

**Gender, agency and the engagement of sole parent
postgraduates in the Australian academy.**

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Key words

Gender, sole parents, higher education, accountability, performativity

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of sole parents within the institutional conditions of postgraduate education in Australian universities. To investigate how sole parents negotiate the conditions of postgraduate education I undertake a theoretical analysis of gender performativity and accountability drawing primarily on the works of Judith Butler (1997, 2005). Drawing from interviews with 10 sole parents, this research is a collective case study which is attentive to how gender is performed through particular constructions of gendered parenting at an intersecting point with postgraduate education.

The distinctive experiences of sole parent postgraduates are significant because as at June 2012, there were 600,892 one parents families with dependent children in Australia, and most (84%) were female lead families, making up 22% of families (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census). This represents a significant cohort within the Australian community, a group, I suggest, whose educational aspirations, experiences and outcomes remains under-researched. This research is contextualised by the 2008 Bradley Review into Higher Education in Australia, which stated an aim for 20% of university students to come from low socio-economic backgrounds. This 20% target remains un-met reflecting broader concerns in the widening participation agenda that has sought to redress the ongoing under-representation of diverse social groups in universities. This thesis makes an additional contribution to the body of academic literature regarding academic parenting by focusing on sole parent postgraduates, many of whom experience multiplied and intensified responsibilities of everyday parental care-work.

The epistemology section of this thesis details my researcher positioning and examines how my experiences of sole parenting in higher education has influenced and informed this study. I consider three critical incidents; my initial assumptions and judgement about sole parents, regulatory

exchanges I experienced as un-helpful as I transitioned into postgraduate education and the institutional structures of postgraduate timetabling as regulatory and potentially exclusionary.

Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, this work acknowledges that sole parent postgraduates are never fully constituted whilst drawing attention to how norms repetitively operate. I have sought to illustrate ways in which participants opened up the possibility of altering and refusing normative patterns associated with gendered parental care to engage with university spaces that are constituted as 'child-free'. Butler's theory of recognisability provides a framework for critiquing university policies and practices and enables an exploration of the interrelated negotiations participants undertook in order to re-work their parental and postgraduate work. Theorising recognisability troubles the prescriptive and (re)productive negotiations between the sole parent participants and social welfare policy - the Welfare to Work policy.

In this study I explore Butler's notion of agency to illustrate how sole parent postgraduate participants responded to the enabling constraints of postgraduate education. Agency in this sense is understood as the opening up of alternative possibilities and this is demonstrated through the re-workings of family finances, flexibility of time and the management of childcare responsibilities within the enabling constraints of sole parenting and postgraduate education. This study is therefore a theoretical analysis that illustrates how the sole parent in this study mediated individual *and* institutional/structural factors which establish their conditions of account as postgraduates.

Candidate Statement

Thesis Title: Gender, agency and the engagement of sole parent postgraduates in the Australian academy.

Candidate's Name: Genine A. Hook.

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and I affirm that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Glossary of Terms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Security
Centrelink	Government agency implementing social security
JET	Jobs, Education and Training
PPS	Parenting Payment (Single)
NewStart	Unemployment payment
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
HE	Higher Education
NATSEM	National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling
GO8	Group of Eight
TESOL	Teaching English as a Second Language

Chapter One - Introduction

This thesis examines the experiences of sole parents within the institutional conditions of postgraduate education in Australian universities. To investigate how sole parents negotiate the conditions of postgraduate education I undertake a theoretical analysis of gender performativity and accountability drawing primarily on the works of Judith Butler (1997, 2005). Based on interviews with 10 sole parents, this research is a collective case study which is attentive to how gender is performed through particular constructions of gendered parenting by sole parents in postgraduate education, given that;

We cannot take gender, or gendered meanings, for granted, since gender is precisely that which is being produced and organized over time, differently and differentially, and this ongoing production and mode of differentiation has to be understood as part of the very operation of power (Butler & Weed, 2011, p. 3)

This analysis develops awareness of how diverse students engage with postgraduate education by considering the experiences of sole parents, who are largely 'invisible in the literature and often within their own institutions of higher education' (Burke & Grenier, 2008, p. 581).

This research is contextualised by the 2008 Bradley Review into Higher Education in Australia. The Bradley Review resulted in an important educational policy that aims for 20% of university students to come from low socio-economic backgrounds. This 20% target remains un-met and reflects broader concerns about the widening participation agenda which has sought to redress the ongoing under-representation of diverse social groups in universities. University responses to the needs of diverse student cohorts have social justice implications because they will determine equitable access to and participation in higher education. Sara Ahmed (2006) argues that ongoing

dialogue concerning equitable engagement with higher education is important to enable recognition of education 'as something that affects 'everyone', at the same time, as it would show how some people more than others are given social and educational advantage' (p. 763). I situate this research within the broader, widening participation in education field by studying the experiences of sole parents in postgraduate education, understanding them as non-traditional and illustrative of how diverse students experience higher education. Through studies, such as this, institutional policies and practices may become more responsive towards alternative or non-traditional students which in turn can support their retention and engagement.

This thesis does not provide a comparative study which considers how different student's experience postgraduate education differently. I understand the distinctive experiences of sole parent postgraduates as worthy of research, as a particular cohort without attempting comparative analysis. In doing so I do not intend to take away from or diminish the experiences of diverse students, indeed many students experience similar conditions that I articulate in this thesis. Factors such as limited financial support and the time cost of parenting are not the exclusive experiences of sole parents. However, given that 'mothers spend around 40 hours more per week on unpaid work (household and childcare combined) than fathers' (Craig, Mullan & Blaxland, 2010, p. 39), and many sole parents do not share any household or childcare work the financial and time implication of raising children single-handedly becomes more apparent. Yvette Taylor's (2009) work on lesbian and gay parenting reiterated such experiences, noting that '[s]ingle-parents reported financial and caring struggles, noting constraints on their income and everyday impossibilities where care could not be shared or divided' (p. 112). All parents manage childcare responsibilities, and this thesis contributes to the body of academic literature regarding academic parenting. I make an additional contribution to the academic field by focusing on sole parent postgraduates, many of whom experience intensified responsibilities of everyday parental care-work because this work is not shared or divided.

This argument is supported by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) (2014), which reports that 'lone' parents with a child under 15 spends 9% of his or her time on contracted activities such as employment and education, compared with 19.2% in couple families. Sole parents spend 30.2% of their time in committed work, defined as caring for children and housework, compared with 23.1% for coupled families. These figures illustrate the additional family work that sole parents do; they spend less time in employment and education, and more time on child care and household responsibilities, which impacts on how they are able to experience postgraduate education.

Research questions explored in this thesis

This research focuses on how gender is constructed in the Australian higher education context. Specifically my interest is how gender is re-inscribed in parental binaries and the ways in which this re-inscription influences engagement with higher education. By applying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to gendered parental constructs, I begin to explore how the socially constructed and sedimented notions of motherhood and fatherhood operate. I do not propose that my analysis is somehow outside these constructions or parental categories, however, I do aim to investigate how the category motherhood and fatherhood operate in ways to constitute gendered subjects. This exploration is opened up through my consideration of how sole parents operate within established categories of mother/father, which are created and reinforced as heteronormative. To provide a detailed investigation of gendered parental constructs in higher education, I focus on how sole parents potentially traverse the gendered binary of motherhood and fatherhood. My aim is to open up possibilities of disrupting the power of the norms of parenting that tend to naturalise the care of children as a feminine act. I have also confined my research focus on postgraduate education as the gateway to the academy, as an important entry and access point to higher education.

My aim in this research is also to investigate educational and social policies that influence gendered engagement with higher education. By theorising policy as fluid and productive, my analysis considers new perspectives in relation to how social welfare policies can also act as educational policies. The interrelatedness of educational/social policy influences gendered constructions in higher education through the disparity of financial and other types of support which scaffold access and engagement with higher education. This analysis provides an examination of political, social and educational conditions that sole parents experience as they combine higher education and sole responsibility for childcare as a pathway to securing sustainable financial security for their families through academic careers.

This research thesis also questions how space influences engagement with higher education. By theorising education space as productive and potentially regulatory, I explore the ways in which higher education constitutes its spaces as ‘child-free’ and how this can operate as a gendered demarcation of belonging and engagement for parental carers. My research focus on policy and spatial arrangements draws on Butler’s theory of recognisability; a co-created sense of one’s self and of belonging. When analysed through a gendered theoretical framework these questions make a contribution to equitable access and engagement in higher education. My research questions begin to un-settle the deficit notions of sole parenting and disrupt the gendered binaries associated with female responsibilities for child-care through the productive category of motherhood within an important social context of higher education.

Therefore, this thesis is a theoretical analysis which scrutinizes gendered parental practices that regulate sole parent postgraduates in institutions of higher education.

Theoretical framing of the study

The foundations of this research are based in feminist theory which supports my aim to examine how gendered parental constructs impinge on engagement with postgraduate education. I

seek to unsettle accepted, established and appropriate practices of postgraduate education by examining the experiences and acts of sole parents which are able to produce postgraduate student subjectivity. This study facilitates a particular focus on how universities frame women and parental involvement because 84% ¹ of all sole parents in Australia are female/mothers. The high percentage of female lead sole parent families in Australia is reflected in this study as all of the postgraduates who participated in this research are female, despite numerous attempts to recruit males who were also sole parents and postgraduates.

In response to all my participants being female, I repeatedly received advice that my study should be about mothers, not parents, because I did not interview any fathers. However, my focus on parental care-work is purposeful and theoretical, and often this position was contentious. I decided against including motherhood in the title of this thesis or my discussions within the work because I aimed to explore and disrupt how the motherhood/fatherhood binary operated. Following Butler, I understood motherhood and fatherhood as not only descriptive but productive and as having material effects on how parents can engage with higher education. Indeed, I suggest that the fact that no fathers agree to participate in this research after widely repeated calls for participant fathers, illustrates the power of the association between caring for children and mothers. This is also reflected in the high percentage of women as sole parents; 84% in the Australian context. Chapter seven of this thesis elaborates on this theoretical position.

This study will demonstrate how regulatory regimes continue to (re)produce a hierarchy of knowledge within the academy through exclusions of predominantly female sole parent postgraduates. In 1998, Kay Standing wrote that ‘women’s knowledge is seen to come from their mothering and domestic responsibilities, it is seen to be private and individual, and therefore it becomes structurally excluded from academic thought’ (p. 198). In this research I hope to disrupt the

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics

naturalised assumptions associated with women and mothering and to rethink ways in which women and academic parents are able to engage with higher education.

To explore the intersection of higher education and sole parenting, the principal text I draw from is Judith Butler's work, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). In this text Butler provides a theoretical framework that allows for the 'operation of agency', the possibilities of which 'takes place in the context of enabling and limiting field of constraint' (p. 19). The following chapters construct the argument that sole parents constitute themselves as postgraduate students within the enabling constraints of university spaces. That is, they are able to 'put a life together under often contradictory and partly incompatible conditions' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 126). This thesis seeks to illustrate the negotiations and agential responses sole parents undertake within the enabling and contradictory conditions of postgraduate education.

Judith Butler's work is central to the theoretical analysis I provide in this thesis because it enables a critique of gendered norms that I employ to disrupt the naturalised assumptions of motherhood/fatherhood as binaries wherein '[g]ender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity' (Butler, 2013, p. 23). Butler's (1990, 2005) theory of gender performativity supports this investigation of naturalised and (re)productive gender norms because it pays close attention to everyday, incremental and repetitive exchanges that accumulate and reinscribe gendered patterns and norms. This performative process is evident and productive in establishing and maintaining sedimented understandings of motherhood and fatherhood as ideals of femininity and masculinity.

In this study I aim to illustrate how the repetitive acts of mothering and fathering are (re)productive and regulatory, in relation to sole parents and particularly insofar as they are able to engage with postgraduate education. Butler's theory of accountability is a useful theoretical framing to consider how particular social and historical productions of femininity and masculinity are

maintained through parental acts within families because it facilitates close examination of the conditions of account, as always and already relational and open to possibilities of alternative and adaption. Inspired by Butler's gender performativity and accountability this thesis seeks to draw attention to how these familial practices can influence sole parents imagining of themselves as students, as well as their engagement with postgraduate education, universities and government agencies that have provided financial support while studying.

Significance of the study

My analysis of the experiences of participants in this study aims to contribute to the existing body of academic work that considers women in higher education and which notes a 'lack of confidence, lack of support, confusion of roles and even hostility can all harm a mature woman's success as a student' (Wisker, 1996, p.9). Over ten years ago, Quinn (2003) observed that 'it may be a hell of alienation rather than a heaven of opportunity that awaits working-class women in HE' (2003, p. 123). This thesis expands on these themes of confusion and alienation in existing academic literature relating to women academics and academic parents by exploring the experiences of sole parent postgraduate students. Rachel Brooks (2012a) in a cross-national comparison of student parent experiences in the UK and Denmark notes that there have been 'relatively few studies of the experiences of 'student-parents' within HE' (p. 423). By incorporating theoretical frameworks drawing from Judith Butler's theories of performativity, recognition and agency, I am able to contribute to scholarly research on parenting in the academy and familial constructions. Butler (2004a) nominates the family and marriage as 'one of the most elementary structures of culture itself' (p. 350). My central argument in this study is that the potential for sole parents to constitute themselves as postgraduate students is enacted through social constructions of family, parenting and higher education. These conditions are often conflicting and are experienced as conditions of

enabling constraint. The interrelatedness of the institutions of higher education, family and child-care and the responses to these multiple influences by participants in this study, open up understandings of potentially exclusionary conditions and how they can be re-worked to ensure more supportive and conducive conditions for diverse students in higher education.

The subjectivities of sole parent postgraduates are negotiated and re-produced through an ongoing process and it is through an examination of this process that educational and familial practices are able to be critiqued and modified. This critique opens up discussions and possibilities for sole parents to engage with higher education and research through access to postgraduate qualifications. This has social justice implications for who is able to participate in and receive economic and social advantages through higher education.

In this thesis, I contribute to existing understandings of parenting in higher education. Lynch's (2008) work considers graduate student mothers and notes this gap in academic research stating that 'there is little formal documentation focusing specifically on how the roles of graduate student and mother are combined or how attrition may be affected by the unique role combination' (Lynch, 2008 ,p. 587). This study expands on academic research concerning student mothers by focusing on student sole parents as outside the heteronormative structures that existing studies tend to assume. How sole parent students navigate the particular terrain of higher education institutions is important because in 'the arena of higher education we find that college campuses and academic policies are built upon the assumption that students are young and unencumbered with no caretaking responsibilities in the home. Consequently, single mothers are particularly disadvantaged' (Naples, 2003, p. 159). Such disadvantage is established and reinforced when '[u]niversity cultures around the world value and reproduce concepts of career, academic achievement and institutional and intellectual work based on male life trajectories' (Currie, Thiele, & Harris, 2002, p. 47). The aim of this research is to draw from research on both academic women and academic mothers to provide a tighter focus on the experiences of sole parents in postgraduate education. This is important because

it is able to extend an awareness of and responsiveness towards the experiences of diverse student engagement in higher education. It also contributes an alternative perspective, that of sole parents, to our understandings of how women are constructed as mothers and how mothering and families are socially constructed within the higher education context.

By examining the experiences of sole parent postgraduates through the framework of gender performativity, recognition and agency, this research extends and contributes to an existing body of academic literature that considers the ‘myriad of apparently disparate and disconnected ways in which ‘gender’ impacts on, and can be analysed as a determining factor of Higher Education theory and practices’ (Howie & Tauchert, 2002, p. 2). Penny Jane Burke (2010) also advocates for research investigating determining and institutional practices;

It is imperative to pay close attention to the ways in which misrecognitions and power relations are constructed, produced and reinforced within institutional spaces, not least because many institutional practices are re/productive of historical misrecognitions’ (p. 34)

Following Burke (2010) this research examines institutional practices that enable postgraduate education to perform a series of re/productive and historical misrecognitions. For instance, that the institutional space of the university is inhabited by people who are construed as ‘child-free’ influences the material conditions within which sole parents are able to engage with postgraduate education. Another misrecognition that this research draws attention to pertains to the lack of or (mis)understanding of university institutions that external social welfare policies have little relevance for postgraduate students. For many sole parents, social welfare policies provide the limited financial support that enables them to maintain their postgraduate studies. Such misrecognitions consequently play a role in reproducing and rationalizing practices that continue the historical misrecognitions that perpetuate the production of institutional spaces as both uninhabited and uninhabitable by sole parents.

This study is informed by and expands on existing academic literature from both the sociology of education and sociology of the family. I draw on Deborah Youdell's (2004, 2006, 2011) work in the sociology of education to explore how exclusions and power operate in education. I also build on the large body of work relating to women in the academy, drawing on Quinn (2003) Reay (2003), Edwards (1993), Hey (2003, 2006), Hey & Leathwood (2009) and Morley (2013). My contribution to this body of feminist research is through my theoretical analysis relating to Butler's notion of performativity of gender.

This research also incorporates scholarly work that focuses on mothers in the academy, such as Mason (2009) and Mason, Wolfinger & Golden's (2009, 2013) work asking '*Do babies matter?*' in the academy, and D. Lynn O'Brien and Andrea O'Reilly's (2012) book, '*Academic motherhood*' a feminist collection of essays. These works tend to reinforce the assumption of female care of children bound up in discourses and practices of motherhood. I build on this work by un-settling this naturalised and persuasive connection, rather I focus my analysis on parental care-work to offer an additional perspective on women, gender, parenting and the academy. This analysis is supported by my incorporation of research relating to the family, I draw from works such as Chodorow (1978), Craig (2007), Gillies (2007) and Vincent (2010). This provides my research with a foundation from which to begin to open up discussions relating to kinship and familial constructs that can provide an alternative to heteronormative nuclear families. I build on this existing body of academic literature to suggest and explore some of the ways that alternative kinship arrangements can also facilitate agency and engagement for diverse students in higher education.

Situating this study in the academy

Within the academic field that considers women in academia, scholars have also focused on academic mothers, with particular emphasis on married/partnered mothers. I aim to disrupt some elements of this discourse relating to motherhood by examining how sole parents negotiate

normative university structures, whilst also navigating the obligations of their families. In *Do babies matter?*, Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas Wolfinger and Marc Goulden (2013) provide a quantitative analysis of the Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR) which tracks more than 160,000 PhD's in the USA. Drawing on SDR statistics between 1979-1995 Mason, Wolfinger and Goulden (2013) state simply that 'families keep women out of the academy' (p. 79). In a brief focus on sole parents in the academy, Mason, Wolfinger and Goulden (2013) state;

What academic population is even more marginalized than faculty mothers? Faculty single mothers. These women, 20 percent of all tenured faculty mothers, face the same difficulties as their married colleagues, but without a partner to help with the time demands of childrearing, and only a single income to defray child care costs. While single fathers may be admired for their devotion to their children, single mothers rarely receive similar praise (p. 75)

This quote begins to illustrate the different familial experiences of sole parents in the academy and draws attention to the ways in which parenting is constructed differently for fathers and mothers.

Sole parents constitute themselves and their families through a messy and incomplete process within conditions that privilege the idea of heteronormative coupledness. The gendered constructions of naturalised and compulsory mothering is a determining factor in how the sole parents in this study were able to account for themselves as postgraduate students. For example, access to child-care is almost always regarded and discussed as a women's/mother's concern. For participants in this study, access and attending academic conferences tended to be based on the assumption that another parent was available to care for children. Assumptions relating to dual financial contributions for household and childcare financial obligations also existed within the policies and practices in higher education.

The conditions within which sole parent account for themselves as postgraduates is only possible by engaging with university institutions that tend to value and provide beneficial institutional frameworks for unencumbered young students. It is the experiences of sole parent postgraduates at the intersection of these (re)productive social norms that this research sets out to examine.

This research is also situated and contextualised in relation to social welfare policy because the Welfare to Work policy is critical to experiences of Australian sole parents in postgraduate education. The welfare to work policy is a clear move towards an ideology wherein, '[w]elfare rights have become reinterpreted as being linked to notions of deservingness as measured by social usefulness and participation in productivity' (Armstrong, 2003, p. 11). Initially introduced in 2006 by the conservative Howard government, tighter restrictions to the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) were introduced in 2012/13 by the Gillard Labor government. This meant that during the course of my interviews for this research all sole parents with children aged 8, were no longer eligible for Parenting Payment (Single) and they were automatically placed on NewStart (principle carer) unemployment benefits.

The NewStart allowance was paid at a much lower rate, has much more stringent reporting requirements and tighter mutual obligation demands. A reliance on government assistance via the Centrelink agency was always an ambivalent and/or contested condition for the sole parent postgraduates in this study. By enacting government policy and controlling access to financial support, Centrelink's power constantly acts on the sole parent postgraduate subject and also enacts that subject into being. My exploration of some of the ways in which social welfare policy operates as educational policy is timely as these changes were implemented during the interview phase of this research. Also, this focus has facilitated considerations of and advocacy for sole parents in higher education as a meaningful and productive pathway for sole parents to secure sustainable financial security for their families through academic careers.

The thesis purposefully focuses on postgraduate education, rather than higher education or undergraduate education, because postgraduate education is the minimum and necessary qualification to begin an academic career. In this way, postgraduate education is one of the many barriers which determine who has access to careers in the academy. Teaching and developing units of work in universities is important work which is enhanced when people from diverse interests and background are able to participate. Furthermore, a postgraduate qualification is mandatory for entry into most research positions, determining who is able to research, in which areas of interest and utilising what methodologies and is therefore central to facilitating equitable, diverse and meaningful research projects. Academic work and research work enables access to authority and knowledge held within universities and I believe that these positions of power and influence ought to be available to a diverse and rich collective who bring ontological and epistemological strengths to higher education, research and the sharing of knowledge. In this way, I include postgraduate education as a site of emancipatory potential more commonly associated with the broader field of education. This study aims to contribute to understandings of how diverse people access postgraduate education by considering the experiences of sole parents whose insights can illustrate institutional practices that facilitate and exclude engagement with education.

My focus on postgraduate education recognises that barriers to education are crafted long before many students complete compulsory schooling. To be imagining and transitioning into postgraduate education requires and therefore assumes significant success in all preceding levels of education. An orientation towards postgraduate education is opened up for certain classed subjects. Most of the participants in this research spoke of middle-class sensibilities towards their education and particularly in relation to their projections of becoming an academic. Participant projections towards middle-class futures were disclosed from their current situation of financial stress. They often regarded their engagement as a postgraduate student as mitigating their current classed status as they perceived that postgraduate education reflected a positive hierarchy of status. Following Nancy

Fraser (2000), this perhaps illustrates the productive potential of thinking about the connection between distribution and recognition, when economic resources do not result in 'economic class inequalities simply reflect[ing] status hierarchies' (p. 118). This research also explores classed understandings in relation to the sense of entitlement participants shared in response to social welfare provisions and a clear differentiation they articulated between themselves and other welfare recipients. Participants tended to orientate towards postgraduate education for its perceived potential as a pathway towards or back to middle-class futures, financial security and their legitimate belonging in the academy.

The importance of class

I have relied on a theoretical framework concentrating on gendered constructions throughout this research. However, I aim to avoid an analysis that tends to 'rip gender out of a sociocultural context' (Ringrose, 2077, p. 473). Taking account of sociocultural context includes a focus on how families are constituted, institutional spatial constructs, social policy and class. Class is central to equity and participation in higher education and in 'Australia today we see a substantial inequality in higher education participation, determined very much by where one lives and where one goes to school' (Gale & Tranter, 2011, p. 32). In the Australian context, The Bradley Review (2008) noted that to increase participation in higher education, students from under-represented groups must be included, adding that students from low socio-economic status were dis-advantaged. Australia has, or aspires towards a higher education system that can enable all people to participate regardless of background (Rizvi & Lingard 2011). It is understood as a social good and an individual 'positional good', wherein 'higher education is important because it confers significant individual benefits, in terms of personal development, lifelong income earning capacity, and career and social status' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011, p. 6). Nevertheless, a disparity remains in relation to who is able to imagine and

engage with higher education resulting in diminished emancipatory potential. Imagining and engagement in higher education is complex and not simply equated with socio-economic status.

I understand class as being attentive to more than socio-economic factors. Family background, geography and various economic, social and cultural capital influence experiences and perceptions of class. I theorise class as a way of examining meritocratic assumptions of individuals taking responsibility for their own pathways through finding and maximising resources to seek productive lives. Class is mobilised throughout this thesis as an examination of how '[r]elentlessly individualising discourses of opportunity, choice, responsibility and aspiration are re-played' (Allen & Taylor, 2012, p. 2).

Gale & Tranter (2011) state that '[s]ocio-economic disadvantage in Australia is multi-dimensional and cumulative, incorporating far more than low income and tends to be concentrated in particular locations' (p. 32). Many of the participants in this study referred to middle-class sensibilities, in that they were currently experiencing severe financial stress as sole parent postgraduates, but they were firmly attached to understandings of themselves as middle-class. This indicates the importance of thinking about class for diverse social groups, not only people from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage. In this study, postgraduate education was central to this projection of class, they often spoke of a sense of entitlement to higher education based on their understanding that education qualifications can open up access to high levels of income and living standards.

Middle-class sensibilities were also shared in relation to their care for their children, often depicted as an entitlement to state financial support to facilitate their in-home and/or out-of-home care of their children. Middle-class sensibilities were strongly evident in many of the discussions I had with participants in relation to Centrelink and the delivery of social welfare. Many participants

strongly disassociated themselves from Centrelink staff and ‘other’ Centrelink recipients as a differentiation of entitlement and deservingness that I interpreted as class based.

Class was also evident in many of the participant projections towards the academy as a future career. They aspired to the financial security and prestige of an academic career. For all but one participant, this projection was mirrored by their middle-class background, they viewed a career in the academy as ‘returning’ them to their middle-classness, in terms of financial security and educational qualifications. Conversely, Jean spoke of her illiterate parents with no formal educational background but who were nevertheless extremely supportive and encouraging of Jean’s university education. Jean’s experience of family support is contrary to Maureen Baker’s (2010) findings that participants who shared a ‘lack of parental support were more often women, [and] those from working-class backgrounds’ (p. 6).

I suggest that research necessitates that particular theoretical frameworks and interests are foregrounded. I rely on Butler’s accountability to mitigate this narrowing of my research focus because it opens up consideration of the multiple and contestatory conditions of account, thereby incorporating wide fields of importance beyond the triad of gender, race & class.

The statistics of sole parenting in Australia

The 2009-10 Family Characteristics Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collected information on household and family composition, along with demographic and labour force characteristics of persons within households and families. A particular focus of this survey is families with children aged 0-17 years. For those families, additional information is collected about family structures, the social marital status of parents, and contact arrangements for children with a natural parent living elsewhere. The depth and the scope of ABS figures provide an accurate statistical reflection of Australian sole parent families.

