in their prior paid work role at home). The occupational titles, techniques, and terminologies represent the enduring elements of professional identity, forming a *vessel* to transport the participants’ sense of selves (from their former workplace to their new, home-based environment), helping the women construct scripts of a *good* mother identity at home which will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.2 Professional Mothering as a Construction of Good Motherhood

Social science scholars have explored – and provided rich descriptions of – the ascendant cultural ideologies surrounding motherhood and paid work (for instance, see Carrigan & Duberley, 2013; Christopher, 2012; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Garey, 1995; Johnston & Swanson, 2007). This section highlights *professional mothering* as a distinct way through which the participants navigated the *intensive mother* and *professional worker* ideologies to help construct their own accounts of *good* mothering at home. The accounts of the participants demonstrate that many women involve themselves in commercial projects and self-development activities to signal their economic productivity at home and to deliberately neutralise the negative label of *housewife* and *Tai-Tai* often directed at them within Singaporean society; this signifies the women’s striving towards reconciling the tension between intensive mothering ideal and, simultaneously, expectations for them to be a *productive* worker in the enactment of a *more realistic* home-based motherhood role.

The significant increase in mothers’ employment rates over the last few decades has challenged the workplace ideology and good motherhood discourse that have not changed as quickly as mothers themselves. For instance, many social science researchers have documented how traditional gender role ideologies and inflexible workplaces constrain mothers’ ability to combine caregiving and paid work (Christopher, 2012; Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010). Women often need to decide whether to work for pay while mothering or make mothering their sole role.
(Dillaway & Paré, 2008). This is a decision that is gendered as men do not appear to face the same kind of constraints (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b, p. 3; Stivens, 2007); this picture, however, is slowly changing, particularly in Europe, where men are increasingly being called to have greater involvement in parenthood – a movement which is supported by legislative changes (Duvander & Andersson, 2010; Wissö & Plantin, 2015). Many women seek to weave paid work into motherhood, and construct various scripts of good mothering, which include "extensive mothering" (Christopher, 2012, p. 73), "night-shift" mothering (Garey, 1995, p. 415), and "mumpreneurs" (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012, p. 629). In a distinct way, professional mothering seeks to bridge the dichotomy of women’s physical locations (of home and workplace) and to resolve the dialectic tension of women’s roles (as mother and worker) in society.

Professional mothering in a way resembles the "work-at-home mother" who maintains her caregiving duty and undertakes paid work from within the private space of the home (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 454). Both professional and work-at-home mothers – who position themselves in a location and time (being at home during the day) that is deemed culturally appropriate – identify themselves as stay-at-home (and therefore, good) mothers even though they engage in paid work, and consequently are unable to give their constant attention to their children (Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Garey, 1995, p. 415). Like "night-shift" mothers (Garey, 1995) and "mumpreneurs" (Duberley & Carrigan, 2012), professional mothering allows the women to perform both (unpaid) child care and paid work without the "social sanction" because the women work hard to "minimise the visibility and impact of their paid work on family activities and vice versa" (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 455; Garey, 1995). Whereas the term professional motherhood has been used to generally describe mothers who engage in paid work outside their homes (for instance, refer to Hays, 1996; Howe, 1996) or to label stay-at-home mothers who adopt professional ideologies in managing their families (refer to Martin, 2009), this thesis highlights professional mothering as a personal strategy through which the participants blurred the divide between being
at work and being at home – as they constantly had to negotiate between the demands of stay-at-home motherhood and their professional career.

On the one hand, human resources are Singapore’s main national asset and the state is pushing to mobilise every single person (regardless of gender) to help grow the national economy (Bastion, 2005). On the other hand, declining birth rates and society’s traditional views of gender roles hinder the greater participation of women in the labour market (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999; Stivens, 2007). This thesis proposes the relevance of professional mothering as a means by which to understand how mothers navigate their caregiving and economic roles in relation to a pervasive discourse within the Singaporean society, which centers on a politically-influenced struggle for gender equality.

5.1.3 Redefinition of Home and Mother-Market Relationship

Home has traditionally been characterised as a space to relax and as a sanctuary to cultivate warm, personal relationships (Smith, 1994). It has also been described as an embracing concept for family, privacy, and self-identity (Hill, 1991; Valentine, 1999). Indeed, in “Haven in a Heartless World” Lasch (1977) paints a picture of home as a “haven” where workers seek refuge from the strenuous world of work.

In contrast, all of the (middle-class) women in this sample conceive home as beyond its conventional meanings; the participants reframe home as simultaneously both a personal space and a professional place where they weave a path between the competing ideologies of intensive mothering and the perceived need to hold a professional career. Contrary to the traditional notion of home, the participants do not position home as a place to relax. Home, for the women in this project, represents a social space where identity goals compete and cooperate at the individual, relational, and collective levels; it is where the participants negotiate their transition (from workplace to home) through the use of their
occupational capital, conceptualising familial activities as work-like to justify their change of physical location (but not necessarily their mentality). The women transform home to become a site for initiating entrepreneurial projects and self-development work. Home becomes the women’s efficient workspace where they engage in a juggling lifestyle and integrate assemblages of commercial family care into the management of their household (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014).

The meaning of home, thus, moves away from its (actual) physical location towards the activities household members perform within that space and the social definitions they lay upon it (Dillaway & Paré, 2008). The shift in how home is conceptualised challenges the notion of family in several ways (Epp & Price, 2008; Popenoe, 1989). First, families appear less directed towards collective (family) identity goals and more towards individualistic goals as parents (especially mothers) spend more time away from childcare activities, impairing individual household member’s commitments to maintaining certain enactments of family identity. Second, families seemingly perform fewer traditional functions as an increasing array of paid services (such as domestic maids, early childhood education providers, and catering services) allow parents to outsource almost any caregiving activity (for instance, in the cases of Adele, Nova, Sonia, Tiffany, and Ingrid). Third, as commercial care services are used more extensively, parents may gradually lose influence to non-familial institutions (such as child care institutions and other commercial care organisations). Ultimately, this challenges family’s subjective sense of its own continuity over time and creates issues in performances of family identity (Epp & Price, 2008).

The outsourcing of familial care to commercial enterprises outside the home, in addition, leads to what social science scholars call the commercialisation of intimate life (Hochschild, 2003; Schor, 2004); Hochschild (2003, p. 37) further observes:

“...the commercial substitutes for family activities often turn out to be better than the real thing. Just as the French bakery often makes better bread than
mother ever did, and the cleaning service cleans the house more thoroughly, so therapists may recognise feelings more accurately, and childcare workers prove more even-tempered than parents. In a sense, capitalism is not competing with itself, one company against another, but with the family, and particularly with the role of the wife and mother”.

While previous research sets up family and the markets dialectically (see for instance, Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004; Valentine, 1999) separating between the spheres of maternal love and money (Hays, 1996) and between the sacred (family) and profane (commerce) (Hochschild, 1997), this thesis finds that mothers’ relationships with the market are complex and not strictly dichotomous. Mothers (such as Adele, Nova, Tiffany, Sonia, Yvette, and Ingrid) bring the markets into family life, supporting their time-poor and overbooked lifestyle, to both substitute and supplement their parental care.