Of all families in 2009-10 with resident children aged 0 to 17 years (2.7 million), 81% were couple families and 19% were one parent families demonstrating that sole parent families are a significant proportion of Australian families. This means that there are 600,892 one parent families with dependent children in Australia (ABS 2011 Census). How these families experience education, how they are able to contribute and benefit from education is an important area of research. An understanding and responsiveness to gendered constructions of parental responsibility and social contributions is also important because it informs social and education policy and reflects on equitable social arrangements in regard to paid employment and familial work. This data is useful in relation to sole parents because it illustrates that the majority of one parent families with resident children aged 0 to 17 years were lone mother families (84% of all one parent families with children aged 0 to 17 years in 2009-10) compared to lone father families (16%).

Sole parents engagement with and experiences of higher education or paid employment is highly relational to the age of their children, particularly pre-school children. One parent families where the youngest resident child was aged 0 to 4 accounted for 17% of all one parent families in 2009-10, down from 23% in 1997. In 38% of one parent families with dependent children, the resident parent was not employed. It is useful to note that the Welfare to Work policy analysis I provide in this thesis shows that the policy is designed to direct sole parents in to paid employment. However, ABS figures show that a similar percentage of sole parents work as compared with parents in coupled families. In 2009-10 mothers were employed in 66% of couple families with dependent children and 60% of lone mother families. These figures would seem to negate the governments' premise that the Welfare to Work policy as facilitating sole parents back into paid work, when 60% of sole parents were already working. Countering the political rhetoric about problematic levels of sole parent unemployment (based on assumptions that caring for one's own children is not regarded as work) are figures that show engagement with paid employment increased when the youngest

dependent child was aged 15-24 years; 83% of sole parents were employed in 2009/10 compared to 69% in 1997.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)² survey Annual Statistical Report (2010) reports that child poverty in lone parent households has increased due to the 2006 welfare reforms. The survey noted that in 2010, 24.1% of children in one-parent households lived in poverty, up from 20.8% in 2001, whilst the proportion of children from two-parent households living in poverty decreased slightly throughout the decade, to 7.6% in 2010. Increased levels of poverty for sole parents over time and relative to two parent families is of concern and is instructive for this work that considers how sole parents are able to access higher education. Equitable access to higher education and postgraduate education is linked to financial and social advantage and I propose in this thesis that sole parents can effectively mitigate the effects of poverty by successful completion of higher education. This research is useful in this regard because it opens up considerations of wider access and engagement to education by diverse and under-represented people. Education is also a meaningful and productive way of accessing paid employment which would assist sole parents to reduce their exposure to poverty and facilitate government targets to reduce sole parents receiving government social security support.

No statistics exist in relation to sole parents in higher education within the Australian context. I sought statistical information from Centrelink, the government agency that implements social welfare policy and some educational policies. Centrelink advised that they did not collect or collate information about educational engagement for sole parents. The Pensioner Education Supplement may be indicative of how many sole parents are in some form of education because they are receiving this financial support, but it does not differentiate between higher education or

² Families, Jobs & Income, Vol. 5 - Roger Wilkins, Diana Warren, Markus Hahn and Brendan Hough
Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research
The University of Melbourne, sourced from http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/hilda/Stat_Report/statreport-v5-2010.pdf

postgraduate education, nor does it differentiate between pension types. These statistics do not clarify how many sole parents are engaged with higher education or postgraduate education because it incorporates recipients of a variety of pension allowances, including the disability pension. Universities do not collect data on the parental responsibilities students may have and no figures exist in Australia that would indicate how many sole parents are undertaking postgraduate education.

Outlining the structure of the thesis

This thesis builds the argument that sole parents actively and productively negotiate within the enabling constraints of university institutional practices to engage with postgraduate education. Negotiations of sole parent postgraduate subjectivity are ongoing and Butler's theory of recognition and performativity frames the analysis that this thesis sets out by demonstrating how norms precede us but do not determine us.

The literature review (Chapter Two) contextualises this study by exploring the structural and institutional influences of higher education and how heteronormative constructs (re)produce parental care-giving practices. I focus on sole parent experiences at the intersection between universities practices and heteronormative understandings of families as a unique contribution this thesis makes to academic research. To provide a focused foundation for this work, I chart the body of academic literature that relates to women in higher education and its concomitant interest in academic parenting. The second section of the literature review provides foundation work for exploring the distinctive experience of sole parenting in relation to normative family structures in order to contextualise the conditions within which participants negotiate and reconcile sole parenting and postgraduate education.

Chapter Three articulates my methodology and epistemological framing of this research. I demonstrate how my choice of a collective case study facilitates my investigation into the experiences of sole parents in postgraduate education. A collective case study provides for multiple

sources of data, including semi-structured interviews and policy documents which I have analysed in conversation with theoretical frameworks to create context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In this section, I detail the data generating questions I used in my interviews with participants and discuss some of the limitations to this study. This chapter also incorporates an epistemology section where I detail my researcher positioning and examine how my experiences of sole parenting in higher education have influenced and informed this study. The epistemology section opens up my use of theoretical framing throughout the research and illustrates my unique contribution to academic knowledge through my use of Judith Butler's theories of performativity, recognition and agency at the intersections of gender, parenting and higher education.

Chapter Four is the first of four data analysis chapters. In this chapter I examine performative acts that were central to the ongoing process through which the participant sole parents constituted themselves as postgraduate students. Drawing from Butler's theory of performativity, I illustrate how repetitive acts attempt to regulate and (re)produce particular subjectivities. Performativity enables theorising of sole parent postgraduates as never fully constituted whilst drawing attention to how norms operate such as 'child-free' university spaces to open up the possibility of altering and refusing these normative patterns. This analysis contributes to understandings of university spaces by thinking of academic spaces as performative and productive in relation to postgraduate sole parents who experiences 'child-free' university spaces as conflicting with their intensified care-child obligations.

In chapter Five I continue to examine university conditions of account for postgraduate students, drawing on Butler's theory of recognition as critical to how norms, regulations and boundary maintenance are experienced by sole parent participants. Butler's theory of recognisability provides a framework for critiquing university policies and practices because it enables an analysis of individual *and* institutional/structural factors. This chapter details the operation of recognition in relation to supervisors, as competent postgraduates, as sole parents, as conference attendees, as

published and/or publishable academics and as engaged and legitimate postgraduates. These factors are explored in this work as establishing the rules of recognisability for sole parent postgraduates and provides new insights into how non-traditional students experience institutional practices in higher education.

Chapter Six continues to draw on Butler's theory of recognition but focuses on conditions outside universities to examine how the social welfare policy (Welfare to Work), becomes educational policy and influences sole parents capacities to engage with postgraduate education. Recognition through this policy was critical to the sole parents in this study because they depended on Centrelink's implementation of the policy to financially support themselves and their children whilst they studied. In this chapter I provide details of the Welfare to Work policy as it intersects with educational engagement for sole parents. Investigating how this policy intersection regulates and problematically facilitates sole parent's postgraduate education draws attention to interrelatedness of education exclusions and contributes to scholarly research concerned with equitable participation in higher education.

Chapter Seven explores the responsiveness to and re-working of the conditions within which sole parent's experienced postgraduate education drawing on Butler's theory of agency. In this chapter I ask – How do the participants respond to these conflicting conditions and hold to their attachment and commitment to their postgraduate studies? Agency is understood as the opening up of alternative possibilities and this is demonstrated through the re-workings of family finances, flexibility of time and management of childcare responsibilities within the enabling constraints of sole parenting and postgraduate education. This chapter also examines agential responses to the normative constructs of motherhood as potentially prompted by the participant's experiences of being outside hetero/partner normative families.

The final chapter in this thesis concludes the study and reiterates my contributions to new knowledge. It also offers some direction for university practice and future research. In particular I draw attention to the theoretical frameworks I have utilised in this study and how this connection is fundamental to how this study expands on existing academic literature. This chapter summarises the individual acts and responses to sole parenting and postgraduate education as always and already enacted within conditions of account established by university practices and social constructions of gender, parenting and the family.

With these aims and intentions in mind, I now turn to the literature review which provides an in-depth review of academic literature that frames the argument I construct throughout this thesis.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

The following literature review provides a review of academic literature relating to women academics and parents in the academy with a particular focus on academic research relating to sole parents in higher education. I consider the social structures of families and parenting to provide a foundation for sole parent subjectivity and the distinctiveness of sole parent experiences. The institutional structures of higher education and the family are both explored in this literature review because they combine to create the conditions within which sole parents are able to account for themselves as postgraduate students and parents. ‘Subjectivities are partially formed by external influences, and these influences work to produce agency in processes of subjectivization’ (Rasmussen, 2006, p. 73). In negotiations and movements toward postgraduate education, sole parents adjust and revise their understandings of themselves as parents and as students informed by the external institutional influences of higher education and hetero nuclear families.

My research aims to build on prior research in order to investigate some of the experiences of sole parents as postgraduates, ‘through an engagement with language, a de-centred subject and an unstable truth...[to ask] how the self, or subject, is made and constrained in these conditions’ (Youdell, 2011, p. 24). I begin by considering feminist research into the experiences of mature aged women in higher education and also chart the body of academic work relating to women in higher education. I review academic research relating to duality of academic and parental work and include reviews of existing academic research which focuses on sole parents in higher education.

This literature review then turns to an exploration and discussion relating to the social and gendered constructions of parenting, mothering and fathering. Socially sanctioned and embedded gender based parental roles are key determining influences in the experiences of sole parents in

postgraduate education. The sedimented feminization of childcare is a crucial condition within which sole parents are able to imagine themselves as postgraduate students. This thesis examines the implications for parental work in the academy in response to Craig's (2007) assertion that, 'caring for children is largely invisible and no framework for social and economic accounting for it exists' (p. 1). This research draws attention to parental academic experiences and begins to propose a framework for understanding how sole parenting exists in postgraduate education.

Central to the construction of the framework is an awareness of the ways in which sole parents understand themselves as living outside, yet amidst, the dominant heteronormative nuclear family construct. Being outside heteronormative coupledness contributes to the conditions of accountability for sole parents in postgraduate education because social and cultural norms 'give heterosocial and heterosexual relations a conceptual privilege of incalculable consequence' (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 31). The following review of academic literature aims to provide some background to the familial and educational conditions that exist for postgraduate sole parents who live outside heterosocial privilege.

Women, motherhood and academic work

This section brings together some of the key academic research in relation to motherhood/parenting and families in higher education. Penny Jane Burke (2010) reflects on her experiences of higher education and parenting as a student from a 'non-traditional background';

This was an important opportunity for me, particularly as a student with childcare responsibilities I rarely had the chance to discuss ideas with my peers and rushed in and out of the university for my supervisory meetings, just in time to make the school run. Time was precious and tightly regulated and had to fit in with the rhythm of family life, even though I was formally a full-time student. This meant having to work on my doctoral research mainly within school hours. (p. 32)

Burke (2010) shares her own experiences which resonate with those of the participants in this study. She notes a disconnection from her peers because of childcare responsibilities and the restrictions on her time to dedicate to research work within school hours which illustrates some of the ways in which institutional university practices may conflict with parental responsibilities. Burke (2010) notes that education is an ‘important opportunity for me’ but her engagement is conditioned and framed by her childcare responsibilities.

The conditions for parents in the academy has been studied extensively by Mason, Goulden and Wolfinger (2013) who note that ‘academia does not really offer any good time to have children. Our results suggest that female Ph.D.’s may have responded by using adjunct professorships as an imperfect solution to structural problems intrinsic to the academic life course as we have come to know it’ (Wolfinger, Mason & Goulden, 2009, p. 1613). Mason, Goulden and Wolfinger, publish academic research that explores the work-family conflict associated with academic careers and investigate why ‘women’s representation in academia has not increased apace with the dramatic growth in female Ph.D.’s’ (Wolfinger, Mason & Goulden, 2009, p. 1593). This disparity between female PhD’s and female representation within the hierarchy of the academy is also evident in the Australian context. ‘In late 2009, 18% (or 7 of 39) of Vice-Chancellors were women, 34% of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were women and just on 40% of senior administrative staff were women’ (Universities Australia Strategy for Women: 2011-2014, p. 2).³ This provides a glimpse of the gendered nature of the Australian academy and it is within these conditions that the sole parents in this study engaged with higher education.

An edited collection by O’Brien-Hallstein and O’Reilly (2012), *Academic motherhood in a post-second wave context: Challenges, strategies and possibilities* is a useful scholarly reference point for this research. In their introduction, O’Brien-Hallstein and O’Reilly (2012) sum up the

³ Universities Australia, See; http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Australia/Australia_Universities_Strategy_Women.pdf

context of their work relating to academic motherhood as conditions that are ‘distinct-to-academia’ and describe university conditions that are also foundational to the investigations I seek to articulate in this thesis. Their research notes the limitations in transferring postgraduate qualifications outside the academy. They state;

we believe that 30ish graduate students and academic mothers across disciplines are asking these questions because the context in which they find themselves is shaped by three, often competing and/or contradictory, forces or features: contemporary women’s status as post-second wave beneficiaries, the intensive and unbounded career-path and ideal worker norms of academia that center on achieving tenure and promotion, and the demanding and also unbounded requirements of the contemporary ideology of “good mothering”, intensive mothering (O’Brien Hallstein & O’Reilly, 2012, p. 3)

Building on these contextual foundations, this research aims to extend consideration of academic motherhood by investigating the experiences of students, particularly postgraduate students who I argue experience materially different conditions in universities.

In her book *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap*, Maureen Baker (2012) notes that although intergenerational change is according that more women enter the academy the gender gap remains partly preserved by ‘gendered family circumstances, [and] household responsibilities’ (p. 9). Baker’s (2012) qualitative research contrasts academic experiences in Canada in 1973 and in New Zealand in 2008 and found that more women have gained faculty positions and that ‘child-bearing and the “motherhood penalty” are clearly consequential for female employees’ (p. 27). In Baker’s 2008 cohort, ‘most women believed that motherhood was a more significant career barrier than gender’ (p. 158), yet I suggest that as motherhood is a gendered performative whereby the caring for children is described and produced as strongly feminine through which motherhood remains a significantly gendered practice and category. This research aims to explore motherhood as a

gendered performance and builds on this analysis by examining how un-settling the gendered constructs of parenting, opens up the possibility that academic work may be experienced more equitably because the 'gender gap' is reduced.

University conditions are also mediated by race and class within national and international contexts. The participants in this research were all non-Indigenous Australians, one participant completed her PhD studies as an international student and found this isolating and difficult. Another participant was the daughter of immigrant parents with no formal education and she spoke of this as a particularly motivating force for her and she felt in the support and encouragement she received from her mother.

Issues of class are inter-weaved throughout the discussions and the analysis in this research. Orientations to postgraduate education stemmed largely from middle-class aspirations and were often facilitated by middle-class sensibilities, if not by participants current realities. Participants all spoke of their attachment to and projections towards an academic career as a means of providing for their children, illustrating their intentions towards 'good parenting'. The participants' passionate attachment to higher education and to being an educable subject was often a performative of middle-class orientations and 'future-making' (Taylor, 2012, p. 66), as a purposeful movement towards financial security, career certainty and academic worthiness.

Whilst I take into consideration the issues of class that are evident throughout this research, my focus is a theoretical analysis of gender, agency and recognition. I also seek to extend my analysis to a re-working of the gendered construct of mothering and motherhood. My aim to challenge and un-settle naturalised gendered motherhood. This aim is also referred to by O'Brien-Hallstein and O'Reilly (2012) when they seek to expand concerns of academic motherhood to discussions and understandings of issues in this context as 'as parental and family concerns' (p. 39). They elaborate their position;

What is needed, in other words, is a re-positioning of the word mother from a noun to a verb so that the work of mothering is rendered separate from the identity of mother; that care is divested of biology such that family configurations can be based on the caregiving that is necessary to sustain families rather than gender roles based on biology (O'Brien-Hallstein & O'Reilly, 2012, p. 39)

Similarly, my focus on parental care-work is concerned with the work that is necessary to sustain families. I suggest this is a re-working and attentiveness to notions of kinship, to an extended understanding of familial relations not confined to heteronormative foundations. However, as O'Brien-Hallstein & O'Reilly (2012) note the need for a re-shaping of sustaining families away from gender, their focus remains firmly located in discourse and experiences relating to motherhood, indeed 'motherhood' is prominent in the title. In this thesis, I begin to make a contribution to this move to understand sustaining care-work in families, by exploring how care-work of children can be revitalized through the critique of gendered mothering, as a practice and a discourse, alongside a shift in articulating this caring of children as parental and familial.

In research concerning negotiations of work and family in higher education, Wolf-Wendel & Ward (2003) argue that the gendered expectations of family obligations impact on academic lives in particular ways. They note that postgraduate education often coincides with child-bearing years and that this results in disproportionate demands of the 'second shift' on academic women;

As more women enter the academic profession, many of the norms that have precluded their participation are given way to more open systems; however, the structures that exist to promote faculty are still largely focused on a normative and male model. The clockwork of this career is distinctly male. That is, it is built upon men's normative paths and assumes freedom from competing responsibilities, such as family, that generally affect women more than men' (Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2003, p. 113)

The sole parents interviewed for this study note that flexibility of time for students contributed to their capacities to maintain their studies and their childcare commitments. The advantage of flexibility was reported by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) who found that the ‘flexibility and autonomy afforded to faculty’ (p. 243) was helpful in managing schedules of academic work and parenting and in negotiating conflicts between two ‘greedy’ institutions (Edwards, 1993); academy and family. Ward and Wolf-Wendel research states that academic mothers carry the bulk of the parenting responsibility even when they reside with their partners and/or co-parents of their children. These findings illustrate the work academic mothers do in raising children and that women are often normatively constructed as mothers whom are passionately attached and disproportionately assigned childcare responsibilities. This commitment may be intensified for sole parents who may do not only the ‘bulk of parenting’ but almost all of it.

Currie, Thiele and Harris (2002) investigate parental responsibilities for academics and make clear connections between success in university institutions and child care.

The obligation to care for children, which is delegated to women, and the costs it extracts, gives rise to a sense that women must make a choice between family and career...that successful women did not have children. (p. 71)

Sandra Acker (1990) notes that ‘men’s minimal responsibilities in procreation’ (in Currie, Thiele and Harris, 2002, p. 71) affords them un-limited and supported paid work whilst women’s responsibilities for procreation and childcare rule them out or limit their capacities for paid work. Therefore, the care-work associated with raising children tends to be highly gendered and impacts heavily on work practices in universities. Limits to financial security and earning capacity influence how sole parents are able to access and participate in higher education. Financial insecurity also has a determining effect on how long sole parents are able to maintain extended periods of time studying.

This is intensified because sole parents do not have a second income with which to share the financial stress of studying and raising children.

This 'second shift' (Hochschild 1989) is intensified for sole parents who often have limited capacities to share parental responsibilities. Many sole parents have limited involvement or *no* involvement or support from the non-custodial co-parent to meet the financial and care responsibilities of raising children. For many sole parent students parental responsibilities are intensified and further compounded because they are students, completing research projects without the benefits of a secure well-paid academic position. The sole parent postgraduates I interviewed noted that their trajectory towards an academic career and its benefits were a central motivating factor in completing postgraduate education. This aspirational projection towards a career in the academy reflects findings by Edin and Lein (1997) who found that most 'single mothers', 'believed that combining welfare with quality training was the best way to achieve self-sufficiency' (p. 81). This research aims to consider the conditions of combining higher education and sole responsibility for childcare as a pathway for sole parents to secure sustainable financial security for their families through academic careers.

The distinction between academic parents and student parents is an important one for this research which focuses on sole parent postgraduate students' experiences of higher education. Successful postgraduate students require 'a single-mindedness and an unswerving commitment to their research. They were marked by an inner drive and intense focus, often working 70+ hour weeks' (Currie, Thiele & Harris, 2002, p. 140). As research students, successful postgraduates carry a significant workload; these work demands clash with family workloads. For sole parent postgraduates, family workloads are often magnified which I argue is uniquely significant to their experiences of postgraduate education.

Hinton-Smith's (2012) work critiques the 'legitimacy of the 'Bachelor Boy' model of the ideal student, with its inherent assumption that full participation in the experience of being a university student requires an individual not to have conflicting responsibilities' (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 84). Conflicting responsibilities for postgraduate students who are also sole parents exist because they often have un-shared and unavoidable commitments to their children. This is one of the ways that sole parent experiences of postgraduate studies can be different from other research students. Research in an edited collection, '*Shut Out: Low income mothers and higher education in post-welfare America*', (2004) demonstrates this constant and over-determining factor that children represent for sole parents in higher education;

All the women describe how their children are a driving motivation for college aspirations, a periodic barrier to their progress, and a constant demand on their time, financial resources, and energy. They struggle to feed, clothe, and house their children, and all endure the welfare bureaucracy, experiencing new bureaucratic impositions and requirements, intensified stigmatization, and often caseworker's condemnation of their educational commitments (Sharp, 2004, p. 116)

Sharp (2004) describes the multiple and colliding conditions for parents with obligations to care for children whilst engaging in higher education. This description reflects in the experiences of participants in this study, their aspirations towards 'becoming an academic', negative feedback from government agencies in response to their education and high levels of financial stress. In this research, I seek to investigate the conflicting conditions that the sole parents I spoke with shared, but also I aim to draw attention to the ways in which they mobilised and maintained their orientation to postgraduate studies.

Research by Sue Webb (2001) explored educational biographies through narrative accounts to consider the educational career narratives of 1145 alternative entry students during the 1990's in

the UK context. Webb found that student experiences of accessing education were heterogeneous, noting that ‘family responsibilities will form barriers to education participation for women but not for men’ (p. 52). This experience is reiterated in research by White (2004) who explored the ‘leaky pipeline’ between undergraduate and postgraduate research programs in two Australian universities. She notes that ‘women postgraduate researchers often have other responsibilities – such as caring for children and or other family members. These may impact on the time they can devote to research and their flexibility to attend meetings and participate in postgraduate seminars...women with dependent children may have less financial capacity to undertake postgraduate research’ (White, 2004, p. 238).

Similarly, Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid’s (2009) research surveyed the top 63 sociology departments in the United States to investigate what supports were available to graduate student parents. In their subsequent findings, Springer et.al. (2009) discussed the incompatibility of being an academic parent and sought to illustrate distinct experiences of graduate students ‘there are circumstances often specific to graduate student parents or exacerbated for graduate student parents – include but not limited to relationships with advisors, financial insecurity, career uncertainty, and open or flexible timelines’ (p. 436). In this research I question how family responsibilities are experienced differently by sole parents and how this subsequently influences their participation in postgraduate education. The sole parents I interviewed spoke of their financial stress and a sense of academic isolation that was directly related to being a sole parent. They also shared a sense of agential capacity in that they were the decision makers and were able to mediate their parenting and study commitments to maintain their postgraduate education. They negotiated the often conflicting conditions as a result of their inability or refusal to separate their sole parenting and postgraduate education.

Rosalind Edward’s (1993) work, *Mature Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education*, considered the circumstances under which women attempted to navigate a coexisting family life whilst completing higher education;

Both, 'the family' and higher education can be said to act in concert in particular ways for women; as social institutions they, in fact, favour a separating approach to education and family in women's lives. Family, as a bounded private sphere calls for separation so that outside concerns do not intrude upon the minutiae of its everyday life and relationships, while higher education invites a separative approach so as to ensure objectivity and attention to abstract concepts (Edwards, 1993, p. 157)

Boundary maintenance between parental and academic work may be somewhat less regimented now than in 1993 when Edwards was discussing a 'separative approach', however participants in this research also spoke of a cross-over between their home/parental work and a self-silencing in relation to their parental responsibilities within the academic context. I suggest that combining parenting and academic work establishes difficult working conditions for sole parents in the academy which tends to privilege people who are more able to subscribe to this separative approach. 'Scholarly work takes discipline, rigor, and a certain amount of ascetic remove, and the care of a child requires practically the opposite of these things: openness, flexibility, and porous affection (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 117). These concerns are examined in this research, particularly in chapter four in my discussion of participant experiences of universities as 'child-free' spaces.

Research by Dorothy Moss (2006) considered that women shape their space and time in order to engage with higher education arguing that, 'to create space and time women are actively involved in integrating, combining and reordering activities in different and overlapping spheres' (p. 3). How sole parents negotiate these 'overlapping spheres' to construct and maintain a coherent identity as a postgraduate student is examined throughout this thesis. By exploring how these 'opposites' are navigated demonstrates how the participant sole parents are able to blur these constructions of insider/outsider in the academy, which I suggest is particularly pertinent to postgraduate students whose futures in the academy are uncertain.

Combining higher education and parenting requires complex and constant re-negotiation of familial relations. O'Malley (1999) writes, '[t]oo often the experience of mothering in academia for me was pretending my children did not exist' (1999, p.29). Parental and motherhood norms have been researched by Joan C. Williams (2004) who recognises the 'maternal wall' in the academy. Williams (2004) quotes one graduate student mother who shares that 'I basically act like I don't have kids' (p. 2). Similarly, Philipsen (2010) writes of her own story as a forty six year old full professor at a research university in the United States that she never talks in detail about her children in her academic workplace because, 'I knew lowered expectations would come back to haunt me at some point, and so I never asked for help, for release time, for maternity leave, or anything else' (p. 15).

Mary Ann Mason (2009), co-author of *'Do babies matter'* a quantitative investigation into parenting in the United States academy also notes that 'many students defer the decision on whether to start a family for the same reasons that I did 30 years ago: They fear they will not be taken seriously and that their professors, mentors, and future employers will discourage them from continuing their studies' (p. 2). Similarly, Rachel Brooks' (2012b) comparative study of 68 student-parents in UK and Danish universities found parental and student roles conflicted, 'the majority were women who, although committed to their studies, prioritised their responsibilities to their children and identified primarily as a parent rather than as a student...there was a notable absence of familial negotiation: domestic responsibilities had been altered little as a result of study' (Brooks, 2012b, p. 448). Brook's (2012b) research work on university student and familial relationships finds;

that the few studies that have been conducted in this area have suggested that female student-parents continue to experience considerable pressure to downplay their 'student' identity while at home and to retain their role as main caregiver irrespective of the demands of their university course...both roles [are] often in conflict, student-mothers adopt strategies to minimize such conflict. This involves downplaying their maternal role when they are at

university, and concealing their student role when they are outside the university (Brooks, 2012b, p. 444)

In response to these findings by Brooks (2012b), I question how sole parents experienced this ‘downplaying’ of parenting and studying. This prompted my research question - Does the autonomy of sole parents result in less demand for concealing their student work at home? Conversely; Does sole parenting increase their concealment of their parenting responsibilities in the academic context? To explore these questions, this study focused on the conditions of account and the agential strategies sole parent’s adopt to enable their engagement with postgraduate education.