The participants view paid commercial services as a necessary evil and reframe the use of care assemblages (such as child care, domestic maid services, and catering services) as motherhood’s support system for their own and their children’s well-being. Mothers generate constantly evolving assemblages of familial care in order to protect family – not from the markets (as previous research indicate; see Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004; Valentine, 1999) but from the rigours and constraints of their daily life at home (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014).

5.1.4 Conclusion to this Section

This study provides empirical support to the notion that the self-concept is both enduring and malleable; this aligns with an earlier study which documents identity as both stable and fluid at the same time (Markus & Kunda, 1986). The findings address the “controversy” surrounding the two (seemingly) “contradictory” aspects of identity in prior literature (Greenwald, 1980; Markus & Kunda, 1986, p. 858). The stability and malleability of identity further manifests through the three elements associated with the professional identity – namely occupational
title, technique, and terminology – that enable this particular (professional) self-concept to both retain itself in, and react to, the new social environment.

In addition, the relevance of *professional mothering* is proposed as a means to understand how mothers resolve the dialectic tensions between intensive motherhood expectations and professional work ideology. The participants not only reconceive what constitutes good mothering, but also frame home-based maternity differently (for instance, as a transitional career and to include self-development projects as a preparation to help their return to the workforce) than the mothers reported in existing studies (for examples, Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Russo, 1976).

The notion of motherhood is culturally constructed (Hays, 1996) and different cultures may have different expectations in relation to gender roles (Ochiai, 2008b). Situated in the wide-ranging socio-cultural and political forces that are at play within Singaporean society, this thesis shines a light on how many of the current motherhood discourses are set predominantly in various European contexts (see Carrigan & Duberley, 2013; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006) and the US (see Christopher, 2012; Dillaway & Paré, 2008; Garey, 1995; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). This thesis infuses nuances to the existing motherhood discourses by looking at *good* motherhood enactment through an *extreme* socio-historical context in relation to pronounced, competing ideologies within Singaporean society which centres on a politically-driven struggle for gender parity.

The participants in this study also point towards the importance of maintaining their professional capital (i.e., skills development, entrepreneurial ventures, and education qualification improvement) while at home. This is in line with, and extends, a recent study exploring the experience of “*at-home fathers*” who strive to compensate their at-home *limitation* by investing in social, economic, and symbolic resources (i.e., domestic skills that distinguish them from at-home mothers, social networks, and savings through thrift) that support their collective
identity goals towards market legitimisation (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013, p. 38).

By approaching the study of identity through the *family* lens (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012), this study empirically supports the heterogeneous nature of identities, exploring the interplay among individual, relational, and collective (family) sense of selves. While prior literature on consumer identity predominantly focuses on identity as an autonomous entity, this research project highlights the significance of relational sense of selves whose identity goals coexist, cooperate, and compete in the co-constitution process of identity (Epp & Price, 2008; Kerrane, Bettany & Kerrane, 2015); this perspective offers a reformulation of the way we think about how consumers construct and manage tensions and synergies among individual, relational, and collective identities that get constituted in their selection and experience of activities (Epp & Price, 2008).

### 5.2 Managerial Implications

It is important for marketing managers to understand how consumers make decisions and how the multiplicity of consumer identities influences the consumer decision-making process. In addition, recognising the challenges of stay-at-home mothers with prior (paid) work experience in balancing their individual, relational, and collective goals is crucial for human resource managers as companies seek to attract and retain qualified talent in Singapore’s increasingly tight labour market condition (Seow, 2015) through the provision of a flexible work environment. This section presents the managerial implications of this thesis from both the commercial (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) and human resource management (section 5.2.3) perspective.
5.2.1 Orienting Solutions around Customer Network Identity Goals

The perspective of identity bundles – comprising of identities of individuals, dyads, smaller collectivities, and the family as a whole – problematises marketing managers’ way of seeing consumers as an autonomous self (Epp & Price, 2008; Therkelsen & Gram, 2008). On this basis, companies need to reformulate their marketing approach towards family decision making to adapt to the contemporary family condition.

Family decision making has been considered generally at the household level (John, 1999) which has largely omitted “the ebb and flow of family relational units into and out of the household” that highlights tensions and synergies of identity goals within identity bundles (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 60). Family decision making has also been narrowly viewed following traditional family life cycle models, inconsistent with relational bundles that reflects more contemporary arrangements of family life (Epp & Price, 2008).

This study has discussed how the participants involve their significant others in shaping their approach to mothering, delegating part of their familial duties to paid caregivers, and attending further education programmes (classes) to help improve their professional skills (which the participants feel is needed for when they eventually resume their former, full-time working self). This multiplicity of collectivities highlights for marketing managers – within the dynamic of family decision making – the reality and importance of considering a “customer network” when creating customer solutions (Epp & Price, 2011, p. 36); customer network refers to a social structure made up of individuals who are connected by formal or informal relationships linked to purchase and consumption activities (Achrol & Kotler, 1999), which, in this thesis, refers to the participants’ families containing individual, relational, and collective identity goals connected to wide-ranging consumption activities. From a commercial perspective, companies could integrate this knowledge in their attempts to focus not solely on individual goods
or services, but rather on integrated solutions to better deliver customised outcomes for specific customers (Tuli, Kohli & Bharadwaj, 2007).

This shift of marketing thinking from a focus on the individual towards a highly networked customer will help marketers reframe family decision making (John, 1999) towards the lens of “identity bundles” that make up the family (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 53). Such a shift recognises that customer networks are more than an aggregation of individual goals, but are instead a complex interplay of individual, relational, and collective ones that shape consumption choices (Epp & Price, 2008; Epp & Price, 2011). This shift in managerial thinking, furthermore, will help companies design customer solutions better by focusing on networked actions that construct family rather than consumption decisions devoid of relational goals, and by delivering products and services that forge relationships rather than maximising individual utility and satisfaction alone (Epp & Price, 2008; Epp & Price, 2011).

5.2.2 Preserving Home in the Commodification of Family Life

Whereas home becomes another workplace for mothers (as discussed in section 4.3.2 of the research findings), their familial space and private life at home opens up a wide range of care resources offered by commercial enterprises to help women manage their time-poor and overworked lifestyle. In this light, marketing managers need to recognise that parents, particularly mothers, continue to experience tensions when assembling complex care support and deciding what is acceptable to outsource.

With such “external parties” involved in an increasing number of family activities, the participants strive to retain a sense of control over family life and family intimacy. The women exercise thoughtful reflection to decide what aspect of household work they should delegate to the outside care providers, and which they should ring-fence and perform on their own. This highlights the notion that
outsourcing does not eliminate a parents’ desire to direct care provision. Parents seek to gain a sense of control not by acquiring such external care support at a complete level (for example, with full-time employees tending to the needs of their children or family), but by finding the right amount of work to retain and release (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014).

Furthermore, the participants also administer a division of labour, demarcating their intimate maternal work from other (less intimate) familial duties when deciding what to delegate to paid care providers. Despite the women’s willingness to share caregiving activities with such “external parties”, the participants adamantly protect the connection with their children and family (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014). The preservation of the women’s caregiving work at home is partially influenced by cultural expectations of good motherhood, whereby mothers (not the market) are to perform childcare and other (more intimate) familial responsibilities (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014).

Singapore’s race to be at the competitive edge globally and to grow economically does not allow the Republic to revert to traditional gender role norms; there are increasing expectations for Singaporean women to contribute to the household income and the national economy at the same time (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). With the rise of mothers’ employment rates and the increasing trend of dual-income households in Singapore (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b), there is a continuing need for commercial establishments to address “the care deficit” in family life (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014, p. 932). Marketing managers need to support the development of household member’s relationships and foster a sense of family through their service offerings. Marketers of caregiving services (and caregivers themselves) should promote the positive relationship benefits (among household members) associated with families’ employment of their services over the long run and recognise the value that families place on a sense of control, independence, and intimacy (Barnhart, Huff & Cotte, 2014).
5.2.3 Helping Working Parents Integrate Home and Work

Traditional work scheduling in corporations worked well at a time when family responsibilities were generally divided along conventional gendered roles (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999). However, as women’s roles in societies have evolved (as section 2.5 of Chapter 2: Literature Review, has highlighted; also refer to Commuri & Gentry, 2005; Venkatesh, 1980), such scheduling places role strains on the families in which both parents are economically active.

All of the participants, for instance, cite “family and children” as their primary reason for leaving the workforce in order to become full-time caregivers (also refer to Stone, Kohler & Hernandez, 2010; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). Many of the women find it difficult to perform both the (paid) worker and (unpaid) mother role simultaneously while working for their former companies. Balancing work and family is high on working mothers’ agendas, and on this basis, there is an opportunity for human resource managers to enhance workplace flexibility, in order to attract and retain qualified workers, men and women, from the increasingly smaller and more diverse pool of labour in Singapore (Seow, 2015; Yong, 2015).

In addition, it is imperative for corporations to go beyond offering competitive compensation and career progression opportunities to retain its employee base as the number of working mothers in the workforce is growing and the needs of the work-life balance (to help support family life), as a result, becomes more exigent (Goy, 2016; Working Mother 100 Best Companies, 2015). A company needs to also forge more flexible workplace practices and offer parent-friendly benefits making the paid work environment more compatible with today’s diverse family lives.

Pro-family employment practices need to accommodate a variety of work arrangements, including part-time work, job sharing, shift work, working from home, and allowing employees to work unconventional hours (Lee, Campbell &
Chia, 1999; Lee, 2016). Meanwhile, flexible working arrangements support working parents with progressive employee benefits, such as favourable childcare leave (enabling parents to spend more time with their children), shared parental leave (facilitating the greater involvement of fathers in parenting at home by using their spouse’s paid maternity leave in a flexible way), paternity leave, breastmilk-expression facilities (allowing working mothers who have returned to work following maternity leave to continue breastfeeding), and employee and family resource programmes (for employees and their family members who need advice on issues that could interfere with work, health, and happiness) (Working Mother 100 Best Companies, 2015).

Singaporean employers lag behind their Nordic counterparts in promoting flexible workplace policies. For instance, Swedish companies have, since 1974, offered paternal leave benefits, aimed at supporting dual-earner households and ensuring equal rights and obligations regarding work and family life for men and women (Duvander & Andersson, 2006). Singapore, in contrast, introduced a one-week paternal leave policy only as recently as 2013 (Yong, 2016). Currently in Singapore, only 40 per cent of fathers use their one-week of government-paid leave; this poorly compares to Denmark, where 60 per cent of men utilise the two weeks of legislated paternity leave offered to new fathers (Leong, 2016). In Sweden, the number of men taking paternity leave is even higher; with around 90 per cent of new fathers taking an average of seven weeks paternity leave (Duvander & Andersson, 2010; Wissö & Plantin, 2015).

Many Singaporean firms have expressed concern about offering flexible workplace benefits, which are seen to potentially raise business costs and adversely affect the availability of employment needs (Yong, 2016). However, flexible work arrangements make business sense according to several companies which have already implemented them, especially in Denmark and South Korea; these two countries face similar demographic challenges as Singapore and seek to address their population issues through, among other things, flexible employment practices, and so have recently become Singapore’s benchmark countries to draw
lessons from (Leong, 2016; Yong, 2016). Such family-friendly workplace policies allow both parents to be more involved in parenthood and provide working mothers (including mothers returning to work after having children) with a more supportive environment to balance family and work commitments.

Furthermore, rolling out more flexible employment practices could result in a mutually-beneficial situation for every stakeholder because employers stand a better chance to attract and retain good talent through adopting such policies, employees have a more balanced lifestyle and more time to spend with their families, and employees’ co-workers are encouraged to create a work environment where mutual support and collaborative culture is strong (Leong, 2016). Overall, companies with parent-friendly policies foster a sense of empowerment among employees, enabling dual-career families to balance their life’s priorities better and address the issues of raising children and family well-being in a responsible manner (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999; Working Mother 100 Best Companies, 2015).

5.3 Policy Implications

The accounts of the participants, as presented throughout chapter four (Research Findings), have described issues surrounding the women’s dilemma between family and paid work commitments, their family life experiences at home, and their perceived challenges in eventually reintegrating themselves into the labour market. As the state is bracing itself for the demographic challenges of a rapidly aging and shrinking population, policy makers will have to find ways to utilise the talents of each of Singapore’s citizens while, at the same time, maintaining policies that are family-friendly (Lee, Campbell & Chia, 1999; Wong, 2015c). To this end, this section offers insights that will harness the potential of the hidden workforce of stay-at-home mothers (section 5.3.1), address the society’s conflicting ideals of paid work and motherhood (section 5.3.2), helping to make Singapore a family-friendly environment that balances economic growth
alongside family well-being (section 5.3.3), through more progressive national policies.

5.3.1 Empowerment for Stay-at-Home Mothers

The research findings in chapter four highlight that many of the participants feel “powerless” (Sonia’s term) and have “low self-esteem” (Adele’s term) as a result of leaving their paid roles for their unpaid, full-time maternal role at home. The participants were concerned about their financial well-being, how their professional capabilities and skillsets may gradually decline, and whether they are able to return to the workforce when their children become more independent (also see Ericksen, Jurgens, Garrett & Swedburg, 2008); these issues have shaken their self-confidence. Given the substantial size of this group of economically inactive women in Singapore (Foo, 2015)75, a government programme may be introduced to help support them financially, and encourage these women to retain their skills, and provide sufficient childcare facilities in order to ease their eventual re-entry into the world of paid work, should they so choose one day.