This also provides a foundation for my central research question of how the category and practices of gendered mothering influence engagement with higher education. Academic research relating to parenting in the academy firmly focuses on motherhood, one of my aims in this research is to draw attention to how motherhood as a practice and discourse operates. I suggest that as motherhood is equated with responsibilities for the care of children and as such it becomes re-inscribed as gendered performative which denotes femininity. I draw from the experiences of sole parents in postgraduate education to explore ways in which mothering practices and performatives can potentially be re-worked. The following section charts the academic literature which addresses the experiences of sole parents in higher education.

Sole parent perspectives in higher education

The academic literature I have reviewed illustrates the conflicting nature of parenting in the academy. One of the ways this research seeks to contribute to new academic knowledge is by paying close attention to some of the experiences of sole parents. As demonstrated in the previous section, a large body of academic literature exists in relation to academic parenting/motherhood, however, little scholarly work exists that focuses particular attention on how sole parents engage with higher education.

In 1994, Van Stone, Nelson and Niemann researched the experiences of forty six 'poor single-mother college students' in a medium sized university in the United States. Twenty years later, much of the discussion in their work still resonates with much of the analysis produced in this thesis. Van Stone's et.al. (1994) research included semi-structured interviews with 'poor single mothers' who discussed the importance of further education as providing good 'role modelling' and as an avenue to 'provide' for their children. The participants in this study noted that 'positive interactions with faculty was critical to their academic success...participants often noted that faculty were more likely to "understand" when "conflicts" arose between parenting and school if professor were aware of the "personal situation" and "family responsibilities". (Van Stone, Nelson and Niemann, 1994, p. 578). Similarly, participants in the Van Stone et. al study indicated a reluctance to discuss their 'personal situation' of 'single mothering' with academic staff because they were concerned that that faculty would tend to think that students who needed more "help" or "concrete explanations" were less intelligent.

This reticence to discuss their parenting responsibilities in the academic context meant that 'participants rarely sought out academic help from faculty and "avoided" or "dropped" courses from professors who were perceived to be unwilling to help with academic concerns' (Van Stone, Nelson and Niemann, 1994, p. 578). How sole parent postgraduates managed 'academic concerns' is also addressed in this research through a theoretical analysis drawing on Butler's theory of recognition and agency to examine how sole parents negotiate conditions of postgraduate education. Participant in this study spoke of a reticence to discuss their sole parenting with academic supervisors and their un-easy sense of belonging within university spaces as postgraduate student parents.

Lorraine Brown and Pamela Watson (2010) included the narratives of two sole parents in their analysis of the experiences of eight female doctoral students at a post-1992 university in southern England. Brown and Watson (2010) make the point that the two sole parents they spoke

with have occupied previously 'lonely' times with study but do not include a more detailed analysis of how the sole parenting of these two participants influences their experiences of doctoral study.

Marjory Horne and Cheryl Hardie's (2002) research focuses specifically on the experiences of 'lone parent students' in higher education to consider the financial implications of seven 'single female lone parents' moving from welfare to study at Queen Margaret University College in Edinburgh. Horne and Hardie (2002) find that a lack of information and financial support compounded financial stress for participants in higher education but that the long term capacity to benefit from education outweighed the short-time financial difficulties. Similarly, the participants in this research also spoke of a projection towards career and financial security, and I build on this idea to consider the implications of these aspirational projections towards the academy in an era of increasing budgetary tightening and uncertainty in higher education.

The experiences and capacity of sole parents to use higher education as a means of moving out of poverty towards middle-class incomes and careers is also explored in the research of Diana L. Haleman (2004) whose study investigated the experiences of ten women who simultaneously receive social service benefits whilst studying at a major research institution in the United States. Haleman (2004) reports that participants understood higher education as personally transformative and a way of countering negative stereotypes about their 'single-parent-family form' (p. 778). Participants in Haleman's (2004) study also regarded further education as beneficial modeling for their children and as a way of moving out of financial difficulty as their 'most realistic avenue toward financial security' (p. 776). The focus of Haleman (2004), and Horne and Hardie (2002) is on the financial implications of higher education for sole parents with particular reference to state welfare policies. In this research I build on these studies by contributing an analysis of Australian welfare policies as they intersect with higher education. I also extend previous academic work on sole parents in higher education by exploring postgraduate education as distinct from undergraduate education. I also shift

the focus towards how sole parents are constituted within and outside normative constructs of hetero familial relations and the gendered motherhood binary.

A recently published academic text, Tasmin Hinton-Smith's (2012) book *Lone Parents' experiences as higher education students: Learning to juggle* provides an important reference point for this study. Hinton-Smith is a sociology research fellow and her book documents a longitudinal study of 77 lone mothers studying in UK higher education. Hinton-Smith (2012) considers the experiences of lone parents in UK higher education and clearly states the importance of further research into sole parents and postgraduate study;

In today's knowledge economy the value of postgraduate study is increasingly recognized. Given the hopes of some lone mothers to pursue postgraduate study, and their fears that financial barriers would prevent this from being possible, further analysis of motivations for continued educational engagement is needed, as is exploration of whether lone parents are able to realize these ambitions to extend their studies, and the barriers they face in doing so. University vice-chancellors have acknowledged the importance of ensuring that non-traditional students have access to postgraduate study, and that it does not remain the domain of the well-off (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 207)

The above quote reflects one of the questions I raise in this research; that is, how is the project of broadening participation in higher education supported through an in-depth exploration of how alternative and often invisible sole parent students participate in postgraduate education? This thesis builds on the work of Hinton-Smith (2012) by exploring participation and pathways in the Australian higher education context by referring to local policy implications and by focusing on postgraduate education as an entry point to the academy. The analysis in this research also extends Hinton-Smith's (2012) focus on the barriers to participation by theorising Butler's concept of agency to

investigate how the sole parents in this research respond to the enabling constraints of combining sole parenting and postgraduate education.

Whilst some strong similarities can be drawn from this research study and Hinton-Smith's work, the Australian context of my research ensures key differences in participant experiences. This is particularly evident in terms of financial provisioning for higher education students from both government social welfare agencies and higher education institutions. In her work, Hinton-Smith (2012) analyses three key areas of concern for lone parents in higher education; juggling time, juggling finances, and juggling childcare within a framework of widening participation. In this research, my discussion also includes issues of time, finances and childcare supported by a theoretical framing of gender performativity, recognition and agency.

Hinton-Smith's (2012) work concurs with my suggestion that sole parenting is experienced in particular conditions as her research establishes a clear differentiation between sole parent students and other mature age parent students because sole parents hold the responsibilities for 'meeting both the material and emotional needs of children...[and] as sole breadwinners' (Hinton-Smith 2012, p. 44). My research builds on Hinton-Smith's academic work by exploring how sole parents are able to respond to these often contradictory conditions to engage with postgraduate education in an Australian context. I make the case that postgraduate education creates particular conditions of account and that sole parenting also influences how higher education is experienced. I explore these conditions by investigating policy, space and gendered constructions of parental care-work.

My consideration of the operation of motherhood practices and ideology and hetero-normative familial constructs begins with an exploration of how parenting on one's own can be experienced differently than co-parenting within a couple. I suggest that sole parenting can be materially different because it is often experienced through intensified levels of childcare, domestic and financial management responsibilities. I argue that this increased level of childcare and

household work has material implications for sole parent's time, energy and engagement with postgraduate education. I make this point carefully, I expressly do not wish to argue that sole parenting is always and already difficult or in deficit. This is an important distinction. Maureen Baker (2012) states that '[h]alf the mothers in the 2008 study struggled as single parents...but this kind of remark was particularly prevalent among mothers with young children' (p. 147). I note the use of the descriptive word 'struggle' in relation to sole parent experiences which Baker (2012) also notes is similar to most mother's experiences of having young children whilst working in the academy. These descriptions I argue are performative and draw on and out assumptions and deficit understandings of sole parents that tend to disguise experiences that are often also experienced in broader familial contexts and experiences. I suggest it is possible and useful to discuss sole parent experiences without reverting to deficit 'struggling' discourses. The following section provides a review of the academic literature that supports my theoretical direction towards attentiveness to how motherhood practices and discourse shape the engagement of sole parents in postgraduate education.

Sole parents disrupting the heteronormative family

Gendered responsibility for childcare, the feminization of poverty and the normative structures of hetero nuclear families all contribute to distinctive conditions that sole parents experience as they engage with postgraduate education. Nancy Fraser (2000) argues that projects examining recognition should be attentive to institutional norms, such as 'androcentric norms that devalue activities coded as 'feminine' (p. 110). I suggest that through the discourse and practice of mothering, the care for and of children is 'coded' as a feminine activity and commonly devalued as such. In this thesis, I explore some of the ways that motherhood and fatherhood are (re)produced as gendered binaries and in turn reinstate gender. This exploration seeks to question the stability of the categories of motherhood and fatherhood. I ask; how do the performatively produced categories and practices of motherhood and fatherhood re-inscribe gender. 'Men and women in the heterosexual

matrix have to engage in repeated performance in relation to the norms by which that arrangement is upheld, and in doing so, engage simultaneously in a series of foreclosures that prevent its dissolution' (Bell, 2007, p. 19). If, fathering for men, and mothering for women are normative what does this mean for the experiences of sole parents in higher education? In this research, I ask - Do the gendered performatives that establishes and reinstates motherhood and fatherhood binaries have material effects on how the sole parents in this study engaged with postgraduate education?

These research questions depend on, whilst they also un-settle, definitions and categories of mothering and fathering that I acknowledge are fluid and problematic. This also expands discussions of kinship and about what *family* means. This is also the aim of Gayle Letherby, Jen Marchbank, Karen Ramsay, and John Shiels (2005) in their chapter 'Mothers and "others" providing care within and outside of the academy. In their co-written piece they note that '[f]or each of us, "caring" is part of our political as well as our personal lives...In some cases, this has involved reshaping what it means to be a father and a parent in a society that genders caring relationships' (p. 211). I too am interested in a reshaping of caring relationships and I begin this work in this thesis by exploring how sole parents potentially reshape caring relationships to mediate their postgraduate education work and their familial work.

Categorising and naming peoples and entities is always difficult. I acknowledge that any such naming has the potential to obscure as much or more than it illuminates. In their writings on the 'anti-social family', Barrett and McIntosh (1982) concur saying that it is a 'sign of the power of essentialist – and highly naturalistic – views of the family that many writers on the subject (including ourselves) find it difficult to avoid essentialist formulations even when consciously attempting to do so' (p.40). Despite the inherent difficulties, I have to rely on categories and identities because they hold pre-existing, reiterative and relevant meanings attached to sole parenting and postgraduate student subjects.

This reliance on categories, however, is not an unquestioned acceptance of the terms. The analysis I provide of these categories acknowledges the historical and contingent nature of these constructions. Judith Butler (2004e) states that categories are functionally necessary and that it is possible to ‘continue *at the same time* to interrogate and to use the terms of universality’ (p. 179). The category of sole parent is (re)constituted over time, in what Butler describes as ‘historically specific emergence’ (Butler, 2011, p. 17). It is important to explore how categories are historically brought into being in order to analyse some of the ways that this category is socially operative. This theme is expanded upon in Chapter Six where I discuss how the social constructions of sole parents are reflected and operationalized in social welfare policy.

Social constructions and operations of the category ‘sole parent’ demonstrate that the scripts relating to sole parents are performative. In this research I want to draw attention to and contest, problematic identity constructions regarding representations of sole parent families. Amato’s (1999) categorisation work is one example of normalised and naturalised discourses of the family. He states that ‘[v]irtually all available research shows that children develop best when reared by two biological parents who have a cooperative long-term relationship’ (p. 183). This quote is regulatory, performative and productive because it contributes to the conditions within which sole parents can account for themselves. How sole parents understand themselves and how they are understood by their communities and educational institutions are central to how they experience postgraduate education. Whilst these understandings are fluid and contested, they are important signifiers to the conditions of account for sole parent postgraduates.

These performative acts are written and enacted socially, in workplaces and institutions and contribute to the conditions of account for sole parents;

These narratives or scripts do not, of course, simply exist “out there”...[t]hey also shape bodies and lives, including those that follow and depart from such narratives in the ways in

which they love and live, in the decisions that they make and take within the intimate sphere of home and work. It is important to consider how compulsory heterosexuality – defined as the accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality as an ideal coupling – shapes what it is possible for bodies to do (Ahmed, 2013, p. 423)

In this research I purposefully do not refer to participants as ‘single-mothers’, lone mothers or single-parents. Firstly, ‘single’ refers to one’s relationship status and I understand this as quite separate from one’s work and attachment as a parent. I dislike the term ‘lone’ as for me it implies lonely or being alone. I also resist the common term ‘single-mother’ as it is my position that sole parents traverse between mother and father ‘roles’, as a ‘doing’ of gendered parenting, rendering the categories themselves tenuous and potentially problematic. I articulate this point strongly, in recognition of the power of language and my refusal of the term ‘single-mother’ is my contribution to what Stuart Hall describes as a ‘politics of articulation’ (Hall, 1996, p. 6).

My politics of articulation in referring to parental care-work rather than single mothers, mothers or lone mothers is also a theoretical positioning. Inspired by Butler’s theoretical frameworks of gender performativity, I understand the naming and category of mothering as productive. I use this theoretical framework to revitalise the discourses relating to mothering in order to open up a critique of the operation of the identifying category and the category itself.

McClintock-Comeaux (2012) discusses the politics of articulation in relation to mothering in academia. In particular she draws attention to comments of father’s ‘helping’ mothers to care for their own children, and women’s income ‘helping’ household budgets. She argues ‘if we change language and change minds from presupposing gender related responsibilities and instead allow families to freely determine the best structure and function for their families, it is likely that we will change the burdensome expectations’ (p. 323). I propose that changing structural familial expectations could be supported by a change in the language and categories that act to reinstate the

established operations of families closely bound with heteronormative nuclear family constructs. Through is this research work I begin a politics of articulation by refusing the term ‘single mothers’ and motherhood/fatherhood, rather I refer to parental care-work to revitalise how the care of children is constituted.

I am explicitly articulating my position on these definitions and understandings because, ‘categories can sometimes act to freeze that process of becoming’ (Butler, 2004e, p. 80). Historic and contemporary constructs of the ‘plight’ of the “single-mother”, I argue, have the potential to freeze parental processes of becoming because the term “single mother” tends to elicit negative and pejorative subjectivities. I use the term ‘parental care-work’ in this research as opposed to ‘single mother’ or ‘lone parent’ in a purposeful and strategic move away from the negative connotations of ‘being’ single often referred to as singlism. Singlism refers to the ‘stigma and discrimination...[that] reflects a pervasive ideology of marriage and family, manifested in everyday thoughts, interactions, laws and social policies that favor couples over singles’ (Sharp & Ganong, 2011, p. 957). Partnered, married or single all denote particular ways of being that seems to be constantly monitored and directs socially powerful social currency, ‘Not to be in a relationship with somebody is experienced as cultural exclusion...Couple culture (especially heterosexual) makes it difficult for single women to occupy public space and for them to feel as valid as married women’ (Skeggs, 2002, p. 322). This reflects the notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich 1976) which seeks to normalize marriage and the nuclear family as ‘natural’ and therefore tends to have an ‘othering’ effect on sole parent families.

Somerville (2007) tends to draw from this idealised symmetrical Mum & Dad family, arguing that, ‘same-sex marriage and *intentional* single motherhood, constitute unprecedented challenges to children’s rights with respect to their biological origins, knowing who their biological parents are, and the nature of the parenting they will receive’ (p. 129 my emphasis). By establishing and maintaining strict gendered parent constructs as ideal, Somerville (2007) seems to preference the

hierarchical notion of the ideal normative hetero nuclear family. It is possible to interpret Somerville's comments as 'idealiz[ing] certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion' (Butler, 1990, p. viii). These types of discourse are central to this research because they help to establish social relations and potential exclusions that sole parents in postgraduate education negotiate, resist and rework.

The categories of mother OR father and parent are constituted over time and to a significant extent still rely on a conventional understanding of childbearing which is regarded as a 'biological function and therefore female' (Oakley, 2005, p.10). However, *childrearing* is not a biological function, it is a gendered and socially constructed function. Anne Crittenden's (2001) book '*The price of motherhood*' discusses the value of mothering and its gendered constructions. Crittenden (2001) demonstrates this gendered construction of mothering stating that, '[c]aring for children is a mother's moral obligation and prescribed social role in virtually all societies, and for that reason alone mothers would be more inclined than fathers to meet children's needs' (2001, p, 127). Frost and Holt (2014) discuss maternal status in relation to their researcher identity and note that 'discourses which construct "motherhood" as natural, inevitable and an intrinsic aspect of femininity, remain pervasive' (p. 91). Allen & Taylor (2012) discuss riotous parental subjects and the gendered practices of mother's labour. They note that 'mis-fitting' mothers, which I suggest includes sole parents, are 'positioned as deficits, responsible for social, cultural and economic crisis where certain femininities flounder and fail' (p. 1).

Similarly, Denker (2009) also draws attention to the gendered social constructions embedded in understandings of hetero nuclear families wherein the 'assumption rests on the idea that not only is a father present and active in the child's life, but that he is also already providing for the basic needs of the family' (p. 109). Denker (2009) articulates a position that I suggest is still widely held; firstly the belief that parenting is done by a 'mother' with active involvement by the 'father'. And secondly that the material needs of the family are the responsibility of the 'father' and that these needs are

being met. For sole parents both these assumptions are inherently problematic because in reality, active co-parents do not always participate in the lives of their children and often it is one parent that is actively engaged in care that also attends to the material and financial needs of the children and family.

Taking Butler's theoretical position relating to performativity of gender enables a critique of the gendered performance of motherhood and fatherhood. This theoretically based analysis facilitates a challenge to how and why the 'biological role of motherhood takes on a whole aura of domesticity and cultural femininity' (Oakley, 2005, p.10). Lyn Craig's book, *Contemporary Motherhood* (2007), contributes to a body of work that considers the practices and constructions of motherhood. Craig (2007) attempts to quantify care-work in regards to children. The analysis incorporates both active care and passive care to consider the costs of 'being available to be summonsed' (p. 18). Similarly, in her piece, *I stand here ironing*, Tillie Olsen (1960) describes this availability to be summonsed, 'the time of motherhood is almost behind me when the ear is not one's own but must always be racked and listening for the child cry, the child call' (p. 22). An availability to be summonsed by one's children demands time and an intent to act that I understand as not being dependent on gendered femininity, rather it requires a performative of care that is not reliant on gender constructs. Responsiveness to the 'child's call' can be acutely experienced by sole parents who are often the only parent available when inevitably summonsed to provide such child care-work. In turn, high levels of responsiveness to care for children influences how family and educational conditions are experienced for sole parents.

My attentiveness to scholarly analysis of motherhood, referring to Crittenden (2001), Oakley (2005), Craig (2007), helps to provide a foundational understanding of power and production of gendered parental care in relation to the academy. This research counters these productive discourses in relation to gender parenting by examining how these discourses and practices operate and to question if and how sole parents re-work these operations. To do this work, I argue that

children require vast amounts of care-work, usually provided by parents, but this care-work produces gender norms and is not reliant upon them. This production of gender norms is important for this research to consider ways in which participants re-worked their parental obligations from within and outside normative nuclear experiences to facilitate and maintain their engagement with postgraduate education. If the participants in this study undertake this re-working of parental binaries, how do they do this?

Canadian researcher, Gillian Ranson's (2010) work, *'Against the grain'* reflects on how categories of mother and father are constituted and are susceptible to slow change through adapting the ways in which gender is constructed in families. Ranson (2010) states that;

The persistence of traditional beliefs and expectations about mothering and fathering, which positions mothers as ultimately responsible for children (even if they are in paid employment) and fathers as ultimately responsible for financial provision (even if they are involved with hands-on caregiving as well). In other words, the mother continues to be seen as the "primary parent", nurturer, and childcare expert, responsible above all for the family's well-being. The father continues to be positioned as the breadwinner, whose family responsibilities are seen to be primarily discharged through his financial contribution to the household...[resulting in] a clear distinction between "mothering" and "fathering" (Ranson, 2010, p. 3)

Ranson (2010) endeavours to re-frame mothering and fathering and questions the strict gender lines that establish and maintain this 'distinction' within parental involvement. However, Ranson's book on parenting, only refers to couples negotiating the conventional roles of mothers and fathers within heteronormative nuclear families and fails to even consider sole parenting. Here again, privileging of the heteronormative nuclear family is evident in the production of marital family relations which

are ‘massively privileged by social policy, taxation, religious endorsement and the accolade of respectability’ (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982, p. 56).

In their work *‘The anti-social family’*, Barrett and McIntosh (1982) describe the naturalised understandings of the nuclear family as also an ‘othering’ and deficit discourse when ‘[c]hildren lacking two parents *in situ* in the family home are an object of pity and a source of anxiety’ (p. 24 emphasis in original). Barrett and McIntosh (1982) succinctly describe the normative power and preference of hetero coupledness in families raising children. This also provides an interesting foundation to consider the experiences of sole parents which I suggest, are meaningful sites to re-work and potentially disrupt preferential assumptions relating to nuclear heteronormative families.

Preferential regard for nuclear families is premised on the (re)productive collaborations between feminine mothering and masculine fathering. Elizabeth Grosz (1995) looks to Butler to contest normative performances of gender as constituted through the mother/father binary. Grosz reminds us that, ‘there is an instability at the very heart of sex and bodies, the fact that the body is what it is capable of doing, and what any body is capable of doing is well beyond the tolerance of any given culture’ (p. 214). Arguably, Australian culture is largely still attached to the historically constituted binary of women mothering and men fathering in nuclear hetero families. Social policy, marriage rates, taxation benefits and common social norms demonstrate the privileging of heteronormative families that provide a sedimented social framework which restricts alternative ways to constitute the ‘social and discursive building of community, a community that binds, cares, teaches, shelters, and enables’ (Butler, 2013, p. 28). The binding, caring, teaching, sheltering and enabling of children are acts of intent and purpose; they are acts that ought not be limited by social constructions of gender embedded in the mothering/fathering binaries which remain at the core of hetero/partner normative nuclear families.

The 'naturalisation' of motherhood, I argue, is an example of what Sedgwick (1990) terms a, 'female-disadvantaging social arrangement[s]' (p. 28). Judith Butler (1990) regards the maternal economy as a, 'reification that both extends and conceals the institution of motherhood as compulsory for women...then the institution gains a permanent legitimation in the invariant structures of the female body' (p. 126). I argue that motherhood is one of the important ways that the category 'women' is reified, repeated and constructed. Mother, mothering and motherhood are signifiers of femininity, 'I become female through the assumption of certain signifiers. Femininity is produced in and through the system of gendered signifiers; there is no gender outside this system of differences' (Colebrook, 2004, p. 151). Mothering is critical to the ways in which the category 'women' maintains its coherence and continuity; the cultural intelligibility of 'women' is achieved through motherhood; 'norms are attached to the categorisation of identity, and verification of belonging to that identity' (Brady & Schirato, 2011, p. 37). Heather Savigny's (2014) research considers cultural sexism in academia and argues that social positioning of women as mothers takes on structural significance within the academy. 'It is fairly uncontroversial to say, that in society, as well as within academia, childcare is often positioning as a women's issue rather than a parental one...Conflating child bearing with child care produces the assumption that child *care* is a women's problem; (Savigny, 2014, p. 10 emphasis in original). Motherhood as a common performance of the category 'women' is effective precisely because gendered categories depend on repetition and reiteration of norms.

One of the ways motherhood has been embedded within disadvantaging social arrangements is by excluding it from the concept of work. Mothering has been central to the conceptualising of 'women's work'. Mothering as a 'labour of love' or a private home-based role has the potential to marginalise and disadvantage the people who do this work by under-valuing it and by limiting their inclusion and participation in social, political and economic experiences, including education. Judith Butler (1990) argues that 'naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively reify motherhood

and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability' (p. 109). I argue an analysis of sole parenting can contest identities of mothering/fathering because one person, either male or female, performing both mothering and fathering renders the gender distinction between the roles, and the categories themselves, illogical and problematic.

Sole parents may disrupt the heteronormative social system which 'establishes the father as other than the mother, and the mother or feminine as the position opposed to the cultural masculine' (Colebrook, 2004, p. 169). By traversing through gendered binaries of mothering and fathering, sole parents experiences opens up a potential for re-thinking kinship and difference beyond the male-female mother/father binary. This discussion is my contribution to feminist politics and the invisibility of "who cares" within broader concerns relating to the 'complexity of "caring" (Taylor, 2010, p. 635). Rethinking the language of parenting is an attempt to question how the 'conceptual scheme has come to organize that mode of social life we call "experience". (Butler, 2011, p. 18). This questioning and reconfigured performative of familial ties by sole parents renders the normative nuclear hetero family somewhat different and potentially destabilises the heterosexual matrix.

Sole parenting has the potential to contest social constructions of gender when, 'the meaning of gender is seen as culturally mutable and variable, highly relational (in the sense that each of the binarized genders is defined primarily by its relation to the other), and inextricable from a history of power differentials between genders' (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 28). This research considers gender constructions to be highly relational and binarized, in-so-far-as, we tend to understand what mothers do to a large extent as what fathers do *not* do. Yvette Taylor's (2009) work relating to lesbian and gay parenting raises interesting questions about how families are constituted. She asks 'who gets constituted as a 'real', 'pretend' or 'failing' also rests upon other, intersecting hierarchies, where 'pious family-values rhetoric' endangers the rights and interests of varied disadvantaged groups including poor single-mothers as well as lesbians and gays' (Taylor, 2009, p. 4). I argue that the binary established in relation to mothering by women and fathering by men are central constructs

that reinforce what Judith Butler (1990) regards as ‘culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality’ (p. 184).

Butler (1990) connects heteronormativity to families, children and reproduction when she states that the, ‘disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain’ (Butler, 1990, p. 185). In this work, I argue that sole parent postgraduates potentially de-stabilise the regulation of gender within the reproductive domain because they interweave both mothering and fathering roles, thereby disrupting the conventional and binarized constructions of those roles. Normative connections for women and mothering has a determining influence in establishing the conditions of account for sole parent postgraduates in that they must combine, exclusive child care, provide financially and maintain their postgraduate studies.

In summary

This chapter has provided a review of academic literature that relates to conflicts of family responsibilities in the academy. I cited work by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) who argued that as women carry the bulk of the child care-work they are disadvantaged in the ‘distinctly male’ working environment of the academy. I referenced prior research which considered the experiences of student parents in higher education, citing Edwards (1993) and Brooks (2012b) who found that students sought to separate their parenting responsibilities from the familial responsibilities in the university context. This chapter also incorporated a review of existing academic literature on sole parents in higher education drawing from Hinton-Smith’s (2012) work that examined how participants juggled time, finances and childcare within a widening participation framework.