Stay-at-home mothers play a critical role in nurturing families, strengthening society, and indirectly contributing to the economy (Crittenden, 2010; Foo, 2015). It is, therefore, important that these women be looked after as they forego career opportunities and advancement to attend to their family needs. While these women do not benefit from employer-sponsored training programmes, a training subsidy could be extended to stay-at-home mothers to help them to learn new skills (through, for example, state-approved education institutions) to help them reintegrate into the workforce more easily at a later point. A state-sponsored agency could also be set up to reach out to, and help, these stay-at-home mothers consider their diverse career options, match available job opportunities with the women’s interests, and prepare them for re-entry into the labour market.

75 This group of economically inactive women, who are in their prime working age, represents 31% (or 190,900) of the 610,600 Singapore’s female population with ages of 25 – 44 (Foo, 2015; Statistics Singapore, 2015c).
Meanwhile, as women become more recognised as an essential source of labour, they are expected to spend more time away from caregiving activities, and thus, require alternative arrangements for childcare. But a number of participants feel apprehensive about placing their young children at child care institutions, in part due to the centres’ (unfavourable) perceived quality in the past (Goy, 2016) and limited availability (also refer to Mukhopadhaya, 2001).

The state, therefore, is encouraged to make childcare services more widely available and to ensure that such pre-school institutions meet certain quality standards (for example, through a certification process which requires the institution to have qualified teachers holding early childhood education degrees). In the meantime, a programme could be rolled out to increase parents’ awareness of the benefits of pre-school education, and to provide stay-at-home mothers who wish to return to full-time employment social and financial incentives, encouraging them to subsequently reintegrate into the economic labour force with peace of mind (Goy, 2016).

5.3.2 Parenthood as a Shared Responsibility

For all of the participants, the birth of their children represents a time of major change in their lives. Many participants reported feeling strained as they learned to cope with the arrival of their newborns; the current 16-week maternity leave appears inadequate for the women to adapt to motherhood. In contrast, both Norway and Sweden offer paid parental leave for approximately one year following the birth of a child, with certain periods reserved exclusively for the father to look after his child (Duvander, Lappegård & Andersson, 2010). In this light, it makes sense to consider extending the current maternity leave to help Singaporean mothers to develop stronger bond with their infants and ease their adjustment to motherhood.
The practice of parenting in Singaporean society is influenced by a patriarchal culture, with caregiving of children traditionally associated as a woman’s role (Devasahayam & Yeoh, 2007b). As chapter four (Research Findings) has discussed, all of the participants feel that it is their duty (instead of their spouses’) to look after their young children. The importance of women’s role at home and in the workplace has been nationally acknowledged (Wong, 2015c) and it is timely for society to adopt a more socially-progressive work ethos that, with more support from the government, strives towards gender parity in parenthood responsibilities.

To promote a family-friendly environment in the workplace, working couples could be allowed to reallocate maternity and paternity leave between themselves in a more flexible way (Lee, 2016), which mimics policy changes across Europe. The state is gradually moving towards this direction. As a first step, a second week of paternity leave, now voluntary for employers, will soon be made compulsory (Yong, 2016). Learning from Nordic countries, the Singapore government is also planning to revise its initial shared parental leave policy by soon allowing working mothers to share up to four weeks of their four-month maternity leave with their husbands; currently, couples can share only one of the 16 weeks (Yong, 2016).

Furthermore, flexible work arrangements need to be encouraged more broadly across industries to allow employees to work wherever they can; working parents can, therefore, focus on their paid jobs at both the office and home adapting to their family situations. These initiatives will afford both the working father and working mother more time and space to be involved in family care, more equally (Lee, 2016).

As the nation’s largest employer of 141,000 staff (of which 53% are women) (Wong, 2015c), the Singapore government can perhaps set the tone in society through implementing the pro-family policies within its various departments and ministries, and subsequently encouraging private sectors to do the same. This will
help accelerate the development of a workplace culture that maximises talent (men and women) and attracts qualified employees not only based on salary, but more holistically, on family support arrangements.

5.3.3 Making Singapore a Better Place for Families

In its most recent, 16th annual Mother Index, the international aid agency *Save the Children* ranks Singapore 14th worldwide behind some of the Scandinavian and European countries (*The Complete Mothers’ Index 2015*). The index, which rates 179 countries based on five indicators (including maternal health, children’s well-being, education, income levels, and the political status of women), points that Singapore lags behind all other top-ranked countries in the area of women’s political participation (*The Complete Mothers’ Index 2015*).

Presently, the number of women as a full minister in the Singapore Cabinet is one out of 19 individuals (Tai, 2015). Increasing women’s participation in the political arenas is crucial because issues that are important to mothers and their families are more likely to be brought up and represented on the national agenda when women have a voice in government (Tai, 2015). On this basis, the Singapore government may, therefore, consider appointing more women into politics as the Republic seeks to address its pressing issues of the aging and shrinking pool of the skilled workforce which threatens economic growth in the longer term (Wong, 2015c; Yap & Gee, 2015).

As Minister for Culture, Community, and Youth, Grace Fu (who is the only female minister in the Singapore Cabinet) points out that increasing the female workforce participation in Singapore is no longer just a women’s issue but a national concern as it relates to the Republic’s economic survival and competitiveness (Wong, 2015c). The government’s role becomes especially critical to help society realise the importance of women nationally, at home and at work.
Most of the participants – the well-educated and professionally qualified stay-at-home mothers – have the desire to continue to be able to use their talents and skills to develop their careers and attain their aspirations after becoming mothers. However, these women also wish to give the best care to their young children instead of giving them what they considered to be their remaining time or energy once they returned home from paid work (Tai, 2015).

The state-led initiatives discussed in section 5.3 (Policy Implications), therefore, need to ensure that stay-at-home mothers receive the necessary support to ease their reintegration into the workforce, and that women are not disadvantaged because they have to more heavily perform caregiving activities. Child care facilities, moreover, need to be improved in terms of quality, affordability, and access to encourage women’s participation in the labour market (easing the tension that many participants felt in placing their children in sub-standard care provision). More aggressive social measures need to be in place to inculcate shared parenthood responsibilities and flexible work cultures, enabling the country to harness its talent resources more fully to fuel economic growth and, at the same time, make Singapore an even better place for families.

5.4 Limitations and Directions for Further Research

While I believe that this thesis offers rich insights into the experiences and identity construction processes of the female participants, it is also limited due to its focus and scale. Further research would be needed in order to address the limitations (which will be discussed in this section) and extend this study.

First, although this thesis has made some advances in highlighting the multiplicity of consumer identities and its role in identity co-construction processes – addressing the call made by Epp and Price (2008) for future research to explore the interplay of individual, relational, and collective identity narratives – given the
focus of this thesis on relational aspects of identity, a recognised limitation is that only accounts of the individual participants have been included. Consumer research literature also documents that people make sense of, and build, their identities through communicative construction of narratives (Stone, 1988) and interplay among individual, relational, and family identities “in jointly-narrated, sometimes contested, and continuously revised consumption stories” (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 54).