The second part of the review considers the constructions and privileging of heteronormative nuclear families and charted some of the ways that being outside this normative family construct influences sole parents in postgraduate education. This is critical to the thesis because norms

establishing families are powerful social signifiers influencing and regulating access to education. Ahmed (2013) reminds us of ‘those who may lack the (cultural as well as economic) capital to support the “risk” of maintaining antinormativity as a permanent orientation’ (Ahmed, 2013, p. 428). Exploring how the risks of sole parenting and postgraduate education are negotiated is important because it is within these spaces that adaption and alternatives can take shape. For sole parent postgraduates, operating within the risky space of non-normative parent and postgraduate, taking advantage of its potential for adaption requires complex negotiations of power relations embedded in higher education. This study aims to explore how the sole parent participants responded to the messy and often uncomfortable but productive experiences of postgraduate education.

The following chapter articulates the methodological and epistemological foundations of this research.

Chapter Three - Methodology

You must learn to use your life experiences in your intellectual work: continually to examine it and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the centre of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you work (Mills, 1970, p. 216)

This methodology chapter will briefly outline the warrant for this research. I will then detail the main research questions and method including an illustration of its appropriateness to responding to my research aims. This chapter includes an epistemology section which discusses three critical incidents which influenced my researcher positionality throughout this project. Central to this epistemology section is a demonstration of theoretical frameworks utilised throughout this study which emerged from my epistemological reflections and analysis.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of sole parents in higher education. The methodology I articulate in this chapter shapes the research, the questions I asked and how I asked them. The chapter incorporates an epistemology section which details my own sole parent postgraduate experiences and some of the ways in which these experiences have informed the research process. My aims are ‘concerned with revealing and understanding problems, rather than finding solutions to them’ (Armstrong, 2003, p. 40). The aim of this research is not to embark on a study that will make general empirical claims about sole parents. Rather, this research is a theoretical analysis of the performativity of gender and how gendered constructs are experienced by sole parents in the context of postgraduate education.

I achieve this aim by drawing from the insights provided by the 10 sole parent participants in this collective case study in order to generate new understandings of how sole parents engage in higher education at Australian universities. Central to this inquiry is my aim to develop further understandings of the interactions and connections between institutional structure and personal agency in relation to how sole parents negotiate the often uneasy terrain of postgraduate education. This research is designed to enable an investigation into the constructions of an 'educational identity' (Webb, 2001, p. 40) by the participant sole parents postgraduates which draws on multiple data sources to examine their personal and institutional conditions of account.

The research method: A collective case study

A case study is a study of a 'specific, unique, bounded system' (Stake, 2000, p. 435). For the purposes of this research post-graduate study includes masters and doctoral qualifications, through on-campus study at Australian universities during the 2012 academic year. Sole parents in this study are parents living with a child or children under the age of 18 for whom they have economic and care responsibilities. Research within these clearly defined parameters is supported through case study, reflecting Yin's (2009) position that case study is a useful method 'because you wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompasses important contextual conditions-because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study' (p. 18). Case study assists the focus on contextual conditions and provides clear research frameworks and parameters which facilitates timely and productive doctoral research.

Utilising a collective case study enabled me to sharply focus on Australian conditions, postgraduate education and sole parents. According to Flyvbjerg (2006) research that carefully studies individual cases does so 'not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224). The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical analysis of how sole parents in postgraduate education engage with the ongoing, 'production of self

in circumstances which are constrained materially and socially by their situations in life and by educational institutional policies and practices' (Webb, 2001, p. 43). A collective case study based on in-depth interviews with a small participant cohort enables a detailed analysis of the educational identities of these students. Importantly, it also enables me to focus attention on how each participant negotiates differing experiences from somewhat similar conditions as sole parent postgraduates.

A case study is defined by Robert Yin (2009) as the study of a, 'contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context' (p. 73). This research employs collective case study because it allows for various data collection tools, 'the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence' (Yin, 2009, p. 11). Interview data is the main source of analysis in this work. I also refer to government policy, Centrelink documents, university policy and university spatiality. A case study is an appropriate method for this research because it enables these multiple sources of data to be incorporated into the analysis that I offer here. The case study conducted for this research collectively and individually considers the experiences of 10 post-graduate students who are sole parents. Participants have been purposefully selected for participation in this exploratory case study because they experienced the contextual conditions inherent in this research topic.

Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that the 'proximity to reality, which the case study entails, and the learning process that it generates for the researcher will often constitute a prerequisite for advanced understanding' (p. 236). Following from Flyvbjerg (2006) I understand my proximity to the research topic, detailed in the following epistemology section, as a strength and a challenge of the work. This is because it enabled access to insights in the conditions of sole parenting and postgraduate education that contributed towards establishing parameters required for this context-dependent research project. Therefore I acknowledge, following Talburt, that my 'interpretations are situated, constituted by the detours and specificities of the happening of events and their retelling' (2000, p. 36).

A collective case study enables an intense and thorough investigation into the unique experiences of a case and also consideration of collective themes of interest experienced by a group of cases. Therefore, the experiences of the 10 sole parent postgraduates featured in this study do not explain postgraduate education, rather I aim to analyse how the experiences of participant sole parent postgraduates are influenced by the conditions in Australian higher education institutions. This focus on experiences as an explanatory force is supported by a collective case study because it can facilitate the consideration of both individual experiences and those experiences that are held across the collective 10 participants. In this way the collective case study method supports an exploration of, 'issues of the common and the specific, without diluting either' (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000, p. 111).

This research purposefully uses postgraduate education as its central criteria for two distinct reasons. Firstly, postgraduate education is the entry point to academic employment. Working and engaging with the academy can be a powerful position from which to influence how university courses are taught, which university courses are offered and indeed, the learning of many students. Most academic jobs are unavailable to people without doctoral level qualifications, therefore by excluding or minimizing particular groups or people from equitable access to postgraduate education effectively excludes such people from acting in critical educational roles in universities. Secondly, and similarly, postgraduate education is the entry point for research work. A diverse researcher base ensures that various ontological positionings can shape research projects, and without such diverse contributions, research capacities are diminished. By extension, if research positions and directions are foreclosed to some groups, then the issues and perspectives that are of interest to a diverse representation of society is invisible or limited and restrict who and how some people access the power and privilege associated with employment as a researcher/academic at an Australian university.

A collective case study is important for this research project because it allows for a wide variety of data gathering techniques. It facilitates a strongly focused and acutely contextual research project because case studies report on bounded and clearly delineated social systems. A collective case study also anchors the work in a particular time, place and space, which facilitates a strong contextual focus for the study. The contextual focus of this doctoral research is firmly set in Australian universities, in postgraduate work and after 2006. The time-frame is critical because it coincides with a significant shift in social welfare policy enacted through the Welfare to Work reforms in relation to sole parents in Australia. This policy shift is elaborated on in chapter six.

My choice of this methodological framework follows work of Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) who notes that the case study is especially well suited to producing ‘context-dependent knowledge’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223). The contextual focus on sole parents in postgraduate education stems from my own experiences. The following section begins to articulate how my experiences inform this research work. This includes the theoretical frameworks I utilize and how my experience and theoretical framework combine to form data generation questions and tighten the focus of the research project.

Epistemology

This epistemology section seeks to acknowledge and articulate that “there are selves behind the projects” (Halberstam 1998, p.63). Therefore, the following section discusses some of the critical ways my experiences of sole parenting in postgraduate education has informed this research project. Judith Butler states that, ‘telling a story about oneself is not the same as giving an account of oneself’ (2005, p. 12). Following Butler (2005) the distinction between my story and giving an account of myself is important because giving an account recognizes the story telling process as interrelated, incomplete and acknowledges the social character through which narrative accounts are

told. In this epistemology section, I want to give an account of myself, as a sole parent postgraduate, as opposed to telling my story.

This distinction is important because I give my account in ways that relate to this research work and it is necessarily partial and incomplete. 'Although we are compelled to give an account of our various selves, the structural conditions of that account will turn out to make a full such giving impossible' (Butler, 2005, p. 20). My epistemology acknowledges the impossibility of full accounts and avoids a tendency to present a clear and concise research project without reference to the ways in which the researcher arrived at their complex and emergent subjectivity nor attempting to articulate how this messy process is infused within the research. Rather, I acknowledge my researcher self as embedded in this research by reflecting on critical incidents relating to my experiences as a sole parent and university student. Karen Barad (2003) whose concept of onto-epistemology affirms my aim in this epistemology section. 'We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because 'we' are *of* the world' (p. 829 emphasis in original). By discussing some of the ways that I am *of* the world, I demonstrate how these experiences influence the research questions I posed in this study and the theoretical framework I draw on.

The connections between my epistemological insights, theoretical frames of analysis and research questions are critical because this research aims to be, 'generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes' (Yin, 2009, p. 15). These connections are illustrated through my discussion of three key critical incidents drawn from my own experience. I describe these key events/incidents and how I came to understand these experience through theories of shame and recognisability that have critically shaped this research, its design, implementation and interpretative analysis.

I do not attempt to detail all or even most of how I have experienced sole parenting and higher education over the last eleven years. I regard that story as auto-ethnographical and as such, not my

chosen methodology. The epistemological work I offer in this section is inspired by Judith Butler who writes in the preface (1999) to *Gender Trouble*;

At the same time that I was ensconced in the academy, I was also living a life outside those walls...it began for me, with a crossing-over...wondering whether I could link the different sides of my life (xvi-xvii)

This section is my attempt to offer clarity and depth to my research positioning and to do this I have linked my life outside the university with my academic work which culminates in this thesis. It has been a messy and problematic crossing-over and this section begins to make some sense of that process. What follows, is my account of my crossing-over and my researcher positioning in order to demonstrate my reflective thinking about the research as well as my ontological foundation that influence the nature of this research project.

In articulating a reflective crossing-over, I am refusing research structures that seek, reliability, validity, trustworthiness and objectivity. I am aware that sharing some of my critical detours and epistemological uncertainty I may problematize my recognisability as a researcher/postgraduate/academic within some sectors of higher education. Butler (2005) describes the concerns I address;

It also turns out that self-questioning of this sort involved putting oneself at risk, imperilling the very possibility of being recognized by another, since to question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is, in relation to the present regime, to risk unrecognizability as a subject (p. 23)

This epistemology section provides space for me to give an account of myself, to illustrate, insofar as this is possible, how my researcher self has influenced the directions and substance of this research.

Indeed, the fact that I live the thesis topic influences the whole conceptualisation of this research project. Again, Butler (2004f) reflects this foundational point, '[o]ne asks about the limits of ways of knowing because one has already run up against a crisis within the epistemological field in which one lives' (p. 308).

I give this account of my epistemological positioning in relation to my research tentatively, understanding that a full account is impossible and acknowledging the academic context within which I articulate this position limits its very nature. 'If I am trying to give an account of myself, it is always to someone, to one whom I presume to receive my words in some way, although I do not and cannot know always in what way' (Butler, 2005, p. 67). In other words, I hope to demonstrate the 'interconnectedness of personal and theoretical concerns' (Sholock, 2007, p. 128). The detail offered and the reflective nature of this chapter seeks to articulate and explore what Clifford (1988) described as inevitable but treacherous subjectivity. However, I proceed with this account, through analysing three critical incidents demonstrating of the work I have done to examine the issue of researcher positioning and in my case the dangers of proximity.

My response to becoming a sole parent.

It took about two minutes for the conversation to conclude as my then husband announced the end to our marriage and his relationship with another woman. In that short space of time, I moved from a wife and mother embedded in a nuclear family to sole parent. Newly single, breastfeeding, mastitis, \$48.60 in the bank, no paid employment and a seven month old baby combined to create a crisis within my epistemological field.

I don't recall much about that time, eleven years ago, apart from feeling physically sick and reeling in what Butler (2004e) calls a 'nonplace'. A conflicted space that didn't equate to anything I knew or had experienced;

[t]hese are nonplaces in which one finds oneself in spite of oneself; indeed, these are nonplaces where recognition, including self-recognition, proves precarious if not elusive, in spite of one's best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense (p. 108)

My struggles to adjust, comprehend and recognise my new sole parent self is illustrated as later that same afternoon I recall apologising to my seven month old baby, apologising for having now placed him in a 'single mother' family.

This reaction is epistemologically significant. An apology to my oblivious 7 month old child demonstrates my response to my newly magnified and overwhelming responsibility of a very young baby. I understand this apology as an illustration of my passionate attachment to the idealised hetero nuclear familial construct. It wasn't just that I was now single after a decade of marriage, but that I had just had a baby and was now single. My reaction to becoming a sole parent is one of shame and vulnerability. Michael Warner (1999), states that shame 'attaches not to doing, but to being; not to conduct, but to status' (p. 28). In being dumped, my status changed to 'being' a sole parent. Warner links this sense of shame to 'a hierarchy of respectability' (Warner, 1999, p. 49). He nominates marriage as a hierarchical social norm that denotes respectability. This hierarchy exists because 'marriage sanctifies some couples at the expense of others. It is selective legitimacy...if you don't have it, you and your relations are less worthy' (Warner, 1999, p. 82). Although Warner is discussing same-sex marriage, the point remains relevant for sole parents whose families 'don't have it' (marriage) and therefore are often seen as lacking legitimacy. Having a new-born baby as a sole parent felt, to me, like a slide down the hierarchy of respectability. I experienced a sense of shame for myself and my child as a 'less worthy/legitimate/valued' family.

Brené Brown's (2006) grounded theory research of two hundred and fifteen women in the United States aimed to generate a shame resilience theory. Brown (2006) argues that shame for women is constructed through interpersonal experiences of relationships and connections. She

points to the ‘very prevalent role of cultural expectations and the relationship between shame and the real or perceived failure of meeting cultural expectations’ (Brown, 2006, p. 45). Brown’s analysis of shame offers three key elements relating to feelings of shame; feeling trapped, powerless and isolated.

In becoming a sole parent without warning I felt trapped in a new scenario with limited options and significantly increased obligations, particularly towards my 7 month old child. I felt powerless because multiple decisions were being made about my life but not by me or in consultation with me. If power is the ability to choose and act to produce an effect then at this time I was powerless in this exchange. My powerlessness was intensified because I had not even remotely considered sole parenting a 7 month old baby.

As a sole parent I immediately felt isolated from my intended and projected future; the ‘mother’s’ group to which I belonged and the conditions I had created were firmly embedded in a heteronormative nuclear family mode. I had un-critically accepted the socio-cultural expectations of motherhood as always and already associated with heteronormative family structures, this had become reinforced by my habitus and I felt acute shame when I was suddenly outside these known parameters and ‘othered’. My feelings of shame reflect Ahmed’s understandings of shame as an exposure to failure witnessed by another. ‘If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate ‘an ideal’ that has been given to us through the practices of love. What is exposed in shame is the failure of love’ (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 106). Love bound up in the ideal of the hetero nuclear family had failed me and this departure was a source of intense shame for me.

In *Precarious Life* (2004d), Butler writes that when ‘we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost “you” only to discover that “I” have gone missing as well’ (p. 22). Coming from a background of married grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, meant that divorce, sole parenting and any diverse family relations was beyond my naïve experiences. For Butler (2004d) our vulnerability is inevitable

because of our interdependence with others. Our vulnerability is therefore an effect of our attachment to others and being always and already socially constituted. For me, my understanding of my “I”, as a hetero mother was only available to me because of and tightly bound up with my marital ties that are regulatory and socially constituted. I was happily participating in a mother/babies group; all ensconced in the normative nuclear families. I was surrounded by mum, dad and child families and in that setting was un-critically aware of the performative structures and the sense of belonging and power that had been bestowed on me and by extension on my child whilst we were embedded within this social familial norm. ‘Normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it...comfort is very hard to notice when one experiences it...We don’t tend to notice what is comfortable, even when we think we do’ (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 147).

While I was embedded in hetero normative conditions they were fundamental to how I understood myself and how I had projected my new-found sense of motherhood. ‘A sense of self must always already be a social self, an historically conditioned self, self governed by the regulatory norms that determine what makes a culturally intelligible subject and what allows for a liveable life’ (Lloyd, 2008, p. 98). The dissolution of my marriage resulted in immediate ‘unknowingness’, through which we ‘become strange to ourselves, exposed and ex-posed’ (Bell, 2007, p. 24). Bell (2007) argues that a sudden or creeping ‘unravelling’ or strangeness may ‘open up the possibility for new linkages, new constitutions?’ (p. 24). For me, this sudden unravelling resulted in a re-constituted family and prompted my subsequent critique of familial norms.

The apology I offered my seven month old baby illustrates my deeply held deficit model understanding of the lives of children raised in sole parent families. This apologetic statement seems very strange to me today, but it reflected my, ‘assumptions about father and mothers, and what normal family life is, and should have been’ (Butler, 2004e, p. 77). I offered this apology only hours after becoming a sole parent, not long enough to have anything logical or meaningful to apologise

for. The apology reflects my pre-existing notion that sole parenting would disadvantage my child. I draw on the work of Gilson (2011) to extend the applicability of vulnerability to an analysis of my apology. Rather than relying on a largely negative definition of vulnerability that is understood as ‘simply to be susceptible, exposed to risk, in danger. In short, it is to be somehow weaker, defenceless and dependent, open to harm and injury’ (Gilson, 2011, p. 310). To extend my analysis of my apology, I take Gilson’s extended definition of vulnerability as an ambivalent state whereby ‘vulnerability is understood to be a more general term encompassing conceptions of passivity, affectivity, openness to change, dispossession, and exposure, which are the basis for certain fundamental structures of subjectivity, language and sociality’ (Gilson, 2011, p. 310). In the context of this research I follow Gilson (2011) in understanding vulnerability as also a condition of potential, an enabling position which simultaneously is a condition of limitation and possible suffering. By drawing on Gilson’s (2011) definition of vulnerability, as opening up possibilities, I can begin to consider that vulnerability has the potential to be the prompt for change and part of the process of becoming different.

The invulnerability I perceived I had in raising a child in a normative nuclear family was supported by my own ignorance of vulnerability and a disavowing of its potential. The ‘ignorance of vulnerability is generated through the achievement of invulnerability as a desirable character trait and form of subjectivity’ (Gilson, 2011, p. 312). I achieved my sense of invulnerability from the structural and normative advantages of being an insider to the dominant heteronormative nuclear family construct. I had solidified this notion of invulnerability as a member of the nuclear family, purposefully constructed by demonstrating mastery of that construct; white, heteronormative marriage, home ownership, middle-class, thirty with baby. That constructed position was dismantled in only a couple of minutes and the illusion of mastery was just that, an illusion. But, simultaneously the possibility of other conditions opened up, an enabling condition began to emerge because ‘vulnerability is a condition of openness’ (Gilson, 2011, p. 310). The apology I gave to my son,

whilst somewhat irrational, may be understood as an openness; an openness to the newly constituted family becoming part of my process to adjust to our new family construct.

This critical incident demonstrates how accepting I was of the legitimate sociality of motherhood tied exclusively with the heteronormative nuclear family. It also demonstrates how I had constructed my subjectivity as a mother, a mother always and already connected by marriage to the father, and it follows that I had disavowed single mothers because ‘disidentification with those vulnerable others goes hand in hand with the idea of vulnerability as a negative state’ (Gilson, 2011, p. 312). I would not have issued an apology to my child if I had understood sole parenting as an ideal family state or even as having the potential to be so. The language of an apology, of sorrow and pity demonstrates my tightly held connection to the invulnerability of the ‘proper’ family and that a family ‘outside’ the nuclear family construct required sympathy and pity. My vulnerability in becoming a sole parent prompted my awareness of and demonstrated to me, ways in which ‘categories by which social life are ordered produce a certain incoherence’ (Butler, 2004f, p. 308). Two weeks later, I made use of the new conditions and participated in my first university class as a mature age student which eventually culminated in this research project.

These reflections begin to detail my research positioning which frames the knowledge and understandings that I bring to this research project. Reflecting on my own problematic emerging understanding of and subjectivity as a sole parent has encouraged a consideration of subjectivities in relation to sole parents more broadly in this research work. The question of how sole parents are constituted over time, within particular contexts and in relation to others became central to investigations in this research. My knowledge of the shifts in power and privilege for sole parents informed my discussions with participants. For example, I asked participants to discuss if and how they shared information about their sole parenting within their universities. I asked participant sole parents how they believed the university understood their needs as sole parent postgraduates. These

questions opened up my analysis of how policy, space and parenting responsibilities influenced the engagement with postgraduate education for the sole parents who participated in this study.

The unravelling of my heteronormative family opened up the possibility of my re-working my understandings and practices of family. Central to this re-working is my questioning critique of familial norms. My critique of heteronormative family constructs stems from my refusal of the deficit or 'plight' discourse that commonly describes and is productive in relation to sole parent families. I began to actively refuse the gendered constructs of mothering because I regard my work in raising my child, (in so far as is possible) as covering dual hetero parental work. This is not to say that I understand myself as both mothering and fathering, rather that the gendered demarcation between those parental roles is disrupted. I do not refuse to parent my child through activities and energies that are commonly understood as a 'fathers' role. There is no line that designates male parenting and female parenting, I cover the parental work that is often done by two people and I somehow wanted this care-work to be acknowledged, if only to myself. This acknowledgement also refuses the deficit understandings commonly attached to children raised in sole parent households, within which it is assumed that the child must be missing out on some parental work because the gendered parent to whom this work is designated is not involved.

In the book, *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam (1998) asks, '[w]hy are we comfortable thinking about men as mothers, but we never consider women as fathers?' (p. 269). As a sole parent I covered the care and energy required to raise a child, I began to understand this care-work not as tasks usually assigned to mothers or others to fathers, but activities and acts that are required in the everyday project of raising children. In this way, parenting became acts of care, love, ethics and intent, acts that did not begin or stop at a gendered construct productive of mothering or fathering. For me, motherhood is no longer a coherent position or practice and this emerging understanding materially influenced how I am able to engage with my conditions of full-time parenting and full-

time doctoral research. These conditions determine my capacities for postgraduate study and it is important to me to take into consideration.

I imagine myself as doing the work of two parents as I maintain my engagement with postgraduate education. This knowledge influences the theoretical frameworks that I apply to this research which is reflected in my use of Butler's theory of accountability and her challenge to closely examine how norms and categories operate. My examination of norms continues in the following section which describes the second critical incident I want to detail in relation to sole parents as educable subjects.

What? Aren't you going to get a job?

Another epistemological trigger for this research was the responses and exchanges I had with many people as I transitioned from undergraduate to postgraduate education. I was surprised at conversations and interactions with various people, friends, family and acquaintances which were strongly resistant and negative in relation to my continued education into an Honours degree. Comments such as 'get a job', 'professional student', 'academic wanker', 'work-shy', and 'welfare dependent' are examples of comments and sentiments expressed to me when I had completed a double Arts/Education degree and ambivalently moved into an Honours degree. By completing the largely vocational orientated Education degree and passing through the 'credential mill' (Giroux 2002) there was a clearly perceived employment trajectory which I delayed and/or rejected in order to complete an Honours degree. It was interesting to me then and now, that a vocationally orientated undergraduate education drew universal support from friends, family and fellow undergraduate students, but that support was withdrawn when I choose to continue studying an Honours degree. This experience resonates with findings from Moreau and Kerner (2013) who drew from ten case studies of student parents in higher education in the UK and noted that 'it was seen as acceptable for

a mother (since the huge majority of student parents are women) to gain a degree, but not to continue studying further' (p. 10).

I interpreted these comments as attempts to rectify and regulate my decision to continue studying. I understand these negative interactions as 'challenges to the conditions of possibility' and almost a 'demand to align oneself' (Butler 1997a, p. 106). To me, these statements were attempts to direct me towards paid employment, particularly now that I was qualified to do so. These attempts to regulate me toward paid employment reflect a middle-class aspiration away from welfare towards legitimacy of paid work. This also reflects an understanding of research and PhD programs in Australia which are often regarded as an indulgence and a problematic and suspect privilege perhaps especially for sole parents.

Drawing from Ahmed's (2011, 2014) theorising of willfulness, these exchanges illustrate how my continuing education into an Honours degree was diagnosed as willful. Ahmed regards willfulness as a setting apart, to make strange and regards willfulness as a wandering away from the right path, insofar as we 'can read in willfulness the very potential to deviate from well-trodden paths, to wander, to err, to stray...willfulness might be required to keep going "the wrong way...being willing to be judged as disagreeable"' (p. 249). Perhaps, others regarded this decision as willfulness, that by proceeding with further education, beyond under-graduate bachelor level that I was 'going the wrong way'. However, I didn't understand continuing into an Honours degree as a deviation of my educable self, nor did I regard it as a deviation from my parental self, although I did register a sense that I was 'erring' because I was moving away from paid employment. In this sense, to some degree my continued education was willful, when, '[w]illfulness can be required to sustain an attachment...persistence for some requires insistence' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 15).

My transitioning between under-graduate to post-graduate, required persistence because it was negotiated within conflicts between paid work, study work and parental care-work. Disrupting

definitions of legitimate work and its operation can create these in-between-times can also be a 'space of undecidability that the possibilities for political transformation emerge' (Bunch, 2013, p. 40). My conditions transitioning into postgraduate education became a time, place and space of possibility opening up my engagement with further education.

My reflections on transitioning into an Honours degree, motivated my aim in this research to examine how sole parents are able to imagine themselves as postgraduate students. In this research aim I endeavour to contribute to the process of 'interrogating how subjects become recognisable as students within regulatory and disciplinary institutional spaces' (Burke, 2010, p. 25).

I sought recognition as an Honours student, but this process of establishing a coherent identity as an Honours student is dependent upon the interactions I had with others. Judith Butler reminds us that this productive work is always done through interactions, and much of this identity work is done before us, before the exchange, and therefore remains beyond us. 'The purpose here is not to celebrate a certain notion of incoherence, but only to point out that our "incoherence" establishes the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us' (Butler, 2005, p. 64). Negotiating my recognisability as an Honours student was a process that evoked several regulatory discourses, primarily associated with constructions of the 'good' parent and the 'good' student.

I regard these discussions as attempts to direct my choices towards employment in order to fulfil the expectations of the 'good' parent. This construct of the good parent is closely linked with 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2011) and 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996), providing and facilitating activities and lifestyles for children. This concerted cultivation of children is dependent on high level of financial support and I argue that my rejection of employment and financial gain was, for many people, a rejection of good parenting because I could not/chose not to provide for my child in the context of this parental ideology. Following Sara Ahmed (2010), my continuing

education rather than taking up paid employment was perceived by many as dissenting from normative family/mothering happiness scripts, a promise of happiness when you orientate towards certain choices. Many people perceived my continued education as a deviation away from financial security associated with paid employment, thereby jeopardizing my future happiness and that of my child.

I suggest that some of the disapproval and negativity I encountered as I transitioned into an Honours degree was indicative of a failure to recognise a sole parent as a ‘good’, potential or ideal postgraduate student. When the ‘ideal’ student is institutionally constituted as an unencumbered young person highly focused on their studies, a conflict exists between the distractions and obligations sole parents experience as being counter to the preferred attributes of a postgraduate student who is directed exclusively toward their study. As a sole parent contemplating an Honours degree I was implicated in and constituted by the discourses and practices of parenting, mothering and postgraduate students. These constructions and recognition of postgraduate students influences how diverse people imagine and project towards further study.

My knowledge of the difficulties in negotiating expectations and recognitions of sole parents and postgraduate students acts as a foundation for the research questions I explore in this research. I seek to examine how regulatory frameworks regarding parenting and postgraduate education operate in order to think about who is privileged and facilitated within these processes. This interest is also reflected in the data generating interview questions that relate to participant’s experiences of transitioning into their postgraduate education; I asked them how they made this decision and who they sought assistance and advice from in order to commit to continuing into postgraduate education. I also asked the participants about their motives for engaging with postgraduate education and about the negotiations of creating a coherent identity as a sole parent postgraduate student which unearthed critical insights into the experiences of postgraduate education for these sole parents.

My difficulties in transitioning into the Honours program opened up my thinking about how university institutions create spaces for diverse students and how those spaces are imagined by under-represented students. A projection towards a university education is more straightforward for some students, equity concerns for higher education must address access and participation of diverse students, to be more informed about who students are how they experience 'relations of power and governance within universities' (Gale & Tranter 2011, p. 42). As Gale & Tranter (2011) state, social justice in higher education 'implies creating spaces for them, not simply creating more places' (p. 43).

The next section concludes my epistemology section by exploring a critical incident I experienced as I took up my place within the Honours degree program and negotiated the space and structures of that program.

Conflicts of/in time

Thirdly, I draw from my initial and ongoing responses to the timetabling of postgraduate classes as a critical incident that drew my attention to institutional structures of higher education as enabling constraints; who it works for and how. My experiences of university timetabling as a postgraduate student keenly brought into focus how giving an account of oneself is always conditioned and relational and it is therefore impossible to fully account for oneself and that doing so, always comes at a cost. In relation to my experiences of managing university postgraduate timetables, I theorise some of the ways sole parents negotiate familial relations and responsibilities, and the cost of doing so, in order to engage with postgraduate education.

The final key incident I want to articulate here which had a determining influence on the design and process of this research is my experiences of university timetabling as an Honours student. I enrolled in an Honours program as a day student however the classes associated with this

course were timetabled at night, from 5pm to 9pm. This timetabling was a fundamental conflict for me; child-care facilities are closed and with no other parent available for child-care duties at home, night classes were problematic and created a time and space conundrum that I experienced as exclusionary and jeopardised my participation. Given that 'the subject is produced through certain kinds of foreclosure – certain things become impossible for it (Butler, 2004a, p. 333), I therefore regarded this timetabling conflict as central to how I was able to construct a coherent identity as an Honours student.

Whilst the university provided off-campus study options, this was not the study mode I enrolled in, nor my preferred study approach. I engaged with and paid for on-campus interactions and the face-to-face study mode because it supported my learning patterns successfully established at the same institution over the preceding five years at undergraduate level. Accessing my preferred on-campus classes became a timetabling conflict which prompted my broader considerations of institutional structures which influence the politics of equitable access to higher education; who is able to access higher education and in what ways are they able to do so?

Deborah Youdell (2011) explores this issue in relation to education when she asks; Which knowledges are authorized and which are silenced? I argue that my timetabling dilemma is 'based on institutional and educator judgements about 'who' students are? (p. 9). This clash of time and space between sole parenting and postgraduate study may be regarded as an example of Youdell's 'educational triage' – institutional 'practices of differentiation that sort students based on their perceived likelihood of attaining benchmark grades in high stakes tests' (Youdell, 2004a, p. 408). This is also a question of resources, of how and where universities fund face-to-face classes and institutional requirements to attract students by offering after-hours classes. I acknowledge the competing demands of an increasingly diverse university student cohort and do not advocate that sole parent postgraduates engagement should be facilitated at the expense of other students, rather, I

am suggesting that timetabling decisions have the potential to be exclusionary and critical to equitable access to higher education.

As I sat in one evening Honours program lecture, I began to contemplate these institutional structures and the ways in which universities determined resource allocation and timetabling. This questioning extended to questions of how the institution understood their provisioning of education and which students this privileged, in other words, 'towards students constituted as not only promising better returns but also deserving of these resources and rewards' (Youdell, 2004a, p. 411). In this way, timetabling of night classes is potentially excluding because it demands a greater impost on some student's attendance than others and is an example of how institutions (re)produce norms for postgraduate student recognisability.

I theorise my experiences of university Honours program timetabling using Butler's (2005) theory of accountability. This exploration is framed by my consideration of how I was able to give an account of myself as an Honours student within timetabling conditions that were not of my own making. Through these reflections I began to not only consider the conditions of university policies and practices that alternative students experience, but to also consider diverse responses to these conditions. I felt anger and disaffected in response to my perceived exclusion based on the on-campus mode timetabling in the Honours program. This prompted my awareness and critique of the institutional conditions and factors that are highly influential in student engagement in higher education. My timetabling conflict was the catalyst for my exploration throughout this research, to bring into view, the conditions within which particular students are able to give an account of themselves in particular institutional contexts

Academic timetabling was deeply problematic for me as a sole parent because I could not be in two places at once and night classes were the only on-campus mode of study available. Nevertheless, I did attend class; I negotiated within and adjusted to the conditions of recognisability

for postgraduate students. The timetabling conditions of postgraduate education were a paradox for me, caught between 24/7 child care-work and night-time academic classes but I purposefully re-worked these conditions to facilitate my choice to complete an honours degree. Judith Butler's theory of agency is useful for me to link my experiences of academic timetabling which highlights how the power and privilege of access to higher education operate. This connection prompts my wider exploration of this paradox for other sole parent postgraduates through this case study research. This exploration takes shape through my interest in participant responsiveness to their conditions of account as sole parent postgraduates. During interviews I asked participants questions relating to financial management, adjusting child-care work, seeking academic networks and the re-working of 'mothering' norms to open up a discussion of how participants maintained their orientation towards their postgraduate studies.

My timetabling collision also opened up my thinking about a sense of belonging in university spaces. Gale & Tranter (2011) discuss the intractable under-representation (14.5% over the last two decades) of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Australian higher education and note 'the role of the academic and administrative culture of the universities themselves in contributing to inequalities in access and success and reinforced the emphasis on institutional responsibilities' (p. 38). I wanted to investigate the academic and administrative cultures of universities in response to the evening classes which I felt alienated me from the university spaces, the people and the learning that took place in those spaces. This affective response can be an important factor in inclusion and a sense of belonging to an educational space and institution. As Ahmed (2010) notes, we 'judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain' (p. 22). The connections I made with the Honours program through attending evening classes was not positive and this encounter formed part of my evaluation of my engagement with higher education. I wondered how other sole parents were experiencing affective interactions and evaluating university spaces? Also, I wondered how those evaluations were influencing their engagement with their

studies as they combined sole parenting and postgraduate education. This thinking is reflected in the interview questions I asked, beginning with talking with participants about having their children with them on campus, their experiences of on-campus child-care and ways in which they accessed and utilised university spaces. This discussion is elaborated on in chapter four.

The following section briefly introduces the participants to provide some education and familial background from which to share their experiences as sole parent postgraduates. I then set out the method and data analysis processes which explain how I conducted this study.

Introducing the participants

Mia is a sole parent of five teenage children living in the outer suburbs of a major Australian city. She studies full-time and is three years into a PhD at a GO8 university. She no longer qualifies for Centrelink support because her youngest child has turned sixteen. She does not receive any child support. She does some casual university tutoring and is seeking an extension to her university scholarship. Mia regards her background as middle class, her family have no previous university qualifications. Her current financial situation is dire.

Polly is the sole parent of four children studying a Graduate diploma part-time. She does not receive a university based scholarship and does not receive Centrelink payments because she derives income from property ownership. She does receive family tax benefit and two of her children receive youth allowance and Austudy. She receives some child support and supplements her income with part-time work as a disability carer. Polly recognises herself as from a middle class background, her family has no university based qualifications and her current financial position is comfortable.

Jean has one six year old child and two teenagers at home and is studying a Masters by coursework in TESOL part-time at a GO8 university. She receives Parenting Payment (Single) and also works part-time and is eligible for child support which is un-reliable. Jean does not receive a

scholarship from her university after her applications failed. She comes from a migrant background, her mother was illiterate but highly supportive of Jean's education. Jean's current financial position is tenuous.

Tina was the only participant who began studying for her PhD before she became a sole parent. She is an international student currently employed full-time by a GO8 university and was finalising the submission of her doctorate when I spoke with her. She has a child aged 9 attending school. When she began her doctorate she received a scholarship, limited child support and no Centrelink or medical support because she was not an Australian citizen.

Eva has two children aged ten and three. She is receiving Parenting Payment (Single), a university based scholarship and is studying for a PhD part-time at a GO8 university. She also does some casual exam marking work and receives a child care rebate for her youngest child after JET child-care funding was cancelled. She reports that she is from a middle-class background, is paying a mortgage on her own house and is financially stable.

Gillian is completing a PhD part-time at a regional university with one child aged six. Her applications for university scholarships have been declined and she receives Parenting Payment (single). Gillian notes that while her regional living expenses are cheaper than in a capital city, she remains under serious financial strain despite casual university tutoring work.

Ani has one three year old child and is completing a PhD at a regional university on a full-time basis. She holds a university based scholarship and receives Parenting Payment (Single) and childcare rebate. She describes herself as having a 'very upper middle class' background with many family members having postgraduate education. She cites current high levels of financial stress partly as a result of ongoing legal issues with her son's father.

Sinead also has one child, aged four with whom she was pregnant in the final year of her undergraduate degree. She had applied for a scholarship when I interviewed her and subsequently received a scholarship to support her full-time PhD. She does receive Parenting Payment (Single) and also works as a casual university tutor and in hospitality. She receives no financial assistance in terms of child support. Her family has a strong education background and is strongly middle class. Currently she lives with significant financial pressure.

Michelle was completing her 4th full-time year of her PhD at a GO8 university when she became pregnant with her only child who was two years old when we spoke. She took an intermission during which she was paid maternity leave and returned to her PhD on a part-time basis and her scholarship payments were extended. She receives minimal child support and receives Parenting Payment (Single). She regards her family as middle-class and supportive of her education. Michelle currently lives with her father to manage her limited finances exacerbated by the removal the child-care rebates she received for her son through JET childcare funding which was removed for all PhD students.

Nina has three primary school aged children and she is studying a PhD full-time at a GO8. She has a violence restraining order on the father of her children and therefore receives no co-parental financial or care-work support. She was notified of a successful scholarship application 10 days after I spoke with her and was in the process of being automatically moved to NewStart as her youngest child turned 8 years old. Her extended family are based overseas and therefore provide limited support for her studies.

Table 1. – Participant summary.

Participant	Age	Academic course	Number of children	Age of children	Centrelink	Child Support Agency Payment	Family of Origin
Tina	40+	PhD full-time	1	9 years	No (excluded due to non-citizenship)	Minimal	Middle-class
Ani	40+	PhD full-time	1	3 years	Parenting Payment (Single)	No	Upper middle-class with high levels of education
Nina	40+	PhD full-time	3	7-11 years	NewStart Allowance	No	Middle-class
Michelle	30+	PhD full-time	1	2 years	Parenting Payment (Single)	Minimal	Middle-class
Sinead	25+	PhD full-time	1	4 years	Parenting Payment (Single)	No	Middle-class with high levels of education
Mia	40+	PhD full-time then transferred to part-time	5	All teenagers	NewStart Allowance	No	Middle-class No University education
Eva	40+	PhD part-time	2	3 & 10 years	Parenting Payment (Single)	N/A	Middle-class
Gillian	30+	PhD part-time	1	6 years	Parenting Payment (Single)	N/A	
Jean	35+	Masters part-time	3	6 years Teenagers	Parenting Payment (Single)	Un-reliable	Migrant family No formal education
Polly	40+	Grad Diploma part-time	4	All teenagers	Family Tax Benefit Only	Un-reliable	Middle-class No University education

Method

This research is framed by feminist principles that seek to ‘form connections between personal accounts and theoretical discourse’ (Kannen, 2013, p. 180). I sought participants for this study by advertising with the postgraduate associations in each G08 university in Australia, I purposefully focused on G08 universities because they conduct the majority of research in the Australian higher education context, contributing more than two thirds of Australia’s research activity and output (<https://go8.edu.au/page/go8-indicators>). In order to consider regional and rural postgraduate experiences I also placed requests for participants in selected regionally based universities. Despite placing notices to request participants in all G08 universities and 5 second tier Australian universities, no male sole parents agreed to participate in this research. One male sole parent initially emailed me but declined to participate after I had emailed the consent forms and introductory letter. I was able to conduct face-to-face interviews with 10 participants in two Australian cities and one regionally based university in the state of Victoria. Only one major Australian university refused to circulate my request for participants stating that my study was in competition with their alumni’s projects. Each participant responded to my request via email, I then sent them the introductory letter, the consent forms and a short description of the project which included guidelines for their required involvement. The interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms on campus at that participant’s university, interviews were 90-120 minutes long and each participant agreed for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

The interview process

Drawing from the broad data generation questions listed below, I conducted 90-120 minute face-to-face interviews with 10 participants. I transcribed the digitally recorded interviews and emailed copies of the transcriptions to each participant to allow for errors to be rectified and changes

to be made. I have used pseudonyms instead of participant's real names and did not refer to their university institution to ensure confidentiality. I undertook an initial data reduction of the 214 pages (15 hours) of interview transcripts by colour coding short sections of interview data correlating to points of interest drawn out of my epistemological work. These themes broadly relate to; University policy and practice, social welfare policies delivered by government agency Centrelink, questions relating to the decision to begin postgraduate education, experiences of being in university spaces, and participant responses to difficulties they experienced in maintaining their engagement with postgraduate education. Each of these thematic groups was linked to theoretical frameworks drawn largely from Butler's theories of performativity, recognisability and agency. These theoretical frameworks illustrate how power is productive, and this research explores how power performatively operates on sole parents in postgraduate education. By drawing on Butlerian inspired analysis of accountability and the conditions within which accounts are made and are able to be made, I am able to illustrate the contextual nature of the data and the interactive nature of these discursive exchanges. I asked the following data generating questions to the 10 participants to share and discuss some of their experiences of sole parenting and postgraduate education.

Data generating questions

- Describe your experiences of transitioning from under to post-graduate studies?
- What are the main reasons for choosing to engage with post-graduate study?
- How does the university space impact on your studies and your parenting?
- How do you think sole parents are understood at your university?
- Describe some of the ways that sole parenting influences your studies.
- What strategies do you use to balance sole parenting and studying.
- Has the 'Welfare to Work' policy affected your experiences as a post-graduate student and/or sole parent?

- Have you ever wanted to drop out of post-graduate studies? Why?

Data Analysis

As a feminist researcher, I conduct poststructural research that analyses interview and policy data to purposefully question power, subjectivity and discourse. This analysis is responsive to an understanding that language is not neutral. I aim to provide many and at times conflicting interpretations of the data and in doing so I acknowledge that meaning and analysis are not static nor transparent but rather are interpretative and contestable.

The data analysis I present in this thesis draws from a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as both producing and regulating the subject. Following Youdell (2004a) this analysis

Seeks to identify those discourses that are deployed, either explicitly or implicitly, within data, as well as those that are excluded. In turn, analysis teases out the constitutive and constraining potential of these discourses in order to offer a nuanced and convincing, but not final or absolute, account of these processes. (p. 413).

The following data analysis chapters provide a theoretically based analysis which enables an exploration on how the subjectivities of sole parent postgraduates are constituted as ‘discourses regulate, govern classify and exclude bodies within institutional spaces such as schools and universities’ (Burke, 2013, p. 114).

Chapter Six of this thesis focuses on social welfare policy operating as educational policy. This analysis aims to examine policy as an articulation of representations of sole parents. I do not seek to offer an analysis of the semantics of the policy but rather I am attentive to how policy is central to the process of representation and recognition for sole parents who negotiate their parenting responsibilities and postgraduate study commitments within the frameworks of this social welfare policy. I consider the ways in which the policy is political and part of the ongoing process which

constitutes sole parents and is significant is incorporating multiple social discourses in the exchanges sole parents experience in relation to the Welfare to Work policy. Rather than concentrating on the language used in the policy, I pay close attention to the exchanges that bring this policy into being, the people delivering and receiving the policy within a co-created process. A performative loop of representation establishes the category of ‘sole parent’ based on historical repetitions of sole parents, created by social, media and political discourses. This articulation of power is illustrated in many of the potentially corrective manoeuvres that are central to the Welfare to Work policy. This policy analysis opens up thinking of the mechanisms of policy as an active and fluid process in which sole parents are constituted and are reinscribed in particular ways.

The analysis I provide in subsequent chapters aims to map out themes and patterns that have been foregrounded in the epistemology section of this thesis. These themes encompass how sole parents transitioned into postgraduate education, an exploration of what university based policies and practices enabled and/or constrained this movement towards any potential and subsequent engagement with postgraduate education. I question the experiences of sole parents within university space and what inferences participants make from how university spatial arrangements were constituted. I explore the financial means with which sole parents experienced postgraduate education and this discussion focused on Centrelink’s provisioning of social welfare policy. I was also concerned throughout each interview with participant sole parents to examine their agential manoeuvres and responses to enabling constraints in the conditions of postgraduate education.

The data analysis I present in the following chapters aims to follow the idea that ‘analysis is thinking with theory’ (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 225). St Pierre states that ‘words surely matter, but they do not exist outside discourse and practice’ (2013, p. 225). The findings of this research are contingent upon the conditions within which they are developed and are interpretative explorations of the experiences of these ten sole parent postgraduate participants. Theory enabled data analysis in this

research supports this work to be ‘affirmative, guided by belief in the world and trust that something may come out that is “Interesting, Remarkable, or Important” (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 226).

Limitations to the study

The timing of the interviews I conducted for this research became an important factor in the discussions I had with these sole parents. Butler (1993a) states that, ‘regulatory schemas are not timeless structures, but historically revisable criteria of intelligibility which produce and vanquish bodies that matter’ (p. xxii). The historic time, place and space within which regulatory schemas exist is important for this work in order to consider the social structures that affect the lives of sole parents in postgraduate education. The content of the interviews and the focus of the interviews became closely linked to the time of year and social welfare issues that became pertinent to this research. I had considered when and where participants would find it easier to be interviewed, and decided to schedule interviews during the summer hiatus for academic institutions, but I failed to consider how the timing of the interviews could influence the study through the interview data. The implementation of changes to the Welfare to Work policy which directly relates to social security provisions for sole parents took place during the time I conducted interviews. This meant that these changes were prioritised and focused on by participants. This may have resulted in a greater emphasis on this issue, however, this responsiveness also represents the timeliness of this research.

I conducted all interviews between November 2012 and early January 2013. These interviews coincided with the newly legislated and enacted federal welfare provisions removing social security parenting payments for sole parents with children 8 years and older. Even if these rules didn’t affect the participant directly it was topical and influenced their perceived or real insecurities about finances, stability and continuity of study in the long term as sole parents. This summer period was also a time when universities are closed, so no sessional tutoring or marking work was available to these participants at the time of interview. This limited their earning

capacities and also increased their awareness of financial instability and marginalisation. This period was also summer school holidays, where childcare issues became intensified, school was finished or nearly finished for the year, school-holiday programs were an additional expense and maintaining postgraduate study work and caring for children throughout school holidays was an increased stress at this time and this influenced the content of my discussions with participants.

The Christmas/New year period is also a critical time for many families. It is one of the most expensive times of the year and parents on a restricted and limited income experience heightened levels of financial stress during this time. This stress was evident in all my discussion with participants and it influenced how they felt and thought about their studies and maintaining their work and postgraduate enrolment. At different times of the year, these factors may have been less important or less of a focus, and perhaps other issues would have emerged as timely and critical. Case studies are focused on a particular time, place and space. It is important to acknowledge my awareness that the timing of interviews influenced the interview content and the subsequent themes that I analysed in this research project. The timing of the interviews might also be viewed as serendipitous, providing an unanticipated set of conversations that made explicit the relationship between welfare reform and participants access to higher education.

Following on from my awareness of how the timing of interviews influenced the research project, I am cautious to not over-determine key dramatic events and through my analysis that I 'do not construct life narratives spiked only with the hot spots' (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000, p. 118). While major events and decisions may be highlighted in the analysis stage, I am careful to include the every-day and more mundane elements of how the sole parent participants navigate through post-graduate study. For example, a lack of money and child-care options are often daily considerations for sole parents and the logistics of these two factors may not be dramatic or ground-breaking but may be highly influential for participants in this study.

I am also aware of a slippage between modes of postgraduate study and I have included in this research. Eight participants were completing PhD research and one participant was completing a graduate diploma and another working through a masters by coursework. The difference in experiences of postgraduate education was heavily determined by the more vocational orientation of the graduate diploma and masters level of study. This was evident in the PhD student participant discussions regarding projections and aspirations towards academic careers. This distinction in study modes also has some bearing on the academic and financial attrition that became a focus of my analysis in this research. These and other nuances were not thoroughly considered during the design phase of this research because I was concerned to connect with participants. In retrospective it may have been more productive to concentrate only on PhD students or seek a wider participant cohort of postgraduate students studying at various levels to enable my analysis to consider these perspectives in more detail.

This research follows Sedgwick's (1990) observation on the task of data analysis, that is '[r]epeatedly to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*' (1990, p. 27, emphasis in original). Through the process of questioning of categories and how they work, there is a risk that the categories themselves are reinscribed. This research deals with categorisation of particular parents as 'sole' parents. This in itself seems problematic and I recognise that my discussion of sole parents as a unitary category is messy, fluid and incomplete but functionally necessary. As Judith Butler reminds us, '[i]dentifications are multiple and contestatory' (Butler, 1993a, p. 63). Annemarie Jagose (1996) understands that identity 'has been reconceptualised as a sustaining and persistent cultural fantasy or myth. To think of identity as a 'mythological' construction is not to say that categories of identity have no material effect' (Jagose, 1996, p. 78).

Being mindful of the works of Judith Butler, I aim to interrogate the experiences of category whilst questioning the category itself. As Youdell (2011) reminds us, categories are useful tools to

investigate experiences because to ‘identify inequalities is to call up a range of categorizations of identity’ (p. 22). I am aware of the risk that refusing one regulatory norm can re-instate another, or as Youdell (2011) states a slip into transformative narratives ‘that call up one regulatory discourse to displace another, and which effect one set of subjectivations to replace another’ (p. 116). I acknowledge the diversity of experiences of families, sole parent, nuclear and queer, but desire to maintain a productive yet un-easy use of the category sole parent, whilst recognizing the variable experiences of sole parent postgraduates. The pre-existing identity of sole parent is disrupted throughout this work because I am attentive to the ways in which gender and social structures bring the category into being. Following Talburt (2000) I explore the givenness of identities through ‘interrogating their production through relational differences or structures of power’ (p. 10). Whilst noting these limitations of subjectivity, I maintain that the participants in this study were negotiating within particular experiences of sole parenting and in order to critique these experiences, I must work within and through the category.

The following chapter is the first of four data analysis chapters. As such, chapter four explores key performative acts that constitute the sole parents in this study as postgraduate students. Butler’s theory of performativity frames the following chapter which investigates the (re)productive operation of repetitive acts within university spaces reinscribing them as potentially child-free zones.

Chapter Four - Sole parent postgraduates and university spaces.

The language of exclusion is, by and large, spatial; who's in, who's out, at the heart, on the margins (Gulson & Symes, 2007, p. 99)

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the role of university space in influencing participant sole parent's orientation to postgraduate studies. The spatial arrangements of university impact on student engagement and/or alienation and this chapter seeks to explore how this is experienced by the sole parent's I interviewed. I am concerned with university spaces designated as 'child-free' zones of learning and I pose the question; What does this mean for the engagement or disengagement towards postgraduate education for the sole parents in this study? Therefore, this chapter draws on feminist ethics and theory to pay close attention to participant's lived experiences from their standpoint. This conceptual framework incorporates a theoretical analysis of participant experiences of university space in relation to their care of children as sole parents.

This chapter therefore begins with an overview of Butler's theory of performativity and its usefulness in theorising spatial arrangements. I then discuss some of the ways performative acts are mediated by university spaces for sole parent participants. I suggest that these performative acts shape not only how these sole parents inhabit the postgraduate learning space, but also illustrates some of the ways gendered spatial arrangements are embedded in higher education institutions. University spaces become gendered for academic parents as the caring work for children remains largely the work of women. In the context of this research, all of the participants were women and

so long as gendered constructs are reinforced through women's attachment to child care, how this care-work is mediated within social and educational institutions is highly gendered.

Butler's theory of performativity opens up a destabilisation of gendered norms through critiquing the repetitive acts that attempt to regulate how a subject is constituted. In this chapter, these connections are substantiated through my theoretical analysis of interview data which examines performative acts by participants. More specifically, I consider stories participants told about bringing their children on-campus. I explore the subsequent encounters and negotiations of participant experiences when they have their children accompany them on campus. Participants largely regarded these acts as disrupting existing boundary maintenance which has established appropriate university spatiality as child-free. I incorporate overt and more subtle performative speech acts that I theorise as acts which sought to reinforce university spaces as child-free. I continue this analysis to consider ways in which the institutional structures of universities tend to assume and/or privilege the unencumbered academic subject as demonstrated through timetabling of university classes outside child-care operating hours. In this chapter I argue that an analysis of performative acts by participant sole parent postgraduates is useful because it draws attention to taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in institutional structures of universities and can also open up the possibilities for disrupting and un-doing existing academic norms.

Butler's theory of performativity

Butler's theory of performativity is a useful analytical tool because it draws attention to everyday repetitive acts that act on us to reinscribe norms. Performativity considers how normative foundations of gender operate because it considers how gender 'gets done' within 'discourse, power relations, historical experiences, cultural practices and material conditions' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 72). One of the ways this research is attentive to how gender 'gets done' is through the repetitive and re-inscribed performance of motherhood, the care of children as a feminine practice.

This chapter focuses on performative acts by participant sole parents in postgraduate education in order to critique taken-for-granted or largely invisible university structures in relation to spatial arrangements and the (re)production of gendered parental normative uses of university spaces.

Close examination of repetitive norms is central to the critique performative theory supports. 'Performativity conceptualises the paradox of identity as apparently fixed but inherently unstable, revealing (gender) norms requiring continual maintenance' (Hey, 2006, p. 439). I suggest in this study that the apparent fixed connection between motherhood, femininity and child-care is continually maintained in social discourse and practice including within higher education. It is within and through these repetitive acts that instability can be revealed which opens up the potential for alternatives and change to take place, precisely because of the repetitive and ongoing nature of performativity. This chapter illustrates some of the ways the continual maintenance of gender norms associated with motherhood operates within the Australian academy and how this maintenance influences how the sole parent in this study engaged with postgraduate education.

Butler's theory of performativity is useful in drawing attention to the operation of gendered mothering norms. Motherhood norms precede us and act on us in powerful ways and I am interested in how these norms operate within university spaces.

The theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us' (Butler, 2009 , p. xi)

Employing the theoretical framework of performativity enables the analysis in this research to reveal some of the ways in which constructs of gender in relation to parental care-work operates through the continual maintenance of norms through performative acts. In this way, Butler's theory of performativity draws attention to gendered binary frameworks, such as motherhood and fatherhood,

private child care-work versus public paid employment and the ways in which these boundaries of normative structures are maintained. I also rely on the theory of performativity to explore some of the acts that both reproduce and contest embedded structures that stabilise gendered identity categories. Attentiveness to potential disruptions to reinscribed norms is possible because the theory of performativity is focused on the repetitive acts through which a re-working and a re-shaping of norms become possible.

The potential to disrupt norms is possible because subjects are never fully constituted. Butler's theory of performativity notes the instability of norms that require and depend upon repetitive acts to reinscribe them. This analysis contributes to academic knowledge by extending awareness of how university spaces influences the orientations towards higher education for diverse students. This theoretical framing illustrates the everyday repetitions that reinscribe spatial markers and influence how students interpret and mediate a sense of belonging and engagement with higher education.

Performativity and university spaces

Gregson & Rose (2000) argue that space needs to be theorised as performative and that this should 'encompass academic performances and performativity' (p. 433). Educational spaces are produced, they have boundaries and rules that attempt to normalise and regulate people. The sole parents I interviewed for this research shared experiences of conflicting conditions between postgraduate education and singlehandedly raising their children. The university created conditions that make possible their postgraduate education which were also conditions which often conflicted with their constant responsibilities to care for their children.

the meanings of these spaces may well be multiple, contested and shifting. This is across time and across those individuals or groups who occupy, pass through, avoid, boycott or are

barred from these spaces and whose subjectivities are mediated by them (Youdell, 2006b, p. 58)

Here, Youdell (2006b) illustrates the productive capacity of spatial meanings to mediate subjectivities. In this chapter I am interested in how participant sole parents ‘read’ university spaces and how they mediated their sense of belonging in academic spaces. This is important for this study because it influences how participants managed their on-campus learning, ways in which participants utilized multiple learning spaces if and when university spaces were inaccessible. Encounters with university spaces also influenced the participant postgraduate’s projections towards the academy in relation to their projections of becoming an academic through their emerging and contested experiences of university spaces.

Connell (1993) argues, ‘education systems are...vibrantly involved in the production of social hierarchies. They select and exclude their own clients...they produce and disseminate particular kinds of knowledge to particular users’ (p.27). For instance, in the context of this study it is possible to see how university timetabling produce spaces that operate as social hierarchies which may operate to exclude sole-parents, while simultaneously operating to include students who are required to work full-time. In this way, it is possible to see how university spaces are highly gendered, ‘this gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed’ (Massey, 1994, p. 186 emphasis in original). In this chapter I suggest that university space is largely constituted as child-free which has effects back on the ways in which gendered parenting is constructed. Mediating academic spaces in relation to children influences how gender ‘gets done’ for the people who care for those children.

This chapter aims to explore these conditions of emergence and operation by theorizing performativity in relation to gender and spatial arrangement as experienced by sole parent’s postgraduates I interviewed for this study. This chapter is concerned with the ways that,

‘[e]ducational systems create spaces which are reproductive of existing social relationships and dominant values in society’ (Armstrong, 2003, p. 28). Universities establish spaces of differential belonging, different skills, attributes and assumptions combine to (re)produce educational norms. Establishing these variable conditions of account is performative because it recognizes different subjects differently. The performativity of gender is ‘bound up with the differential ways in which subjects become eligible for recognition’ (Butler, 2009, p. iv). The differential between parental care obligations remains largely based on gendered constructs of mothering as a feminine act which reflects on and effects how these parents are able to be recognised within postgraduate education. Placing restrictions and demarcations on children in university spaces similarly acts on the care givers of children.

Gendered segregations via the geography and architecture of built-places contribute to the subordination and spatialized social control of women, either by denying access to knowledge and activities crucial for the reproduction of power and privilege or by limiting mobility more generally within places defined as unsafe, physically threatening, or inappropriate’ (Gieryn, 2000, p. 474)

The participants in this study spoke of their sense of un-welcome un-ease in relation to their children being with them in university spaces. I suggest this un-easiness is an example of what Geiryn (2000) describes as spatialized control of women which also has the capacity, in the context of higher education, to restrict their access to knowledge and the privilege associated with higher education.

Puwar (2004) notes that, ‘[b]odies do not simply move through spaces but constitute and are constituted by them’ (p. 32). The spatial organisation of university campus life has a particular ‘physical and emotional choreography’ (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 21). Parameters of recognisability within university spaces constitute educable subjects and are therefore able to constrain a liveable life. My investigation in this chapter, of gendered parenting in postgraduate education requires an

analysis of university spaces because space is central to how bodies are organized and engaged.

‘Regulation of the body, from this perspective, is both an act of construction (bodies are brought into being via a grid of intelligibility) and a form of architecture (they are set in motion and disposed in accordance with the arrangement of socio-cultural sites and spaces)’ (Brady & Schirato, 2011, p. 11).

University spaces constitute an important socio-cultural site and space which sole parent bodies attached to children are brought into being as postgraduate students.

University spaces constituted as child-free

University institutions regulate students and ‘inclusion and exclusion are often extremely subtle, and involve informal rules of behavior that are rarely explicitly discussed or mentioned’ (Puwar, 2004, p. 109). The invisibility of children on campus can be regarded as an example of informal rules of behavior that although not explicit, does impart a sense of what is appropriate behavior in relation to children on university campuses. I propose that university spaces are re-inscribed as child-free in both subtle and obvious ways. All of the participants in this research noted a sense of awkwardness in relation to bringing their children with them onto campus. Cella’s (2012) essay in the collected work *Academic motherhood in a post-second wave context*, discusses the child-free attitude that she argues permeates her academic experiences, ‘don’t bring your children to school, to conferences, avoid telling stories about them at parties’ (p. 264). In their analysis of academic work and family balance Ward & Wolf-Wendel (2004) noted that the ‘professoriate presumes a singleness of purpose that parenthood does not always allow’ (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, p. 237). Mason and Ekman (2007) describe a ‘no children allowed’ (p.15) rule in relation to women in PhD programs in the United States. Christopher and Kolers (2012) argue similarly that the ‘everyday functioning of the department takes on a childless character’ (p. 304). The childless character of university spaces is often read by the participants in this research as a conflict of their

time and study and parenting work which mediates their sense of belonging and legitimacy within academic spaces.

Regulating university student parents is detailed in the work of Quinn (2003) who found that universities understood that some students also had children ‘but a separation was clearly expected between them and the learning environment’ (113). This childless institutional culture was discussed by Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid (2009) in their research on graduate student mothers in the United States.

Student mothers experience awkward pauses rendered by pregnant bodies on campus, struggle to navigate strollers in classrooms, and search to find clear and discreet places to feed their babies...there are constant reminders in the social and physical environment of the university that graduate student parents and their children do not truly belong (p. 439).

This research also explores how the sole parent postgraduates in this study read university spaces as environments in which they contingently belonged because their children did not ‘truly belong’.

The awkwardness of the collision between parenting and academic spaces ensures that conforming to the ‘informal rules’ that establish academic university space as ‘child-free’ is more straight-forward for some subjects than others. It is more work for some students to stretch towards compliance and recognisability in regards to maintaining a child-free space. For the participants in this study, maintaining child-free university space was often in conflict with their sole parent child-care obligations and this influenced their orientation towards the university and their postgraduate studies.

Performative speech acts in academic spaces

“There were *even* little children running around”

In the early months of this research work, I listened to the above quote, spoken by a young male at a large postgraduate student on-campus forum. This linguistic act prompted my thinking about academic spaces, how they are constituted and for whom. Judith Butler (1990) refers to the speech act as a, ‘bodily act with specific linguistic consequences’ (p. xxvii). The above quote is a discloser of self for this male postgraduate student who voiced his frustration and disapproval at children in spaces designated for academic work, it is possibly a disclosure that he doesn’t need to bring children onto campus. ‘And when we do act and speak, we not only disclose ourselves but act on the schemes of intelligibility’ (Butler, 2005, p. 132).

The quote above refers to a university library space assigned *only* to post-graduate students that did not conform to this student’s expectations of academic space because it was not child-free. I experienced this public and un-checked statement as an articulation of power, a performative statement which is potentially regulatory because in describing how a space should be, it produces the spatial arrangements.

Laurel Richardson (1997) reminds us that ‘[p]olicing is always about bodies, though, isn’t it? It’s not just about ideas, but about people’ (p. 148). I suggest that child-free university spaces is a policing of bodies who are attached to children. My aim is to bring specific bodies (sole-parents and their children) explicitly into discussions about the production of university spaces. In their call to make space for space in educational research, Gulson & Symes (2007) argue that language is;

linked so palpably to experience, it is imbued with the sense of inclusion and exclusion as individuals and groups move, in and out of communities...much of our ordinary vocabulary is concerned with specifying the fundamental ordinates of space, with communicating information about position, direction and movement, a sense of belonging and absence, or being home or estranged (p. 99)

The above speech act, “There were *even* little children running around”, communicates information, position and movement about children within academic spaces. This statement specifies and communicates how this student understands academic space operates.

Amy Hudock (2008) recounts her experiences of completing a PhD in *Mama PhD: Women write about Motherhood and Academic Life*. She describes how she mediates her parenting and PhD, ‘at the university I will put on my game face and perform childlessness as best I can’ (p. 65). This idea of performing childlessness within university spaces, I argue, cites and repeats widely held views of appropriate use of academic spaces, established as child-free. I argue that this ‘child-free’ discourse reiterates and reinforces that rationality of universities as intellectual spaces in which children do not belong. This, by extension, shifts the sense of belonging or being ‘at home’ in university spaces for those subjects who are also parents and I propose this is magnified for sole parents who do not share everyday child care-work, nor often have the financial means to access formal child care.

Through this speech act, this postgraduate student is drawing on existing academic culture and practice that tends to exclude children. Whilst this student is attempting to contain and govern how academic space ought to be experienced, (child-free) the paradox of performativity is evident because clearly someone *did* occupy this space with their children and this very speech act makes visible this alternative use of academic space. This demonstrates the multiple and contested meaning inherent in performativity which incorporates the potential for change and adaption within the process of constituting the academic subject. The performative act of introducing children into an academic space unsettled the normative category of the postgraduate student. The performative process continues in response to children being present in academic space through the speech act of ‘there were even little children running around’. This is an attempt to re-claim academic space as child-free, to regulate ‘what may not take place there’ (Lefebvre in Puwar, 2004, p. 35). In this speech act, the male student attempts to reinscribe postgraduate space as child-free and in the process

students who are also parents, with children visible and on-campus, are potentially being 'hailed into the social norms of the academy' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 74).

This speech act is provisional in so much as it is an exchange to be interpreted. He speaks, the group hears, he communicates a position and everyone else interprets that speech act according to their own ontological positioning. 'The intention of the speech act is thus determined belatedly by the listener' (Butler, 2004d, p.106). The postgraduate student who voiced his concerns about children in academic spaces attempts to (re)produce a category through this performative speech act. Ahmed (2004b) argues that interactions between peoples within institutional spaces becomes a, 'loop of the performative' whereby we repeat past understandings and thereby reinforce them. He is giving instructions as to how to 'fit in' as a postgraduate, by nominating correct child-free use of academic spaces allocated to postgraduate study. These instructions may illustrate 'how powerful such use of discourse can be in creating place-myths [and] maintaining segregation' (Armstrong, 2003, p. 40). But the 'I' that this student attempts to sure-up is tenuous already because he himself has illustrated how not all postgraduate students can be categorized as sharing the same bounded category. The speech act itself introduces at least one student who has refused the academic practice of maintaining intellectual spaces as child-free. Butler's theory of performativity is useful in this example to illustrate a potential unsettling of categories that attempt to regulate people. By paying attention to repetitive exchanges through performative acts we are able to make visible paradoxes and binaries in relation to norms and critique the practices of doing and undoing gender.

Butler (1993a) states that performativity tends to reinscribe norms because '[p]erformative acts are forms of authoritative speech...statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed' (p. 171). It is impossible to gauge how authoritative this speech act was, one could argue that amongst peers, this speech act has a limited capacity for binding power. However, the opinion expressed was not contested by anyone in the room, the ensuing silence could also be interpreted as an acceptance of this statement; that children do not belong in

this university space. Given that it remains normative that it is overwhelmingly women who care for children, boundary maintenance in relation to children is (re)productive of gender categories and can re-inscribe the conditions of engagement with an academic space.

The sole parents in this study experienced shifting and conflicting conditions as postgraduate students in academic spaces. These contested experiences were demonstrated when they brought their children with them onto campus. I acknowledge that other academic parents may also experience this bind but in materially different ways because they are not students and therefore occupy the more powerful insider position of belonging in university spaces; offices spaces, high income and job security are examples. The participants in this study all spoke of a difficulty in accessing and being present in university spaces because of the un-relenting demands of being the only parent caring for their children. The following section examines some of the ways participants experienced having their children accompany them within university spaces. I theorise these acts as performative and which mediated the participant sole parent postgraduate's orientations towards the academy.

Troubling the unencumbered postgraduate

Postgraduate students are constituted within academic contexts which in turn regulate how they are able to performatively act; they are bound to particular academic/student discourses and norms. I begin my discussion of performative spatiality by drawing on the experiences of Sinead. Sinead has one child, aged four, with whom she was pregnant in the final year of her undergraduate degree. She receives an Australian Postgraduate Award scholarship and part Parenting Payment (Single) to support her full-time PhD. Sinead also works as a casual university tutor and in hospitality and receives no financial assistance in terms of child support. She describes her family as having a strong education background and as strongly middle class, although currently she lives with significant financial pressure.

The following analysis centres on Sinead's performative act of bringing her child onto campus and into academic work spaces. I suggest that this act has the potential to disrupt the gendered construct of the unencumbered postgraduate student/academic and of parenting/children as preferably removed from academic spaces. Sinead's experience may indicate the preference or tendency in academic spaces that caring work and intellectual work should be or ought to remain separate. The following transcription of this interaction also calls forth a consideration of who can respond to this particular framing of particular university spaces. I asked Sinead to share her experiences of combining on-campus academic work with sole parenting child-care responsibilities;

Sinead: Yeah but a lot of people tut tut and look funny and I find the pram logistic crazy. Yeah, I'm (laughs), I've actually...and my worst experiences have been actually when you have the meetings about marking essays with the other tutors and you're all like marking together.

Genine: Like moderation meetings.

Sinead: Yeah, because they always have to be on a day that I don't have childcare because they have to be on a day where everyone can come. My daughter is very cheeky, and they are saying, 'this is so distracting'. But it was really good; one time it was my supervisor who was the moderator, and she said, (supervisor/moderator to complaining academics) - well 'why don't you go do it in another room?', which was really funny.

Performative acts can be 'linguistic *and* bodily' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 73). Here, Sinead brings her daughter to an academic moderation meeting to 'fit in' with the academic schedule and in doing so takes up an academic discourse of high levels of availability, flexibility and work demands. Sinead is constituted as a becoming academic through her performative act of attending the moderation meeting when it suits everyone else, although the presence of her daughter

demonstrates how performative acts are experienced within conflicting contextual power relations and as such they cannot fully constitute her. It remains incomplete because her daughter is present, and Sinead's performative act of postgraduate student parent is contested by others in the moderation meeting. Academic colleagues voice dissatisfaction with Sinead's child being present in an attempt to regulate her, in what I suggest is an attempted corrective maneuver; to correct how academic subjects work in academic spaces.

Sinead's performative act of bringing her daughter into an academic space is part of her iterative process of becoming a postgraduate/academic parental subject. Some of the other academics in this space contribute to this process in an attempt to un-do Sinead's performance of an academic subject by vocalizing their disapproval of her child being present because they found it 'so distracting'. This interaction demonstrates the process of becoming through performative acts. The process continues when Sinead's supervisor, a senior academic intervenes. The supervisors positions in the academic hierarchy enables her to draw on power and discourse to counter the regulatory attempts by some academics in the moderation meeting by suggesting or instructing them to leave the academic space and thereby re-casting the academic and the space in which they work somewhat differently. Sinead's performativity can be understood as unsettling normative understandings of academic work and space as child-free through a negotiation with others based on conflicting subjectivities. This exchange illustrates performativity as an unfinished process of repetition within power relations that (re)produces academic subjects and spaces. These exchanges are performative acts which are mediated by the conditions within which the process of repetition is able to constitute subjects.

The following section extends my exploration of performative acts that 'work to unsettle the stabilizing gender categories that attempt to normalize and regulate people, and accentuates a process of *repetition* that produces gendered subjectivity' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 72 emphasis in original). One of the critical ways gender categories are stabilized is through gendered constructions

of motherhood and fatherhood. This stabilizing of parental gender norms re-inscribes historically designated binaries of mothering and fathering with the majority of care-work assigned to mothers. That women are (re)produced as mothers, is a largely stable gendered category. Repetition of mothering norms is productive; it normalises and regulates the category of 'mother'; who is able to mother, how they are able to mother and in what conditions they are able to do so. This has ethical and feminist implications for how 'mothers' are able to engage and operate within the social institution of higher education. Parental acts produce particular academic subjects and maintaining a child-free university space conforms to prevailing academic expectations. The following analysis expands on gendered parental norms in the academy by examining how sole parent postgraduates operate within these conditions and open up the possibility of unsettling academic spatial norms.

Sole Parent performative acts on-campus

The sole parents I spoke with often brought their children with them to campus, sometimes they did this with little choice and other times this was ambivalently intentional. Participants spoke of pressures in regard to conflicts of childcare and when they wished to access on-campus spaces. Not sharing childcare with another parent reduces times that these sole parents had to engage with their academic work without childcare directly impacting on their time. Each participant spoke of an awkwardness and a sense of being 'out-of-place' when they had their children with them on-campus.

In the book, *Space Invaders*, Puwar (2004) discusses the experiences of 'non-universal bodies' which exist 'as anomalies in places where they are not the normative figure of authority, [and] their capabilities are viewed suspiciously' (Puwar, 2004, p. 59). Students who are also parents attached to children in a university context are not universal and become highly visible when their children accompany them on campus because children tend to be a rarity on university campuses. These experiences illustrate how negotiations of 'visibility help us to understand the nuanced dynamics of subtle forms of exclusion as well as the basis of differentiated inclusion' (Puwar, 2004,

p. 58). The sole parents in this study were acutely aware of the issue of parental visibility and spoke of perceived risks associated with high levels of visibility as a sole parent, non-universal postgraduate student.

Most of the sole parents interviewed understood that being non-universal students had implications for how their competencies were perceived. An academic focus on on-time completions of postgraduate qualifications, a strong publication record, being attentive to establishing networks, a researcher profile, and academic conference attendance are examples of how successful and ‘safe/worthy’ postgraduate students are constituted. With these pressures in mind, participants in this study usually regarded it as easier and safer to remain invisible as sole parent postgraduate students. When universities are constructed as child free zones it tends to reinscribe academic cultures whereby ‘[b]eing a mother in HE seems so negatively received that women teachers [and students] have sometimes tried to ‘pass’ as childfree’ (Quinn, 2003, p. 67). This perception of the ‘child-free’ university meant that when the sole parents in this study were able to choose to remain invisible as sole parents in university spaces they did so. They tended to only bring their children onto campus when the logistics of sole parenting forced them to do.

The following interview extract illustrates negotiations by Gillian which enable her to incorporate tutoring work into her sole parent and postgraduate research work. Gillian is completing a PhD part-time at a regional university with one child aged 6. Her applications for university scholarships have failed and she received Parenting Payment (single) and whilst regional living expenses were cheaper, this participant is under serious financial strain despite casual university tutoring work. Gillian shares her experiences of sole parenting in academic spaces which illustrates the construction of academic norms which compel postgraduates to take up sessional and casual academic work that may fulfil future academic employment criteria. However, Gillian’s performativity also disrupted the norms of the academic subject because she took her child with her when she worked as a sessional academic tutor;

- Genine: What about having your son on-campus other than at childcare? In your office, general meetings, does he come on campus? How does that go? How does that feel?
- Gillian: He only comes on campus when, ummm, or I'm picking him up from crèche and I have to go back to my office and do stuff. Or this semester I had a tute that ran quite late and it ran till 6.30pm and the crèche shut at 6pm so I would pick him up at 4pm and bring him to that tutorial. My course coordinator was quite supportive of that, the students took a bit of getting used to it for the first 2 weeks but after that they were okay.
- Genine: Did any of the students comment?
- Gillian: No, there was a few looks and a lot of them, which was fantastic, were engaging with him before the start of the tutorial, 'oh what are you doing buddy' or when he would do something silly they'd laugh and all that type of stuff. I found that professionally when I was teaching that I wasn't 100% focused on my tutorial but I felt that that didn't influence the student learning. Mentally in my head I was in two places, but professionally presenting I felt that I was still in the room.
- Genine: If you hadn't been able to do that, you wouldn't have been able to teach that class because there is no childcare at that time.
- Gillian: Yep.

Following Butler's theory of performativity is instructive because it enables a reading of how norms are (re)produced through repetition but may also be altered during the course of repetitive interactions. In this interview excerpt, Gillian shares a sense of wanting recognition as a subject who

is professionally and fully engaged with the task of academic tutoring. Gillian re-inscribes the category of academic subject in these performance acts. However, tutoring whilst caring for her child illustrates an instability of the category 'academic' that her acts attempt to constitute. Gillian constitutes herself as an academic within conflicting demands that she struggles to make sense of. She talks of the students taking time to 'get used to' having her child at the tutorial but interprets their kindness and interactions with her son as them becoming comfortable with her child's presence. She is ambivalent about her son's presence in this academic space saying she was 'in the room, but not 100% focused'.

Gillian understands herself as outside the normative accounts of academics who are/should be available to teach evening classes without interference of caring responsibilities which are also the conditions that allow Gillian's tutor identity possible. Gillian is doing gender by following gendered norms that attached femininity to childcare but is also un-doing how this gender category operates because she is working in a professional academic capacity whilst she cares for her child. Gillian's agency to complete academic work is experienced within a paradox of conditions that she would not choose; because the tutorial has been timetabled outside childcare hours and as a sole parent she does not have the option of a supportive partner to care for her child.

Gillian is constituted by these academic norms, of scheduling and expectations of high levels of flexibility scholarly/teaching engagement. As a becoming and aspirational academic, Gillian is dependent on these conditions even as they are not ideal to the extent that she has to combine academic tutoring work with parental care work. Gillian is not meeting normative expectations of academic teaching because she has her son present when she is teaching in a university context. The shifting and mediated process of performativity is evident in the following account of Gillian's experiences of attending academic seminars. I asked Gillian to share her experiences of discomfort and compromise when she has her child with her in university spaces;

Genine: Have you come across other seminars, meetings where that happens?

Gillian: Yep, yep, there has been a lot of meetings or seminars here that start at 8.30am and he doesn't go to kinder until 9.15am and there has been days where there has been seminars, he has Thursday off in term 4, it used to be Wednesday's off and there has been a lot of things organised for Thursday and I just say I'm not coming. Ummm, I am not going to drag my son in to a meeting type environment because he does...he's not a sit and write type of child, we do have an iPad and he will play with that, but he talks and stuff and ummm, all kids talk...

Genine: He is 5 and a half?

Gillian: Yeah, he's 5 and a half. (laughs), So now I just make the decision that I'm not going to take him and if that's going to be an issue then I just get notes. There was one particular incident about a month ago, I went to an after school seminar that had about 20 people in it. I took my son because I was really interested in the topic and in the pre-nibble drinks and pre-presentation nibble and drinks he was really quiet, he was talking to people and he was eating and stuff like that. I had the person who was running the seminar ask, what, I'm trying to think of the exact words, 'what's your child rearing strategies?' or something like that, 'for when he gets loud'. I was really taken aback by that, I just thought he's not making a fuss now, why would I, this goes with that single parenting thing as well, why the hell would I bring him to somewhere and just let him go nuts? Because I know that is the perception that a lot of people have of single parents when they take their kids and they go nuts. He

knows his rules, and I felt really offended by that, I didn't say that to that person.

Genine: There is an assumption there that that behaviour is going to happen.

Gillian: Exactly, it's an assumption that that's going to happen. I just went, that's, I am a considerate person, if he was making a noise or he was blah blah blah, I would take him out of the room, I wouldn't just sit there and ignore it. Ummm, and yeah, yeah (phfff!!!) that has thrown me, but that was really, I felt, it was offensive to me and I felt that it was really inconsiderate of the person who said it. Ummm, so, if it's a really important meeting, I'll still bring him because I need to be there but that's only when I can't find friends to look after him. But otherwise I try not to have him, and every now and then he comes when I just doing one or two things around the office.

Butler's theory of performativity is also useful in unpacking how Gillian experiences the after-hours academic seminar during which the convenor of the session questioned her parenting standards and responsiveness. 'What's your child rearing strategies – for when he gets loud'. This hailing of Gillian as a mother, and as a mother of a potentially rowdy child could be interpreted as an 'attempt to pull or put someone in "their place" or force them into subjection based on discursive and social norms' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 79).

The academic convenor of this seminar is drawing on existing conventions of children in academic spaces and is read by Gillian as possibly hailing stereotypes of troublesome children from dysfunctional sole parent families. This performative act seeks to regulate Gillian's academic/parent behavior because she feels unwelcome and out-of-place. Gillian's response is to refuse the 'space invader' tag although, 'bodies that are out of place have to work harder to convince people that they are capable' (Puwar, 2004, p. 61). Gillian undertakes additional reflective work to reconcile her

conflicted position of being an interested and engaged academic attending a faculty seminar with that of a sole parent with un-relenting obligations for care for her child. The convening academic of this seminar found it difficult to recognize Gillian as a normative and productive academic subject because she had her child with her. I suggest this exchange illustrates the position of the academic convenor and potentially the institution that combining academic space and children results in 'living an unviable academic life' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 79).

This unwelcoming exchange between Gillian and the academic seminar's convenor has the potential to 'undo' Gillian's recognition as an academic. Gillian is recognizable in that as a sessional academic tutor she is a member of faculty academic staff. However, this recognition is performatively questioned by the convenor of this session, who from a hierarchical position of power, questions Gillian's parental strategy; "for when he gets loud". Gillian's subject attachment to being a 'proper' academic is called into question as a result of this exchange, illustrating that 'recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differently produced' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 80). Arguably this exchange is also possible because of the power imbalance between the academic convenor subject and Gillian's more marginal sessional teaching position. Gillian's performative response to this exchange is to reflect on her differently produced recognition of academic subjectivity. Gillian feels 'thrown and offended' by the exchange and begins to reconcile her childcare and academic work commitments before continuing, somewhat ambivalently, to combine her sole parent childcare responsibilities within academic spaces.