While this thesis has taken some steps to discuss the roles of the participants’ significant others (such as spouses and other family members) in co-constructing the participants’ sense of self, future research might broaden this thesis’s focus by including accounts of more family members who are important to the participants; this will expose the roles of other identities in shaping decisions and in jointly constructing the participants’ identity narratives (see for instance, Therkelsen & Gram, 2008). By adding the stories of other identity bundles, this would amplify the polyphony of their voices, capturing how tensions and synergies between individual and relational identities get constituted in the participants’ enactment of good motherhood. To achieve this level of coverage (of data collection), however, this thesis would have needed to make a trade-off in terms of the number of participants (and their family members) which could be included, in light of the time constraint of this doctoral research programme; the practicalities of such an aim (to include participants’ significant others in interviews) may also be difficult to accomplish due to the participants’ family members’ overbooked and time-poor lifestyles. However, this thesis represents an important starting point in capturing the experiences of Singaporean mothers who have chosen to devote themselves to caring for their child(ren) through removing themselves from the paid workforce.

Second, Singapore is ethnically a Chinese nation and nearly 80% of its population are Chinese (Statistics Singapore, 2015a). The participants presented in this thesis were all Chinese. Scope exists to explore mother identity construction more widely by including other races represented in the population of Singapore, such
as Indian, Malay, and Caucasian. The notion of motherhood is socially constructed (Hays, 1996) and different cultures have different expectations in relation to gender roles in the performance of caregiving activities in the family (Ochiai, 2008b) (for example, as was demonstrated by one of our participants, Adele, who had a Canadian husband who had more egalitarian notions of care). In this light, future research needs to consider the experiences of mothers from different ethnic backgrounds where there may potentially be different understanding about the role of men and women in parenthood, and thereby, the expectations towards the role of women in family life. It would be interesting to compare whether mothers of varied racial backgrounds construct good motherhood identity differently (Ochiai, 2008b).

Third, as highlighted in chapter three (Research Methodology), the participants presented in this thesis are fairly homogeneous in terms of socio-economic group; all of the women appear to be from middle-class families. The notion of motherhood is socially constructed (Hays, 1996) and it may be experienced differently across different social classes in part due to varying access to social and economic capital (see for example, Banister, Hogg, Budds & Dixon, 2015; Perrier, 2012). Social class plays an important role in shaping how the Singaporean population thinks (Tan, 2015), and future research should be devoted towards exploring how mothers from other social classes would enact their good motherhood identity (for instance, whether mothers with more affluent backgrounds also frame home-based maternity as a transitional period and how entrepreneurial activities or self-development projects figure in their constructions of motherhood).

Fourth, this thesis could benefit from additional empirical work with a more longitudinal approach to capture the extended motherhood experiences of the participants (which may be particularly fruitful to see how – and indeed whether – the women eventually returned to full-time employment). It would be interesting to revisit these participants in the future, especially when they have returned to the labour market, to understand whether they continue to uphold their professional
mother identity. Professionalisation of motherhood emerges as a way used by the participants to reconceptualise their caregiving activities as work-like to justify their transition to stay-at-home motherhood through their familiar occupational resources; it reconciles their home-bound maternal duty with a sense of economic productivity. When these participants return to paid work (in the future), they would have regained their sense of (economic) productivity in a real sense. It is a question that future research may address; whether these women would need to enact their professional mother identity as a coping mechanism or whether a good mother identity would be constructed differently (for instance, by weaving their stay-at-home, good mother identity into their paid work self-concept) as a result of their return to the workforce.

Fifth, a motherhood study is not complete without understanding how fatherhood is constructed; this is because relationships between mother, father, and their employment are increasingly hard to disentangle as dual-income households become more common (see for example, Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2014; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2015). While fathers have more recently been portrayed by the literature and media as “more involved”, “more nurturing”, and “capable of co-parenting”, studies documenting their actual conduct, however, have not kept pace (Wall & Arnold, 2007, p. 508). Fathers are still marginalised in the day-to-day shared parenting initiatives and the reasons remain unclear to date (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper & Sparrow, 2012). On this basis, it makes sense for future research to investigate how men construct their good fatherhood identity, what shared parenthood means to fathers, and what factors lead to how parenting roles are negotiated and allocated in the early stages of a child’s life. Ultimately, this understanding aims to promote the importance of both maternal and paternal roles for the care of young children, shift cultural understanding of masculinity and femininity, and contribute to greater equality in both the family and the workplace (Wall & Arnold, 2007).
APPENDIX A: Application Form for Research Ethics Approval

Manchester Business School
Application for Research Ethics Approval

When completed this form should be returned to the PGR Office.
The form should preferably be typed, where handwritten please use BLOCK CAPITALS.
Surname: WIJAYA
Forename(s): HADI
Student Number: 7706991
Programme: DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (DBA) – PART TIME
Thesis title: RELATIONAL IDENTITY INTERPLAY: EXPLORING THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF CONSUMER IDENTITY IN THE LIFE TRANSITION (Note: Title is subject to revision as necessary).
The following should be addressed, where applicable, when explaining how you will address any ethical issues arising from your doctoral work. All questions must be answered. ‘Not applicable (NA)’ is a satisfactory answer where appropriate.

1. Brief description of the research project including the main research aims and objectives including research questions and why it is important.

This research aims to explore how consumer identity might be constructed relationally, involving ‘significant others’ or ‘intimate others.’ The research about the co-construction nature of consumer identity is situated in the life transitions of career women who decided to take up a new, home-based role as a caregiver to the family. A special focus will be given to understanding how the co-construction of identity goes through the interplay (interaction) process with other identities in the life transition.

This study responds to the research calls to shift the attention from the predominant conception of identity as an individual entity to a new perspective of identity which may be relational forged with other people (i.e., small group or multiple relational identities) (Epp & Price, 2008; Higgs, Curasi & Masironi, 2004; Gentini, Decropenaer & Ravio, 2013).

The research is premised on two primary assumptions. First, identity construction processes are influenced by diverse goals of other people and co-existence with other identities (Epp & Price, 2008). Second, to further advance our knowledge about consumer identity, it is important to recognize the role of relational identity in constructing one’s identity, a point which has been missed in prior consumer research literature (Gentini, Decropenaer & Ravio, 2013; Theoret & Gran, 2008).

Concentrated in the subjective, lived experiences of the career women (as the key informants) who have abandoned their professional work to pursue home-based roles, this research seeks to explore and address the following research questions:

1. What factors determine the woman’s move from the professional organisation to a role in the home environment? How does the decision relate to the overall identity project of the woman?
2. Whether and how the transition creates identity-goal tension among different identities?
3. How the heterogeneous identities interplay during or after the role transition? How does the co-existence of the identities (at the workplace organisation and at home) influence the identity construction processes?
4. What roles does consumption play during and after the transition – in the negotiation, construction, and enactment of the identities?
5. Whether the elements of the professional identity may be transposable across the distinct life domains, from the workplace to home. If so, how does it work? What are the factors that determine the success or failure of this migration (of the identity elements)? What are the roles of the other identities in this process?