In this exchange the academic convenor called on Gillian to give an account of herself; an account of her 'child rearing practices'. She was called to account for herself within conditions not of her own making, rather, the academic convenor of the session, who was demanding an account, contributed to Gillian's uneasy conditions because the academic session is timetabled outside childcare hours, having potentially exclusionary outcomes for sole parent students/academics. Sole parents experience greater time pressures in relation to child care and tend to have fewer

contingencies with which to manage times when university based work conflicts with child care parental work.

There is a slippage that is demonstrated in this interview transcript that deflects thinking away from how the institutional space is constructed and places the ramifications of the role conflict squarely with the individual sole parent. This individualized understanding of institutional interactions such as these become problematic because ‘doing’ gender is unavoidable and the gendering enterprise is, ‘fundamentally interactional and institutional’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). Whilst it may be the individual who is ‘doing’ gender, it is also a doing which is always interactional and institutional and ongoing. Arguably the session convenor seems to place, ‘too much emphasis on the individual’s ability to free themselves from the constraints of gender’ (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 438). Furthermore, while women fulfil the majority of the caring for children function, the feminine gendered mothering role is re-inscribed and tends to restrict an adjustment or freedom from the constraints of this gender construction. Gillian can only engineer her becoming academic subjectivity, one that must advantageously incorporate her position as actively engaged within the faculty, from within these productive/constraining university conditions. This illustrates the operation of performativity in that subjects are constantly produced in an ongoing and interrelated process of repetition through which subjectivities are mediated.

Michelle is a sole parent to one preschooler, with whom she became pregnant during her PhD candidature which she noted caused much consternation within her science faculty. Her experiences of combining sole parenting and postgraduate study include an understanding of clear academic expectations of a separation between children and university campus spaces. This is how she responded to my question about children in university spaces;

Genine: Do you feel as a parent in the library for example that when you’re on-campus with your son that having a child here is an issue for people?

Michelle: I find it...there is a little bit of embarrassment I guess, going into the Chemistry department, not so much the rest of the university, but where I am more familiar with people, not to say that anyone has done anything or said anything it's just, I suppose, you know, if I found out that someone was pregnant and doing a PhD it would be a massive thing for them, I would consider it a massive thing for them to have to deal with, so I probably, umm, you know, people probably think that about me and think oh my goodness – what is she going, how is she going to manage this? I know my supervisor has said, this has never happened before and I don't know what to do with the annual review forms and that sort of thing and there was a question, like, are there circumstances beyond the student's control that have effected their studies (laughs). And he said, I don't know if having a baby is beyond your control. (laughs).

Genine: Well, umm.....

Michelle: Cringe!!! (laughs)

Genine: I guess your faculty too, is it still the case that it is quite gendered and quite male orientated?

Michelle: Oh yeah, definitely.

These thoughts indicate a difficult movement for Michelle when she is connected to her child within her university space and especially in the chemistry department where she is 'more familiar with people'. Michelle was not embarrassed about having a child on the general campus but felt a 'little bit of embarrassment' with 'people she knew' and specifically in the chemistry department. She also discusses a silencing practice, a performative act, within her Chemistry department wherein

they do not ask or refer to Michelle's pregnancy or the presence of her child. Michelle articulates that no one 'has done anything or said anything' about her pregnancy and child and she interprets this lack of discussion as a discourse in itself; an avoiding discourse, a tacit speech act. Michelle regards having a baby whilst doing a PhD as 'massive', her understanding of this experience as significant serves to draw attention to the lack of reference to or discussion of her experiences within the Faculty of Science.

By understanding this silencing and lack of communication as a linguistic act, it becomes performative because it draws on pre-existing understandings of postgraduate students as child-free and then attempts to repeat and re-inscribe this as the appropriate and normalized postgraduate student identity. This performative act is interpreted by Michelle as regulatory because it draws attention to the presence of her child as a use of university space which deviates from the accepted norm. There is a doing and an undoing of gendered subjectivities here constituted through the repeated acts of moving through different university campus spaces, and coming into contact with different people. Michelle cannot be a Chemistry PhD student without being in the Chemistry department, that department makes her PhD possible and so she must also negotiate the power relations that exist in that space.

Michelle's interaction with her supervisor in relation to her pregnancy mid-way through her PhD candidature is also performative. This senior academic acting as Michelle's supervisor, has made it clear in this exchange that having a baby and doing a PhD is not the norm, un-heard of, potentially/preferably avoidable. I interpret this exchange as the supervisor implying that Michelle's pregnancy is problematic. Through Michelle's interaction with her supervisor, who is in a position of seniority and power, he is able to nominate particular boundaries of university space; 'this has never happened before'. I argue that this boundary maintenance is highly gendered because female students have babies and, still to a large extent, care for those babies/children. By drawing attention to Michelle's choice to have a baby and nominating this on an annual PhD review form as a factor

that is affecting her studies the supervisor introduces the potential for Michelle's pregnancy to be exclusionary as he nominates her pregnancy as an issue of control and creating circumstances which affect her academic work on the faculty annual review form. Michelle's pregnancy and child is interpreted by her academic supervisor as a 'disruption of established academic knowledges...themselves constitutive of spatialities of knowledge' (Gregson & Rose, 2000, p. 447). Illustrating how the supervisor regards Michelle's pregnancy as unprecedented through this interaction, I draw attention to the ways in which gendered constructs of PhD students and 'motherhood' are (re)produced through ongoing and un-finished performative acts.

Negotiated performatives within university spaces

Many sole parents in this research spoke of conflicts when accessing university spaces as they also managed the relentless responsibilities of child care-work. However, some of the sole parent participants relished their non-parental time on campus. The majority of the sole parents I interviewed articulated a sense of enjoyment in university spaces exactly because it was child-free, particularly free from their own children. Being on the university campus was something of a sanctuary for these parents. This may be viewed as reinforcing the notion that universities are no place for children, but these sole parents were strategic in mediating their childcare and on-campus activities.

In the following analysis I have selected an interview transcript from Nina who describes her use of the university space as a refuge from what she described as endless 24/7 parenting. Nina has three primary school aged children, completing a PhD full-time at a GO8. She has a violence restraining order on the father of her children and therefore receives no co-parental financial or care-work support. She receives an academic scholarship and was automatically transferred to NewStart unemployment payment because her youngest child had turned eight years old. Her extended family

are based overseas and therefore provide limited support for her studies. It is within these conditions that Nina shares her thoughts about her time within university spaces;

Nina: Umm, when I'm in here, I'm not their mother, I'm me and I'm respected for what I do and umm, I'm liked for who I am as me rather than as somebody's mother... here I'm less of a parent.

For Nina, postgraduate work in a university space was an important way she performed gender, by stepping away physically and cognitively from being a mother/parent. The university space enabled her to move her body away from her children's, to performatively act as *not* 'somebody's mother'. Nina is still constituted by her parental childcare in her university office, but she understands herself as 'less of a parent' in her university office. She uses this university space to exclude her children, setting clear demarcations of education and home spaces which form the conditions of her performative acts as a parent and as a postgraduate student.

However, Nina's PhD/parent subjectivity remains unstable as she seems to be attempting to reconcile and equate respect, 'I'm liked' as an academic because she can inhabit her university academic office space as a 'child-free' space. Nina's orientation to her academic subjectivity seems to be associated with and somewhat dependent upon her becoming 'not their mother' whilst she is in this space. Nina then qualifies this statement; she shifts from 'I'm not their mother' to 'here I'm less of a parent'. This qualification illustrates the fluidity and shifting nature inherent in the repetitive acts of performativity. Nina is 'hailed' and actively 'hails' herself towards the operation of an unencumbered and focused academic, which she seeks to separate from parenting but this performative act remains incomplete because she may understand herself to be 'less of a parent' in her university office space, but nonetheless, she is still a parent in all spaces.

Being a parent in all spaces is critical for sole parents. This is illustrated in interviews with the sole parent participants in this study who regarded university spaces as critically important in

maintaining their postgraduate education because working/studying from home was untenable. As a sole parent, these participants regarded their home space as always and already a parenting space. With no other adult at home to assist in boundary maintenance to facilitate a home space that was conducive to studying, the participants were immersed in parental mode at home and this restricted their abilities to study there. Jean has one six year old child and two teenagers at home and is studying part-time. She receives Parenting Payment (Single), works part-time and payment of her child support entitlement is un-reliable. Jean does not receive a scholarship from her university after her applications failed and she describes her current financial position as tenuous. She found it impossible to work at home and as a response to this she began the somewhat unconventional use of university space and time; returning to campus very late at night. The following quote from Jean describes the difficulty she found in combining parenting and studying in these challenging conditions;

Genine: Tell me about how you study at home, with the kids.

Jean: I cannot. (laughs). This is where I feel very disadvantaged. I see all these people, they are able to come to do a bit of research, do some reading, and attend class and all that. Then their core study will be at home, after hours, but I couldn't do that, at home, it's my kid's time.

Genine: You're in parenting mode?

Jean: Yeah, it's like, oh my god. Lately, with this unit, what I've been doing, what I've been doing, now my older two are older, I've fed them, read to her, the little one, put her to bed and make sure the other two are doing their homework and all that and then at about 10pm I came back out and luckily the library is open til 12pm. Or I study in the postgraduate room.

Genine: So you're coming back onto campus late?

Jean: Yeah, I had to. I just couldn't study at home, I start cooking, washing and cleaning and thinking of the next day, everything else except study.

To carve out time to study, Jean leaves her children late at night and returns to her campus to work. Later in the interview she spoke of becoming worried for her safety when she returned to her car in the university car-park after these late night study sessions and this concern had stopped her from continuing this practice.

Jean: I felt a bit scared going back to the car, coming in was okay but coming back out to the car, was, wow, a bit late and that was putting myself at risk, so I didn't do that too often.

Jean's decision to return to campus study spaces late at night to work is unviable and problematic. It is indicative of the measures that she felt was necessary in order to access university study spaces in particular ways that fitted into her sole parenting responsibilities.

Another participants concurred with Jean's experience; that studying at home with children is highly problematic. Michelle told me;

Michelle: I started trying to work from home and it just wasn't happening. I was doing the washing and all that sort of things instead.

Nina also said she couldn't work from home, for her it was a financial decision as well as a decision about space,

Genine: But could you, when the kids are at school, work at home, do you have a space at home allocated to research work.

Nina: No

Genine: You come here (on campus) 5 days a week?

Nina: Yep. Apart from the fact it saves a crap load of money on heating the house and cooling the house and all that kind of stuff. So, you know, because I have an office I come in and I use it, which would be why my electricity bill is only \$220. (laughs) I can't work at home, I don't like it.

These participant responses demonstrate some of the ways in which sole parents navigated through often conflicting and shifting contexts of university and home study spaces. Largely, for these sole parents, home space was allocated to parenting and their ability to work on their postgraduate studies at home was limited. Their performative acts were based on diverse and fluid uses of university and home space. This effectively meant that their preferred space to study was university spaces, in spite of and sometimes precisely because they were understood as child-free zones. In this way, university spaces had the potential to (re)produce gendered subjectivities, particularly in relation to sole parents because university spaces are constituted by participants and by academics they work with as child-free. Sole parent postgraduates often shared their university spaces with their children, thereby re-working university spaces, performative acts that un-settled normative constructions of postgraduate students and parental childcare.

In summary

This chapter has sought to explore some of the ways the sole parent participants orientated themselves towards their postgraduate studies through their awareness of university spatial arrangements. Butler's theory of performativity provides a useful framework for examining how institutional space is experienced as un-stable, fluid and (re)productive. Performativity draws attention to the repetitive and productive processes of discourse and engagement with others in social institutions such as higher education. Disruptions and shifts in how university spaces are perceived and experienced is possible during this ongoing performative process because it is during this

process that gaps and fractures may exist which can open up the potential for alternative uses, belongings and understandings of space.

The performative acts of the sole parents I interviewed for this research are able to demonstrate ongoing, reiterative and productive acts associated with subjectivity. These acts are only possible within specific power relations and within regulated and normative institutional practices associated with the context of university spaces. This chapter has illustrated how university spaces are designated as 'child-free' and how this demarcation influences sole parent postgraduates. I also examined some of the performative acts that the participants in this study discussed which enabled them to mediate the often conflicted nature of university space as sole parent postgraduates.

Previous literature which considers sole parents in higher education has focused on financial management and welfare reform (Horne & Hardie 2002; Haleman 2004; Mazzeo, Rab & Eachus 2003; Christopher 2005; Butler, Deprez & Smith 2004), or academic services for graduate student parents (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid 2009). This research extends a focus on sole parent postgraduates to the Australian context and opens up understandings of how university spaces can mediate engagement in higher education for the participant sole parents. Marandet & Wainwright (2010) consider space as one factor of interest in their research of university students with dependent children in the UK, however their analysis focused on the location of the university in relation to the proximity to participant homes and their subsequent choice of university. My focus on on-campus university spaces adds to a detailed understanding of how sole parents orientate and create a sense of belonging in higher education and has implications for broader equitable access to higher education agendas. My analysis of university spaces also contributes to the field of gender and higher education academic research through theorising motherhood as a performative of gendered norms which influence how gendered parental subjectivities operate within institutional structures of university spaces.

The following chapter extends my exploration of the sole parent participant's experiences of university conditions as postgraduate students. Butler's performativity has illustrated the ongoing, relational and fluid nature of movements towards postgraduate student subjectivity. In chapter Five, I turn to a further analysis of material and interrelated conditions of account for the sole parent postgraduates I interviewed for this research. To do this work, I explore supervisory relationships, academic publications and attendance at academic conferences as key elements that participants regarded as critical in establishing recognition as a postgraduate student.

Chapter Five - Recognition and accountability for sole parent postgraduates.

Introduction

Following my discussion of performativity and university spaces in chapter four, this chapter provides additional theoretically based analysis of university conditions that participants nominated as critical to their recognition as postgraduates. This theoretical analysis is based on Butler's theory of recognition and accountability and will focus on supervisory relations and university practices relating to conference attendance and academic publication expectations as examples of regulatory and normative conditions that are central to the experiences of sole parent's postgraduates I interviewed.

Sole parent participants shared a sense that supervisory relations are critical to the ways in which they are able to account for themselves as postgraduates in university conditions. Supervisors linked these sole parents to the university institution and to a broader research community and often were central to the decision of participants to begin postgraduate study. Participants sought recognition from their supervisors in both academic and more personal ways, and I argue this illustrates a shifting confusion between mentorship and academic supervision. Supervisory recognition was ambivalent in that participants shared a reticence in discussing their sole parenting with their supervisors, a self-silencing that tended to place limitations on the support they received. In this chapter, I also investigate how attending academic conferences as part of postgraduate conditions became potentially exclusionary for sole parents who had limited capacity to travel away from home due to child care-work responsibilities and financial stress. I also problematise expectations of academic publications in postgraduate education a key factor of recognition for sole parent participants.

Butler's theory of recognisability and accountability

In this research I am interested in the desire of sole parent participants to be engaged with and recognized as postgraduate students. Jackson & Mazzei (2012) argue that the

desire for recognition is in actuality a site of power, where who gets to be recognized, and by whom, is governed by social norms...the choice to be recognized (or not) within the constraints of normativity is a condition of agency in the doing and undoing of subjectivity' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 77)

The choice by participants in this study to be recognized as postgraduate students is made within the constraints of norms associated with sole parenting and postgraduate education. Following Jackson and Mazzei (2012) I explore sole parent recognition as postgraduate students as constrained but also agentic in a purposeful and productive orientation towards a postgraduate qualification. The dual mechanism of recognisability was evident in participant stories relating to their supervisors who are critical in their engagement with postgraduate education through conditions of constraint and agency.

The previous chapter explored Butler's theory of performativity theory to illustrate how repetitive acts are bound up with norms that determine recognition and it is through these repetitive acts that spaces for alternative ways of being and thinking become possible. This draws attention to the ways in which subjects are constituted and stabilized, through 'boundary maintenance, as examples of border work and classifications, gender as a means of regulation, experience and resistance' (Arnot & Mac an Ghail, 2006, p. 4). Any desire to be recognized must be negotiated through norms, regulations and 'boundary maintenance'. These negotiations are (re)produced within conditions of account. Conditions of account frame who and how subjectivity is able to evolve and it what ways recognition is sought and conferred.

In this chapter I focus on university practices that create the conditions of account for sole parent postgraduate students by examining structural and institutional norms and regulatory forces. Judith Butler (2005) work, *Giving An Account of Oneself* is useful to examine the relational nature of individual experiences and institutional structures. A focus on conditions of account and recognition provides a foundation from which to explore structures that shape social relations of power, as ‘one is only required to give an account of the self in the face of another. To become self-knowing requires recognition by another and recognition of others’ (Zink, 2010, p. 209).

Butler (2005) argues that it is impossible to provide a full account of oneself because all accounts are mediated and shared with others, ‘If I am trying to give an account of myself, it is always to someone, to one whom I presume to receive my words in some way, although I do not and cannot know always in what way’ (Butler, 2005, p. 67). Butler’s theories of accountability and recognition are useful to examine relational ambivalence and I draw from this theoretical framework to support an in-depth exploration of the university conditions that the sole parent postgraduates in this study experienced. I examine how Butler’s theory of performativity is not bound to individualization nor abstract from structural conditions. Rather recognition and accountability are set firmly within relations of power that are continually mediated in the context of institutional structures and social relations.

My theorising with recognition also aims to avoid what Nancy Fraser (2000) called ‘displacement’ (p. 108), wherein struggles for recognition dilute struggles for redistribution. My argument in this chapter and the following chapter, is that misrecognition of sole parents within universities and through social welfare policies contributes to the ‘patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation’ (Fraser, 2000, p. 115). Participating in higher education opens up benefits of distribution in terms of employment and financial security and therefore my theorising of recognition pays close attention some of the ways institutional obstacles influence fair participation of sole parents in postgraduate education.

Recognition of sole parents in the academy

Most participants were cognisant that academic staff and particularly supervisors were scanning and assessing their work habits and commitments to their postgraduate studies. All of the participants shared concerns that their sole parenting commitments would be viewed negatively in the university context. Louise Morley (2013) argues, '[m]anaging identity, discrimination and other people's negativity can be an additional affective workload which deters women' (p. 124). As these sole parents began to recognise what it meant to be a postgraduate student they perceived an academic regime that valued the 'independent scholar: the rational, autonomous, implicitly male-gendered subject' (Lee & Williams, 1999, p. 22). These sole parents sought to be recognised as competent postgraduate students, an identity shaped by 'discourses of meritocracy in which the right to higher education is understood in terms of individual ability, potential and hard work rather than as shaped by structural, cultural and institutional inequalities and misrecognitions' (Burke, 2013, p. 110). Participants in this study shared an awareness that when scholarly work is constituted through notions of meritocracy and as 'implicitly male' it could result in a tension between their academic work and their sole parenting obligations, which they regarded as potentially exclusionary.

In response to the tensions of recognition for sole parents as postgraduates, these participants tended to be strategically and selectively silent about their sole parenting. They limited their discussions about sole parenting as a strategy to actively avoid possible exclusions and negative judgements. They were aware and defensive of potential discriminative stereotypes of 'single mothers' that may result from 'pernicious stereotypes regarding the cognitive and moral traits of socially constructed 'kinds' of people' (Code, 2011, p. 32). Tasmin Hinton-Smith's (2012) work on lone parents in UK higher education confirms this self-silencing. She reports that;

Over three-quarters of lone mothers who discussed their HE Institution's perceived attitude to lone-parent students experienced this as being negative. This included overtly negative

attitudes, alongside reports of institutions offering no special interest or treatment to lone parents' (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 154)

The participants in this study shared the perceived attitude towards sole parents as negative and unsupported within their university. My analysis of these perceptions and how they mediate the participant experiences of higher education contributes to Australian academic knowledge regarding how students engage in postgraduate education and has implications for retention and equity aspirations for the academy.

The following data analysis begins to explore the concept of bias avoidance and self-silencing. I elaborate on ways in which the sole parents in this study mediated their recognisability as postgraduate students. My analysis pays close attention to the conditions within which they were able to account for themselves as postgraduate students and sole parents within the Australian academy.

Strategically and selectively silent

Parenting is often understood as a private act embedded within social constructions. Linda Martín Alcoff (2006) argues that identities are relational. 'Learning that someone is a mother produces unconscious or conscious relations in people, involving assumptions that may involve one's intellectual state, one's emotional state, one's ability to achieve detached objectivity on certain matters, one's maturity, or one's moral status as a working mother' (p. 90). Alcoff (2006) refers particularly to mothers which reflects broader gendered performatives associated with the parental binary of mothering and fathering. Alcoff's point about the assumptions of intellect and emotion in relation to mothering I suggest can be extended to parenting by connecting these attitudes to all caregivers and/or parents of children, not only mothers. This extension from mothers to parenting is useful to draw particular attention to the operation of mothering discourses and examine how care-work is constituted. Alcoff's assumptions describe and establish normative and regulatory

discourses of parenting that I suggest may be applied to any body who is responsible for the care of children. However, Alcoff's point about the relational nature of identities and the (un)conscious reactions to motherhood in relation to one's emotional and intellectual state are evident in the participant reflections in this study. The participants in this study perceived the assumptions associated with the separation of intellect and emotion in relation to parenting as being strongly upheld in their university conditions. This perception intercepted participants ease in bringing their children with them on-campus and their comfortableness in discussing their sole parenting in an academic context.

The participants in this study shared concerns that their 'intellectual state' would be open to question precisely because they were sole parents. Colbeck & Drago's (2005) notion of bias avoidance may be useful here as it describes how 'individuals either minimize or hide family commitments in order to achieve career success' (Bardoel, Drago, Cooper & Colbeck, 2011, p. 158). Wyatt-Nicol, Cardona and Drake (2012) discuss bias avoidance in relation to balancing family obligations in higher education.

Bias avoidance behaviour typically results from discriminatory stereotypes and may be reinforced through organizational culture. Women often assume that having a child while on the tenure track will decrease their chances of tenure and promotion...Bias avoidance is reinforced when faculty mothers bear witness to negative tenure decisions of women who used family friendly policies (p. 119-120)

The participants in this study also assumed that their sole parent status may result in discriminatory stereotypes and sought to avoid this disadvantage by limiting their discussions relating to their children. This assumption is reiterated in the comments of Tarshia L. Stanley (2005), in her chapter '*The One with the Baby: Single-Mothering in Academia*', from the edited collection by Rachel Hile Bassett; *Parenting and Professing: Balancing family work with an academic career*. Stanley (2005)

reflects on becoming a mother and a scholar at the same time and shares that she ‘had no idea that people would see me and judge my ability to survive both in school and in life by the fact I was a single parent’ (p. 84). Stanley (2005) notes that judgements about sole parent abilities exist within the academy. The sole parent participants in my research also shared these concerns.

When I interviewed Eva, she shared her understandings of university awareness in relation to the experiences of sole parent postgraduates. Eva has two children aged ten and three and receives Parenting Payment (Single), and a part-time university based scholarship to support her PhD. She also does some casual exam marking work and regards herself as having a middle-class background and is currently paying a mortgage on her own house and is financially stable. When I spoke with Eva, I asked about her interpretations of how sole parenting is understood in a university context;

Genine: Do you think, from your experiences, that the university as an institution
 would have any idea that some of its postgraduate students were sole parents?

Eva: I wouldn’t think they did, no. It doesn’t seem to be something that people talk
 about. And then it puts a sense of doubt or shame over it. It’s like, why don’t
 people talk about it, should I be ashamed about it?

Similarly, Mia shared her thoughts on university institutions responsiveness to sole parent postgraduates. Mia is a sole parent of five teenage children and is three years into her PhD studying full-time. She no longer qualifies for Centrelink support and does not receive any child support. Mia supports her family through her university scholarship and casual university tutoring. She regards her background as middle class although she describes her current financial situation as dire. During our interview, I asked Mia to share her thoughts in relation to university awareness of sole parent postgraduate experiences;

Mia: No, I don't think anyone knows. I think sole parents are invisible. I don't think that they are often aware of who the single parents might be, or even who the parents might be, let alone the single parents. Because often it will come up and someone might say something like, 'do you have children', and I say, 'Oh yeah, only five', (laughs). And sometimes I add that I'm actually on my own, and they can't believe it. So it's not like they ever say, oh yeah, lots of people do that, or that's normal for our institution and we'll support you and you'll be fine, it's like, shock!

Genine: Because I'm interested in how much the sole parent has to mould themselves to the institution and how much the institution can speak back to the needs of sole parents.

Mia: No, we just have to fit in.

Eva evokes a shame discourse and Mia shares her feeling of being 'invisible' which I suggest reflects a sense of alienation and anxiety about how these sole parent postgraduates are understood in the academy. Erring on the side of caution, many of the sole parents I spoke with described a sense that sole parenting was not 'something that people talk about'. This minimisation of parental responsibilities is also evident in the research of Karen Lynch (2008) who conducted a case study of graduate student mothers and referred to strategies participants used to limit their visibility as mothers in academic contexts because they feared it may detract from being taken seriously as graduate students. Lynch (2008) writes, 'they simply do not make mention of their maternal status to advisors or other department members...[and took] steps to 'hide' their motherhood status inside of academia' (Lynch, 2008, p. 596).

In their work on balancing family work in academia, Connelly & Ghodsee (2011) share a general rule that before tenure or a secure ongoing academic position that academics should not discuss their children on-campus.

No matter what your parental obligations or how demanding your child care schedule becomes, spare your colleagues the details...you may want to limit the number of pictures of your offspring in your office...You want your colleagues to think of you as a scholar...as a young professional who is organized in control and worthy (p. 133).

Connelly & Ghodsee (2011) point to the child-free culture that exists within the academy, and/or the perception of doubt relating to how children are read in relation to an emerging academic career. The strategies of visibility and professionalism are called into question when academics, particularly junior academics, draw attention to their children. This questioning was evident in the understandings and negotiations between their parental and academic work that the participants in this study shared.

Michelle is a sole parent to one preschooler, with whom she became pregnant during her PhD and responded to my question regarding discussing her sole parenting in her university context. Michelle's comments reflect a self-silencing in regard to her sole parenting and also open up considerations of the cost of these contested conditions of account;

Genine: What about...do you, when you are talking to academic people and other people at the university, do you say, I'm a sole parent?

Michelle: You know, because I've almost been like embarrassed at my situation and, umm, just, almost like a special needs student in a way really, that I don't talk to the academics about my aspirations and that sort of thing

Michelle shares that she doesn't talk to academics about being a sole parent. She shares her perception that she regards herself and/or others that will regard her as a 'special needs' student in response to her 'situation' of sole parenting. Michelle's 'embarrassment' at being a sole parent postgraduate restricts her discussions with academics about her 'aspirations'. I understand this as a cost, as Butler (2005) states, conditions are not of your own making and accounting for oneself always comes at a cost. For Michelle, managing her (non)disclosure in relation to her sole parenting restricts the ongoing recognition process with academics and potentially has become detrimental to her studies. By not talking to the academics about her 'aspirations', Michelle limits her access to academic knowledges and practices that are helpful in completing postgraduate education and subsequently moving into an academic career.