These are among the key, initial questions that the researcher wishes to investigate in the study.
2. Does the research involve any of the following?:

- use of questionnaires designed by the researcher
- use of standard survey instrument
- use of on-line surveys
- use of interviews
- use of focus groups
- audio-taping participants or events
- video-taping participants or events
- research about participants involved in illegal activities
- access to personal and/or confidential data without the participant's specific consent
- administration of any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research
- observation of participants without their knowledge

3. Provide a summary of the design and methodology of the project, including the methods of data collection and the methods of data analysis.

This research aims to explore the co-constructed nature of consumer identity in-depth, within the real-life context of and through the subjective experiences of the informants themselves, in relation with their significant others.

The Unit of Analysis
This study views the woman (who have transitioned from a professional career to a home-based role) as the key unit of analysis and informants, with consideration of their relationships with the ‘important others’ (e.g., husband, colleagues, mother, father, sibling, etc.). The study refines the focus on consumer analysis, from the individual action of identity to identity as a relational entity.

Profile of the Informants
Informants will be mothers who are currently based at home, age approximately between 30 and 45 years (as of Year 2013), possess prior professional experience (e.g., lecturer, company’s employee, nurse, etc.), have left their career between roughly 2 and 5 years, and have important person(s) with whom they have close relationships.

Phenomenological Interview as the Research Method
This research, therefore, aims to use a phenomenological interview method (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). This interview method has been used effectively by consumer research scholars to gain the first-person description of experience, placing the primacy on the informant’s experience and concepts (see for example Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 2002; Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1998). The interview, or often described more appropriately as ‘conversation’ (Thompson & Haydie, 1997), represents an informal dialogue between the researcher and the researched at a pace set by the research participants (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

Data collection process will consist of two sessions of interview, ranging between 60 and 90 minutes each. This interview length has been validated during the EDBA Pilot Study to be of appropriate length. The first session will begin with the ‘grand tour’ questions (McClellan, 1989) around the informants’ description of their personal background and general views about the current life. The conversation will then develop around the research questions. Outcome of the first interview will be reviewed and reflected by the researcher before second interview begins. In the second session, the researcher will explore topics that may have been missed or insufficiently covered during the first interview, including some new topics of discussion.
Distance between the first and second interviews is approximately between 7 and 14 days. The in-between period will allow the researcher to reflect on the findings from the first interview and refine for the second meeting. This process is expected to generate more comprehensive data. Interview guide will facilitate the conversation with the participants (Kvale, 2011). The interview sessions will also employ some ‘creative methods’ involving: ‘show and tell’ and ‘drawing’ exercises. In the show-and-tell, the research participants will be prompted to articulate their life stories with showing of relevant possessions or artefacts that may aid in expressing who they were and who they are (i.e., former identity and current self). This method also aims to ‘break the ice’ and facilitate the flow of the conversation. In addition, the interviewees will be given a piece of paper to visually share their network of relationships with the key people who are regarded to be crucial in shaping their identities. This ‘relationship mapping’ will support in the identification of the women’s relational ties.

Note: The study participants will be notified about these methods early in the recruitment, and find these clearly stated in the Participants Information Sheet & Consent Form, for their consideration and preparation ahead of the interview meetings.

Data Analysis
The interview will be audio recorded personally, and transcribed with professional help. The transcript documents will go through a second-level, detailed check by the researcher (against the digital recording). A revised and final version of the transcripts will then be produced for analysis. Subsequently, the researcher will listen to the digital recording and read the transcripts personally. During this process, the researcher will make notes to highlight interesting and relevant points raised by the informants. This process is aimed at gaining in-depth understanding of the individual informants’ perspective and a sense of the whole data at the same time. Once the whole transcripts are reviewed and noted, the reading will once again commence to ‘code’ or assign common themes identified across the individual transcripts. Reading will be repeated to ensure that relevant themes have been accurately described and surfaced, and that no duplication or missing themes is identified. This is the first step to launch into the next analytical phase involving ‘within-case’ and ‘cross-case’ method of data analysis framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

General Note on Data Care
As this research relies on, and deals with human subject (Kvale, 2011), building ethical and trusted relationship with the study participants is critical to the success of this research (Silverman, 2011). The relationship is expected to evolve, initially from ‘individual’-to ‘individual’, then to ‘interviewer’-to ‘interviewee’, to ‘anonymous’, and eventually to ‘friend-friend’ stages of relationships (Ryan, 2012). Transparency, professionalism, and demonstration of how the researcher safeguards the interests of the interview participants at all times will be made evident throughout the research process (Silverman, 2011) – from the recruitment, data generation, data analysis, and data presentation.

4. Describe the research procedures e.g. how relevant research participants are identified, recruited and the organisation of the field research.

To allow for an intensive understanding of the complex interplay of identity construction process to emerge, this research aims to recruit an appropriate number of informants. Eight is a recommended size (McCrorrie, 1988). Furthermore, fewer than eight informants have also been used successfully to interpret the identity-related consumer experiences (see for instance Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1995). While these numbers represent only an indication, the present study will eventually be guided by the level of data saturation achieved in the process of data generation. The purpose of this study is not to survey the terrain, but execute insights understood about a phenomenon. Hence, working intensively with fewer informants may be more meaningful than working with a superficially higher number of samples (McCrorrie, 1988).

The sampling for the key informants will be selected purposively (Mason, 2011) to enable this research to produce a relevant range of contexts, and ensure that diversity of the sample characteristics will be achieved, illuminating the vast variety of the consumer identities. The women profiled in this study are likely to exhibit diverse life stories and a relevant range of professional experiences and personal attributes. Initially, a key informant will be recruited through a network of personal contacts; this recruitment method will facilitate access to the right participant (who meets with the sample criteria that has been established separately – please see Question 2). The first informant will be contacted initially through an email to introduce the researcher (a URL link to the researcher’s “LinkedIn” profile will also be provided), share how the referral takes place, and inform the purpose of the contact.
(Continued, Question 44)

Upon agreement in the email, the researcher will call her for introduction. In this call, the researcher will explain about the research and the reasons why she is considered as a potential informant. With her approval, the researcher will send the Participatory Information Sheet and Consent Form, to share the further details about the study, why she has been identified (i.e., background profile), how the study is to be conducted, and that participation is strictly voluntary.

This first informant will be given at least a week to read and consider the document, and ask any questions she may have, via call / email / meeting (as necessary); this interaction also serves to validate the participant’s profile and interest level as well. If all is positive, this first informant will be recruited and asked to complete and sign the Consent Form. What follows will be setting up interview schedule.

The researcher’s knowledge about this first participant is expected to be limited. In order to avoid bias, in the same vein, the participant will likely be someone who does not know the researcher well. The researcher, however, will have a degree of familiarity about the first informant, necessary to verify the participant’s profile and background. From the first informant, sampling is expected to broaden based on a snowballing principle (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Note: Schedule for the second interview will be determined at the end of the first interview mutually with the participant.

5. What, in your opinion, are the ethical considerations involved in this research e.g. risk to participants and researchers (physical or psychological), issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting etc? Describe precautions to minimize or mitigate the risks and issues identified above?

There are potentially three areas of ethical consideration. These include:

First, as the researcher (male) will forge a ‘research relationship’ with the key informant (female) over time, it is important to plan how this cross-gender interaction shall evolve appropriately along the research process—from the recruitment to data generation to data analysis and, finally, to data presentation. Ethical relationship that involves cross-gender can evidently be sensitive (Ryan, 2012). Therefore, it is important to safeguard the development of the trusted relationship, starting from individual and institutional, to interview-interviewer, to man-woman, and eventually to friend/friend stages in the relationship (Ryan, 2012). Striking a balance between professionalism and friendliness is, therefore, imperative to ensure that the fieldwork can move in the ethically right direction (Ryan, 2012).

Secondly, the interview may turn in an unfavourable direction (e.g., the women getting too emotional, the women’s partner/husband feel unhappy about the wife being interviewed, the women feel uncomfortable midway, etc.). The fieldwork remains open to this future possibility, and hence, will adapt to the range of reactions from the key informant / the spouse / relational others. The situations will be handled as and when they occur appropriately and professionally. For instance, the researcher will be prepared to bring in information relating to domestic problem situations (e.g., sexual issues, chronic stress, etc.), community service information, or counselling support contact details, in case such information needs to be shared. At all times, the researcher will keep away from getting involved at personal level (Silverman, 2011). However, he will offer supportive ideas to direct the ‘needed’ participants to relevant channel of assistance to deal with present, emerging situations.

In an extreme situation, where the researcher deems no longer possible to continue with the interview (e.g., severe psychological distress or heavy emotional situation faced by the women), the researcher will politely offer to discontinue with the interview. The meeting will gracefully find a neutral, natural end point until it is appropriate to reconnect.

Third, the interviews are expected to take place at the residence of the informant (please refer to Question #12 below for detail). The researcher will take necessary precaution to safeguard his personal safety during the time of interview (Ryan, 2013). He will carry a mobile phone (registering emergency helpline, police number) and make known to his family members about the timing and whereabouts of the interview. Place of interview in the house is planned to be at common areas, such as the living room, dining room, front yard, or backyard. Alternative venue of interview outside the house may be mutually agreed and arranged as alternative.
6. Will the research specifically target:
   - Students or staff of this University  Yes  No
   - Adults (over the age of 18 and able to give informed consent)  
   - Children (under the age of 18)  
   - The elderly  
   - People from non-English speaking backgrounds  
   - Anyone intellectually or mentally impaired who can't provide consent  
   - Anyone who has a physical disability  
   - Patients or clients of professionals  
   - Anyone who is a prisoner or parolee  
   - Any other person whose capacity to give informed consent may be compromised  

Please note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students).

7. Will payment or any other incentive be made to any research participants? If so please specify and state the level of payment to be made and/or the source of funds/government service to be used. Please explain the justification for offering payment or other incentive.

This study will not offer payment to attract the informants for participation. Such an "incentive" may influence the informants' decision to participate for a reason other than for the study's interest. Participation in the interview is expected to largely be driven by how this study could offer positive experience and deeper insights into the area of the informants' lives relating to their identities and consumption (through meaningful conversation/sharing of the research outcome).

As a token of appreciation, the researcher will extend a "thank you" gesture in the form of a gift voucher (worth approximately $250) in Singapore local currency. This is solely aimed at acknowledging the informant's valuable participation in the study. Source of funds is from the researcher's own research budget.

8. Please indicate the method of recruitment by ticking the appropriate box(es). Tick all that apply.

   - Mail Out
   - Advertisement
   - Recruitment carried out by researchers
   - Participants from a Previous study
   - Email
   - Recruitment carried out by third party
   - Contact details obtained from public documents
   - Snowball
   - Telephone
   - Personal contacts
   - Contact details obtained from private sources
   - Other (please explain)

If using a mail out who will be distributing it?
   - Not applicable.

If using an advertisement explain where it will be placed. Have you attached a copy? Y/N - if no please explain.
   - Not applicable.
If recruitment is to be conducted by a third party (e.g. friend, contact, doctor) have you attached an approval letter
Not applicable.
- requesting their assistance? Y/N - if no please explain
- confirming their willingness to act? Y/N - if no please explain

If contact details are to be obtained from private sources have you attached an approval letter? Y/N - if no please explain.
Not applicable.

9. Please give details of how informed consent is to be obtained. A copy of the proposed consent form, along with the proposed information sheet must accompany this proposal.

Initially, potential informants will be contacted via phone call. Researcher will verbally introduce about the study via telephone conversation. Face-to-face meeting may be arranged as alternative (and if necessary). Participants Information Sheet and Consent Form will then be sent to them (via email) at a follow up to the initial discussion. This exercise allows them to learn about the study in greater detail at their own time (with no pressure), and aid in decision making (Silverman, 2013). The researcher will send approximately one week for them to consider participation. In the process, the researcher will be available to answer any questions they may have about the study and participation. Once the informants confirm to participate, the consent form is to be signed. Interview schedule will then be setup upon collection of the signed consent form. Note: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are attached to this ethical form.

10. Data Protection and Confidentiality. Please state who will have access to the data and what measures will be adopted to maintain the confidentiality of the research participant and to comply with data protection requirements e.g. will the data be lawfully processed, anonymised, secured and not kept longer than necessary?

Interview data (audio recording and transcripts) will be stored in the researcher’s own, password-protected laptop. Only the researcher will have access to this laptop. Data may be shared with the Academic Advisors at the University publicly, but solely for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. Upon completion of the video (oral examination) and paper publication requirements, audio recording will be permanently deleted from the computer.

Real names of the research participants will be masked with use of label (e.g. alphabet such as “A”, “B,” and “C”) to maintain anonymity in the thesis, future paper publication, and other published materials. Identifiable elements about the informants (e.g. place of work, name of organisations, and name of relational others) which may lead to the informant’s identification, will also be made anonymous as necessary.

11. Will the research results be made available to the participants? If so describe how they will be disseminated.

Research results may be made available to the participants if they express intention to wish to have it. The findings will be summarised and formatted in an accessible fashion; Participants’ real names will remain masked in this document or theirs to protect confidentiality stated in the Participants Information Sheet and Consent Form. Summary of the findings may be shared via email only open expression of interest.
12. State location(s) where the project will be carried out.

The interview session is to be held at the informants’ residence to make them feel “in control” and at ease; the choice of venue also affords them with a convenient access to personal objects or materials they will need to show to support the stories they share (please refer to the Question 95). Alternative venue, however, may be arranged if this first venue proposal is objected. Alternative venue will be agreed upon mutually; it will be a place where conversation and audio recording can take place without interruption. The whole data collection process will take place in Singapore.

13. The proposed period of field research is from 31 August 2013 to 31 January 2014 (this must not be before the date of Ethics Committee approval). (Note: Dates are indication only, and may change to adapt to the field).

Signature: .................................................. Date: 27 July 2013

Supervisor’s Declaration:

I have discussed the above ethical issues with the student in relation to his proposed research and agree that the involvement of human participants/human data/material is essential for the proposed research topic.

Supervisors Name: BEN KENNEDY .................................................. EMMA BAUNSTER ..............

Supervisor’s Signature: .................................................. EBMN

Date: 30.07.13

The following section will be completed after you have submitted the form to Emma Griffiths in the PGR Programmes Office. Email: emma.griffiths@mba.ac.uk

Director of PGR Programmes: ..................................................

Action: Approve .................................................. Date: 22/08/13

NB: Should you change your research plans you will need to complete another ethics form. Please contact the PGR Ethics Committee should you have any questions.

References are listed on the next page
References


End of Document
Research Topic
EXPLORING CONSUMER'S RELATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Participants Information Sheet
(Final)

You are being invited to take part in this Postgraduate Research Project entitled the above. This research will explore how consumer identity is constructed relationally. In addition, this study also focuses on how consumption plays roles in life. This letter provides background information to aid you in making decision and assist in preparation for the participation. Therefore, please take time to read the information, discuss it with others (if you wish), and feel free to ask any question if you would like more clarification. Participation is strictly voluntary. Thank you in advance for reading this note.

Who will conduct the research?
Hadi Wilaia, Postgraduate Researcher,
Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester, UK
Profile:
Mobile number:
Email address:

What is the aim of the research?
The study aims to explore how consumer identity is constructed relationally and the roles of consumption in the life of consumers

Why have I been identified (chosen)?
You have been invited since we thought you may fit the profile needed for this study. That is a woman who possesses prior professional experience, are currently home-based providing care to a child (children/family), can identify an important person(s) with whom have close relationship(s), and is a consumer.

About your participation
• You will participate in informal conversations with the Researcher. The interview will take place in two separate sessions. The first session may take around 50 minutes, and the second session (a follow-up) around 45 - 60 minutes. Distance between the first and second interviews is several weeks apart, based on mutual availability.
• The conversation will cover your life stories and experiences, in both current role (at home) and formerly as a working woman (working mother). During the conversation, the Researcher may ask you to show relevant possessions / consumption objects (e.g., photos, loved belonging, meaningful consumption objects, etc.) that relate to your identities (who you were / are). The conversation will also include identifying some important people in life who are (or have been) instrumental in influencing your personal and identity development; this identification of 'relational others' will be in the form of drawing a relationship map or 'network of relationship.' Truthfulness is highly valued in this research.
• Interview will be audio recorded for data analysis purpose. Elements of identification (e.g., real names, place of work, name of organization, etc.) will be removed to protect confidentiality. (Note: Please refer to the Confidentiality section for detailed information, on the next page).
• Interview venue is preferably to take place at your residence. We wish our interaction to stay as close as possible to where you live (and your life). This also enables you to gain easy access to the things you will show in our conversation. This location is expected to be appropriate for audio recording purpose. (Note: Alternative venue may be discussed and mutually agreed).

Continue on the next page
What happens to the data collected?
The data will be stored in a password-protected computer and accessed only by
Researcher/Transcriber. The data may be shared with the Academic Advisors based in the UK,
strictly for analytical purpose. The audio recording will be deleted and destroyed permanently after the
research project and academic publication(s) are completed.

Confidentiality
Your participation will be kept anonymous at all times. Elements of identification (e.g., real names,
name of workplace, etc.) will not appear in the research publication(s) or material(s).

A Thank-You Token
We thank you for your participation. As a token, you will receive SGD 100 worth of grocery voucher
from NTUC Fair Price Supermarket when the interview process is completed.

How will the research outcome be disseminated?
It will be submitted to the University as part of the thesis requirement for the Postgraduate Research
Programme (DBA). The outcome may also be published in an external academic publication (e.g.,
Academic Journal). In any of these works, no real names will be included.

Would I be able to access the research outcome?
Yes, if interested you may be able to read the summary of the research outcome upon completion of
this study. Please indicate your interest to the Researcher.

Additional University Contact
Any questions relating to this research may be directed to the researcher (Email:
or mobile number). Additionally, for any concern you may also reach the
Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester,
M13 9PL, United Kingdom.
EXPLORING CONSUMER’S RELATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Consent Form

If you are happy and agreeable to participate in this research based on the information presented in the Participants Information Sheet on pages 1 and 2, please complete and sign the consent form below.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project, have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

By signing this consent form, you are agreeable to the above statements.

Name of participant    Date    Signature

____________________  ___________  ______________________

Name of person taking consent    Date    Signature

____________________  ___________  ______________________

Please return this page (Page 3) signed before the first interview begins.
APPENDIX C: Example of Online Advertisement for Recruitment

*Singapore Motherhood and Parenting Forum*

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**Inviting Stay-at-Home Mothers for a Research Project**

We are looking for Singaporean stay-at-home mothers with several years of (professional) work experience to participate in a postgraduate research project. If you are between late 20s and early 40s and are keen to contribute to the knowledge development in motherhood and relational identities, please contact me at [mobile number] immediately for further detail. As a gesture of appreciation, we offer a thank-you token in the form of a shopping voucher upon completion of your participation.
APPENDIX D: Guide for Visual Construction Exercise

Guide for Visual Construction Exercise

We have talked about different areas of your life in our first interview. One thing that this research is particularly interested in is the way that your life has changed since you made the decision to take on the present role at home. This exercise is to explore the important relationships that you have in your prior experience (as a working woman) and your experience currently. In this light, can you please do two free drawings which link you to the important people in your past and present lives?

**Drawing 1:** Me as a working woman (and the links with the key people)

**Drawing 2:** Me now (and the links with the key people)

Please carry out this exercise in a way that you feel comfortable, using illustrations, texts or whatever that comes naturally. There is no artistic merit to what you will produce. It is about visually expressing who you are, and the visual mapping of the important relationships in your past and present lives – and whether and how these have changed as a result of the decision you made to take on the present role. We will talk about what you produce in our next meeting. Meanwhile, if you have any question please feel free to contact me, Hadi Wijaya at [mobile number]. Thank you
APPENDIX E: Visual Construction Exercises

Case 1: Adele

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 2: Nikki

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

![Relationship Map 1](image1.png)

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood

![Relationship Map 2](image2.png)
Case 3: Nova

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 4: Tiffany

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life & Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 5: Sonia

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life
Case 5: Sonia

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 6: Estelle

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 7: Inez

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 8: Yvette

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 9: Ingrid

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
Case 10: Stella

Relationship Map 1: Professional Career Life

Relationship Map 2: Stay-at-Home Motherhood
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