Michelle's comments indicate a sense of embarrassment about her 'situation' as being 'like a special needs student' as a sole parent and reveals her recognition of herself and of special needs students somewhat negatively. This differentiation between her 'situation' and 'special needs' student's illustrates the process of recognisability which includes recognition by another and of others. Michelle's comments also reflect a lack of confidence or capacity to engage with a robust and meaningful exchange with academics in relation to how she wishes to be recognised as a sole parent and as a postgraduate student. Recognisability is co-created, and given Michelle's reticence to talk to academics about her sole parenting it is difficult to imagine how academics can become aware of student potential and requirements if the student cannot articulate them strongly for themselves.

However, these exchanges always take place within power relations that are skewed in favour of academics who are limited by time and other institutional conditions. Student and supervisory exchanges are often experienced in conditions that are not always conducive to productive exchanges. Michelle's comments illustrate that the process of recognition of her as a postgraduate student is only possible in the face of another (the academic). This exchange also reflects the fluid

and changing nature of the subject which is always contingent because it is, 'dependent upon the recognition of the other' (Salih & Butler, 2004, p. 2). My analysis of Michelle's 'situation' illustrates the complexity of relations between these sole parent students and academics that I understand as more than avoiding bias.

Bias avoidance is one, albeit important, factor in how the sole parents I spoke with negotiated their postgraduate subjectivity. Butler's notion of accountability and its focus on recognition may be more instructive for thinking through the multiple ways sole parent postgraduates are constituted in university conditions, a 'thinking through of the constitutive ambivalence of being socially constituted' (Butler, 1993a, p. 83). Particularly pertinent to the sole parent postgraduates in this study was the recognition they ambivalently co-constructed with their academic supervisors.

Supervisory recognition and accountability

For the participants in this research giving an account and coming to understand themselves as postgraduate students and emerging academics is largely mediated through their relationship with supervisors. Recognition by supervisors is critical for the sole parent postgraduates in this study; supervisory recognition was regarded by participants as the most valuable and valued. Recognition given and received between supervisors and postgraduates students was problematic for all of the sole parents I interviewed for this research. They were very wary about being recognised by their supervisors as valid students, they wanted their research work to speak for itself and to have work and study opportunities extended to them in the same way it was offered to other students.

Sinead shared a story about not being able to complete a research assistant project because her child was sick and she had no other immediate child care option available. Sinead has one child, aged four, is completing her PhD full-time and receives an academic scholarship which she supplements with Parenting Payment (Single) and work as a casual university tutor and in hospitality. She receives no financial assistance in terms of child support and currently she lives

with significant financial pressure. In our interview, I asked Sinead to reflect on the ways she negotiates an understanding of her sole parent experiences with others;

Sinead: I was doing some research for someone and I really had to get this work in for them, umm, and my kid got really sick and her Dad couldn't help out extra and I remember being at home thinking, 'oh my god'. And he said, just tell them your kid is sick, and I'm like...and I did, I said, my kid is sick and they were like okay, but what I feel is they didn't give me more research work. They probably did understand that I couldn't do it because I'm a single Mum and they probably don't think ill of me but they also didn't give me the next project to do, they gave it to someone whose kids are not going to get sick and who is not going to have that issue. I think it's really hard to talk about it without making it sound like it is a deficit.

This quote from Sinead shares a key issue for sole parents in this research, her sense that seeking recognition as a sole parent in postgraduate education is problematic 'without making it sound like it is a deficit'. Butler's theory of recognisability draws attention to the ways in which the process of recognition draws forward historically constituted norms and expectations. I argue that Sinead is referring to previously held notions of the deficit 'single mother' in this exchange of recognition and seeks to avoid this negative categorisation but notes that 'they didn't give me anymore research work'. Not being offered any more research work may be (as Sinead herself concludes) a result of Sinead's conflicting child care-work illustrated in the above quote. Sinead's experience in this exchange demonstrates the shifting and ambivalent process of recognisability and also some of the potential pitfalls of recognisability for sole parents in postgraduate education.

Sinead's experience is reflected in research conducted by Hagedorn (1999) which investigates factors of retention for female graduate students over 30 and notes that because 'mature

women so frequently juggle a multitude of responsibilities, faculty may be hesitant to include them in extra-curricular events or activities' (p. 108). Faculty may also be hesitant to include them in publishing projects, teaching roles and other academic work advantageous to finding academic employment post PhD.

Eva also spoke of similar concerns about how her supervisor would understand and respond to her partial account of sole parenting and postgraduate study. She reflected on the following exchange with her supervisor;

Eva: I'm going to be working with you for 8 years...I have two children, I'm a single parent, I am part-time and I have a scholarship.

Genine: He didn't want any extra information about that?

Eva: No he didn't ask, no.

Genine: He didn't want to know how you thought those things would affect your work?

Eva: No, he didn't ask any questions.

Genine: How did you view him not asking about that?

Eva: I was kind of relieved, because I didn't want him to think I wouldn't be capable of doing it. Because for some reason I sort of thought, maybe people are going to think that I'm not going to be as capable as someone else because of this decision I've made in my life.

Genine: Do you mean capable academically or pushing through the work?

Eva: Possibly both. I'm apprehensive that I'll be perceived in a certain way.

Eva illustrates the power relations that may influence how sole parent postgraduates choose to be understood in university spaces. Eva's interaction with a new supervisor shows the reticence of sole parents to share this information because they are concerned that they will be 'perceived in a certain way'. Butler's theory of accountability notes that 'I give an account *to* someone, and that the addressee of the account, real or imaginary, also functions to interrupt the sense that this account of myself is my own (Butler, 2005, p. 36 emphasis in original). When Eva's supervisor does not recognise, take interest in or extend her account of her sole parenting of two children he 'interrupts' Eva's account. Even as Eva is 'kind of relieved' that her supervisor doesn't extend his recognition of her sole parenting conditions, she also interprets this as the supervisor questioning her capabilities to 'possibly' do the academic work and manage the workload.

Eva begins with an account of herself that she regards as open and 'being-up-front' and the addressee (her supervisor) interrupts this account in a manner that Eva interprets as potentially placing her outside normative and appropriate postgraduate conditions. Conversely, consideration must be given to how an increased focus by supervisors in regard to sole parent's demands may be interpreted. Potentially a focus on sole parenting may be interpreted as patronising and may also be construed as regulatory and as a type of surveillance questioning the legitimacy and capacities of sole parents to successfully engage with and complete postgraduate education. The challenges to co-constructing recognition resonate with the experiences of Michelle as her academic supervisor problematically referred to her pregnancy in her annual review forms as discussed in chapter four. These differing points of analysis illustrate the ambivalence and co-created nature of recognisability.

Gillian also spoke of a conundrum in relation to recognition in an academic context. Gillian is completing a PhD part-time at a regional university and has one child aged six. Her applications for university scholarships have been declined and she receives Parenting Payment (single), however she remains under serious financial strain despite casual university tutoring work. In the following

interview extract, Gillian shares her difficulty in articulating her sole parent postgraduate student conditions to academic supervisor. Gillian describes her dilemma;

Gillian: I don't want to be patronised and stuff like that but at the same time I want it to be acknowledged, but I don't want to be patronised about it.

This conundrum between acknowledgement and awareness and patronised exists because the 'name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a scene of agency from ambivalence' (Butler, 1997b, p. 163). Consequently, when sole parent postgraduates diminish and/or refuse to discuss their sole parenting in university contexts to avoid 'subordinating' effects, they also may be limiting 'enabling' effects. I argue that experiences of ambivalent recognisability for sole parent postgraduates, such as Gillian refers to, are linked to a limited discourse and institutional responsiveness to equitable student diversity in higher education. A lack of responsiveness and wider engagement with the micro experiences of diverse students effectively maintains the centrality of the normative student based on 'a slow accumulation of the past, a silent sedimentation of things said' (Foucault, 1972, p. 141). The university institution cannot develop policies and practices for particular cohorts of students when they lack an awareness of those students even being enrolled. A lack of awareness of sole parents in postgraduate education is illustrated by the lack of meaningful data on this student cohort in Australian universities and is also reflected in the comments of participants in this research. Butler's notion of accountability is useful in working through this conundrum because it explores how a subject is recognised whilst being attentive to the conditions of possibility for the emergent 'I'.

The intense and often fraught relationships that the sole parents had with their supervisors emerged as a very strong theme throughout all of the interviews that I conducted. Lee and Williams (1999) spoke with six academics who reflected on their own academic supervision which the authors described as 'compulsive anecdotes of trauma and loss, of abuse and neglect, of plagiarism and of

abandonment' (p. 9). This sense of loss and abandonment is also reflected in Jean's comments. Jean has one six year old child and two teenagers at home and receives Parenting Payment (Single), works part-time, does not receive a scholarship from her university, she describes her current financial position as tenuous. I asked Jean to discuss her connections with academic staff as she negotiates her part-time Masters degree;

Jean: Yes, this one I am totally on my own and have never felt so alone as on this unit. I couldn't talk to anyone.

Jean's comments reflect her feelings of a lack of recognition from her academic supervisor. Her sense of aloneness may have serious implications for her engagement and retention in the Masters program. This quote also draws attention to Jean's experiences of university structures that not only could she not talk to her supervisor about her work but that she felt that she did not have 'anyone she could talk to'.

During my interview with Ani she spoke very openly and frankly of her experience with supervision. Ani has one three year old child, is completing a PhD on a full-time basis and holds a university based scholarship and receives Parenting Payment (Single). When I spoke with her she was experiencing significant financial stress. I asked Ani to share her experiences of supervision, she offered the following description;

Ani: Yeah, something has happened. On some parts they are disengaged and other parts they are engaged wrongly. It was just a cluster-fuck for the first year.

Genine: Hmmm, it is crucial. I do think when you are living in a marginal PhD land that relationship is more of a focus.

Ani: Yes, it becomes even more central.

Genine: It's magnified?

Ani: Yes, it does, it dominates your life. And like you said, there is no other relationships to take its place and to provide support in its place, because you are a single parent and you are isolated. When there is less anything else, there is more, 'oh my god my supervisors are giving me shit', or 'oh my god my relationship with them is great', whatever they provide...

Genine: I think the ripples are felt differently when everything else is so close to the bone.

Ani: Yes, it's like being in a boat too low down to the surface of the water and any shift any tip and the water is in, you know.

This interview exchange is demonstrative of the complex and ongoing interrelatedness between supervisor and postgraduate student. The comment which provides an analogy of the low lying boat and postgraduate education for this sole parent is supported by research on mature aged students retention in higher education by Osborne, Marks & Turner (2004) who reported that 'the decision was so finely balanced that any small change in personal circumstances could reverse the decision' (p. 309). By saying 'it dominates your life' this participant draws attention to the centrality of supervisory support in the experiences of the sole parent postgraduates in this study.

For sole parent postgraduates, supervisors became intensely important because they were in many ways isolated; socially isolated and institutionally/academically isolated. Leonard's (2001) work reminds us that poor supervision is one cause of lower completion rates and, '[o]ne reason the supervisor is so significant to non-science students is partly the lack of other sorts of support in such departments' (p. 87). Many of the sole parents interviewed for this research experienced no other academic support networks other than their supervisors. If the relationship between supervisor and postgraduate student was not professional and functional the student's experiences were limited and

tenuous. Misrecognition between sole parent postgraduates and their supervisors was magnified because this recognition is compulsory and sole parents often had limited other resources to draw on.

The sole parents in this study spoke of their struggles to establish and maintain peer relationships in a diverse and autonomous postgraduate study environment. This can increase the intensity of their focus on their supervisory relationship. Sole parents do not typically live with another adult, in which case there is no other adult at home who takes an interest in their work and conversation at home about academic work are almost non-existent. These conditions mean that motivation and help from another adult whom you live with is an unavailable support mechanism for sole parents.

Poverty and financial stress often meant that participants in this study were excluded from social activities. They also keenly felt that the costs and availability of child-care coupled with their often overwhelming responsibility to care for their children placed material restrictions on where, how far and for how long they were able to socially engage and develop academic networks. The following quotes are a chain of comments which illustrate some of the ways academic isolation is experienced by sole parents in this research;

Nina: There is no-one else, there is only me.

Ani: But it's exactly that, it is isolating and it's a double whammy of a timetable that you can't control and a level of commitment that you can't shirk.

Sinead: I do find it incredibly isolating. I don't see my friends much... When people ask me what I do, I never say I do a PhD, because they just have nothing to say to that....[it] is only mostly my supervisors that I talk to, so I don't actually talk to adults very often.

Tina: Exactly, but it's been three and a half years and I still don't have friends in Australia. I think that's because I'm a single parent. I can't really make friends at school because they have Mum's clubs and all that, who the hell has time to go to any of that? I have from 9.15 to 3.30pm and finish all my work here (university) so I can't waste a single minute of that time and so I don't have time to pursue friendships here either. So it's like a dog trying to catch its tail.

This cluster of participant comments reflects their sense of isolation as sole parents in postgraduate education. Often these sole parents expected that the isolation they felt would be, in some way, mitigated by their supervisors. They hoped and projected an understanding that their academic supervisor would act as enablers and they sought this type of relationship as a highly important strategy to successfully complete their postgraduate qualification. This was rarely the case, which reflects Hinton-Smiths (2012) research which 'underscored that too often lone-parent students experiences of support in Higher Education are determinant on nuances of individual staff, departments or institutions, rather than being indicative of uniform standards on conduct' (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 216). Negotiating the nuances of recognition of and by supervisors was critical to the ways in which these sole parent's experienced postgraduate education.

Many of the sole parents I interviewed disclosed their hopes and projections for meaningful supervisory relations and these ideas were often problematic. In the following interview extracts, participants share how their projections and hopes for supervision are mediated and un-settled by their subsequent experiences;

Eva: No, it's not a mentor. This is the business side of the PhD and [the supervisor says] I will help with this, and I don't feel that there is room for my personal things to factor into it.

And,

Ani: So I would love...a different kind of supervisor and different kind of emotional engagement with the PhD, I do find it very confronting.

Genine: That's a very individual and particular experience. It's not written into the guidelines, you either got it because that academic is that way inclined, or you don't.

Ani: I read someone else's PhD and she thanked her supervisor, I was reading it and flicking past the guff pages and there was a dedication page and she thanked her supervisor who had helped her so thoroughly with line by line, sometimes word by word re-workings of certain paragraphs. I just cried. I really did tear up.

Genine: Because that supervisor is really in that person's corner.

Ani: Yeah, and that's mentorship and supervision in the same box.

It is instructive that Ani talks in such emotive terms about 'love' and 'tears' associated with mentorship and supervision in the 'same box'. This affective language demonstrates the high level of importance to sole parent postgraduates allocate to recognition by their academic supervisors. Often the participants in this study felt short-changed, under-supported and compromised in the process of recognition in regard to their supervision. This analysis indicates the uneasy and contested nature of recognition for these sole parent postgraduates who shared limited capacity to actively participate in constructing a positive working relationship.

However, during my interviews with participants, they demonstrated that they were not passive within the recognition process with supervisors. The previous section has detailed some of the limitations and concerns for participants in this study relating to recognisability as postgraduates

by their academic supervisors. I now turn to an analysis of some of the ways participants reflected on, adjusted to and benefited from the ongoing process of recognisability as a postgraduate student. This discussion aims to illustrate ways in which the conditions of postgraduate education influence the recognition process.

University conditions of recognition for sole parent postgraduates

Ani's reflections begin this discussion as she sums up her revised and pragmatic position relating to supervisory relations;

Ani: I think there is a point where you've got to divide it into emotional support and practical support. The university is full of practical support but I have found it a very difficult place for emotional support there isn't a lot of understanding. You know, that's what it's like, and you have to be a grown up and pull your socks up and get on with it.

Ani shares her adjustment from how she understood and wished her supervisory relationship to be and how it actually was. She sought 'emotional support' and found it to be unavailable. As I have suggested earlier, many of the sole parents in this study tended to over-determine their expectations and demands in regard to supervision, largely as a result of a lack of support at home and within the academy. The shifting nature of Ani's recognition of supervisory roles, from 'tears' reflecting a sense of loss to her call to 'pull your socks up', illustrates the ongoing and interrelated nature of recognisability. That Ani's pragmatism and revision of her supervisory expectations to 'get on with it' indicate that a misrecognition exists with this recognition process. Ani has potentially misrecognised the capacities and role of the academic supervisor and her academic supervisor may have also misrecognised Ani's request for or need for 'emotional support' in addition to 'practical support'. I argue that Ani and her supervisor's misrecognition illustrates the contingent and fluid nature of recognition as a co-created understanding.

I draw on Ani's experiences of misrecognition because it opens up this discussion to a critique of institutional structures, or lack of them, in terms of how postgraduate students are able to seek recognition, be recognised and orientate towards the academy. I propose that this type of critique is particularly important for understanding how alternative or more marginal students are able to establish and maintain engagement within postgraduate education. A consideration of Ani's supervisory experience may indicate that higher education institutions do not consistently provide professional and appropriate supervision structures. The previous section has detailed the importance of supervision for these sole parent postgraduates which can establish strongly supportive conditions that are conducive to postgraduate completions and a trajectory towards becoming an academic.

Supervisory/postgraduate student experiences are problematic because they are co-created, fluid, difficult to define and dependent on the conditions within which they are experienced. Misrecognition within the recognition process between postgraduates and their supervisors exists within an ambivalence created between academic mentor and academic supervision. Many of the participants in this research confused or blurred the lines between supervisor and mentor. They wanted mentors but had supervisors. They perceived that mentors would be more attentive to contributing 'emotional support', whilst supervisors tended to restrict their interactions to 'practical' and academic work. Diana Leonard (2001) succinctly sums up the difficulty in adjusting expectations and professional relationship between supervisors and postgraduate students, 'dissertation supervision is not meant to be therapy. Go look for the latter elsewhere' (p. 244). However, Anita Devos (2004) argues that it may be productive to consider a separate role for academic mentoring, she advocates that

Mentoring is a site where we act upon ourselves and invite and allow another to act upon us...Mentoring is also a site where a range of subject positions of what it might be possible to be as a woman academic, take shape. Through mentoring, women may be disciplined as

suitable academic subjects within the conventional and masculinist terms of the discourses of academic life (p.78).

Devos (2004) offers a feminist contention that mentorship is advantageous for academic women to learn the ‘rules of the game’ and become recognised as belonging and becoming in an academic context.

Following Devos (2004) I suggest that recognition through mentorships could enable ‘access to the resources of power held and distributed in the academy: namely, publishing, networking and intellectual capital that “joining the club” constituted’ (Hey, 2003, p. 325). This is particularly meaningful for postgraduate students who are under-represented in the academy and often have limited capacity to access and engage with other forms of institutional support. Maureen Baker (2012) also agrees, she argues that to ‘counteract the gendered relations at home, university mentoring programs may need to examine these issues more openly’ (p. 122). A more open discussion about the mediation between home and work would be useful, I suggest a more open and detailed discussion of how ‘gendered relations at home’ are reinscribed and powerful would also be useful. This discussion has drawn attention to institutional conditions that direct resources and institutional capacities with variable outcomes in relation to supervision in postgraduate education which are largely dependent luck and goodwill. Recognisability also draws attention to the resourcefulness and agency of students in this process, because recognition is co-created and ongoing as Ani’ previous comment ‘pull your socks up and get on with it’ alludes to.

The following section continues my exploration of institutional capacities in influencing the process of recognition and orientation for these sole parents towards postgraduate education. Gillian’s experience draws attention to the often ambivalent and fractured nature of recognition within universities. Counter to other participants in this study, Gillian spoke confidently about the support and understanding she received from her main supervisor. She shared a sense that her lead

supervisor understood her sole parenting time pressures, but contrasted that with her perception that in general university cultures fail to comprehend these pressures;

Genine: Do you think the staff at the university and particularly your supervisors understand? Do you openly talk about your sole parenting?

Gillian: My associate supervisor understands completely.

Genine: Your associate is the original academic who you spoke with?

Gillian: Yeah, that's right. And that person has 5 children and a partner, but having said that they do understand. The other person, I don't think they have a child. That person is full-time they have a partner, umm, I think unless other staff members are either in a sole parenting position or are insightful enough to understand the demands of sole parenting even though they are in a partnered relationship, no, most people don't understand. Because I've been asked to draft a bit or work within three weeks and I just go, 'are you shitting me, I cannot do that in three weeks!!!' At a management level and at an academic management level, so more than just a lecturer or a tutor, anyone whose program coordinating it, it has been in my view that those positions are generally held by people without families or without children or have partners. I feel that, yes, there is a lack of understanding about time requirements, time requirements, and emotional requirements.

Gillian draws attention to the discrepancies between different academic staff member's expectations and understandings of her 'time and emotional requirements'. Is it reasonable to expect that academic supervisors or university staff have an understanding of time and emotional requirements of postgraduate students?

Gillian suggests understanding such requirements would only be possible if you had children or were 'insightful enough' but she adds that 'most people don't understand'. I argue that because conditions of account are mutually created, this interrelatedness necessitates that the sole parent postgraduate who is seeking to be recognised must take some responsibility for articulating a coherent account. I question Gillian's assumption that unless an academic is a parent or a sole parent that they could understand the experiences of sole parents. This position tends to draw from a universal or essentialist notion of parenting and specifically 'the sole parent' which is problematic. It is difficult to be meaningfully recognised by those from whom we seek or require recognition. This difficulty is to some extent always the case, regardless of assumptions and expectations of similarities in experiences.

Participant discussions in relation to supervisory relations and Gillian's discussion of academic and university staff more broadly seems to lack an awareness of the nature of supervision and the institutional conditions within which supervisors are able to work. None of the participants referred to the institutional limitations their supervisors faced. 'University teachers and researchers also now have less time to be collegial and for time-consuming individual relationships with students, even if a sense of professional identity has made them try to minimize the passing on of these effects to their students' (Leonard, 2001, p. 40). Participants tend to reflect that they regarded good and responsive supervision as good-fortune rather than a common mechanism based on institutional structures and resources designed to provide supportive and productive supervisory practices as a matter of course.

Perhaps this assumption of fortunate supervision reflects a slippage by participants. By focusing on how their supervisor recognises them, often the participants neglected to consider their role and capacities in co-creating recognisability. They also largely avoided acknowledging and taking into account the institutional limitations associated with academic supervision. Participants often sought or spoke of a sense of entitlement in regard to supervisors understanding their

experiences as sole parent postgraduates, but this type of recognition was not reciprocated by participants towards their supervisor. The experiences of recognisability for the sole parents in this study demonstrate the ongoing and mediated nature of exchanges of recognition and how conditions of account can influence these experiences.

The participant's focus on luck and goodwill, rather than institutional structures is also evident in some of their initial orientations towards postgraduate study. The importance of the interrelatedness of recognition manifests in the following participant experiences. The following section discusses seemingly random, short, one-off conversations between academics and the participants that were important for sole parents as they began to explore the possibilities of postgraduate education. These experiences also draw attention to the institutional conditions that frame this recognition. Ani talks about how un-structured and ad-hoc these conversations can be;

Ani: My boss just randomly, I mean it was in the university environment, had said to me, you should do a PhD you're smart enough, you know, apply for a scholarship.

Similarly, Mia discusses her initial contact with her university supervisor;

Mia: Yes, if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have done it I don't think. Because it would have been too scary, to just go in. I don't know this place.

Genine: Is that partly why it was key that that academic was positive?

Mia: I think so, I think I could see that there would be support, she kind of believed in me.

Often the impetus for these sole parents to begin postgraduate study was prompted by one academic and not by multiple access points to the faculty or institution. This personal interaction may have

been more important for these sole parent participants who were seeking particular support, particular encouragement and who lacked confidence in the academic context.

Often postgraduate students have been away from university study for some time, this may be particularly the case for sole parents who have been caring for children. It may also be the case, as this research shows, that sole parent postgraduates can require additional encouragement and support because they face many other roadblocks to participation in postgraduate education. For example, Gillian talks about the influence of just one academic in her decision to begin a Masters that was subsequently transferred to a PhD,

Gillian: Well, it was during the course of that unit that I was doing with that staff member, umm, it started off as obviously very professional; you're the tutor – you're the student. But after that, getting into and just having informal talks about the subject area and saying I don't know much about this and I'm really interested in it, and I guess it was that interest. Then I just started a professional relationship, if you want to say it in that way, just talking about the issues and umm, went to a seminar together and I was really excited saying; I want to do this and I want to do that and then they suggested that I look at doing a Masters in the area.

Genine: Did you speak to any other staff member or representatives of the university about that plan. Or was it mainly that particular academic? Because I'm interested in as a student how one enters into an institution to get the information you need and start that involvement.

Gillian: To get to the decision to do a Masters or a further qualification was really just the conversations with that person.

It is Gillian's good fortune that one academic staff member took interest in her research proposal and suggested she begin her Masters qualification. Not all students are fortunate in this way, and a reliance on one academic to act as an introduction and bridge into postgraduate study limits accessibility.

Sinead's experiences reiterated this sentiment, referring to an academic with whom she had a positive pre-existing relationship, which transferred from one university to another.

Sinead: Well for me, like, the main reason I came to [this university] was because I knew that I would have someone supportive here.

Sinead states that the deciding factor in choosing a university for postgraduate work was the supervisory relationship. Having 'someone supportive' motivated Sinead to travel on public transport from the opposite side of the city to an outer suburban university in order to work with that academic. This decision also demonstrates a somewhat tenuous connection to their university faculties for many of the sole parent postgraduates in this study. Again, a reliance on one academic to be 'someone supportive' may limit Sinead's broader experiences of the academy and has implications for retention, postgraduate completions and career development. These implications exist because retention through postgraduate education is far more likely with 'someone supportive' acting as an academic supervisor. Also a supportive supervisor will potentially be more pro-active in facilitating networking, conferences and publication opportunities will support retention, research completion and career advancement.

In my discussions with participants it became clear that, in addition to supervisory relationships, several other key university based practices regulated their recognisability as postgraduates. Universities establish very specific norms of recognisability for postgraduate students. Participants were keenly aware of being called to account for themselves within these normative university conditions. Specifically they discussed attending academic conferences,

pressures to publish papers in academic journals and timetabling of academic classes and other university-based seminars as central to how sole parents experienced the conditions of account in postgraduate education. The following final section of this chapter investigates these conditions of recognisability that were influential to the participants in this study.

Academic recognition through conferences and publications

Butler's theory of accountability is useful in thinking about academic norms and how they establish particular conditions. Theorising accountability is productive in my analysis of sole parent postgraduate recognisability because it focuses on how a greater understanding and recognition of others can lead to greater understanding of ourselves. This process of recognition is important to the context of sole parent postgraduates within university conditions. This is because during their postgraduate studies, these participants are beginning to foster a greater understanding of what it is to be recognised as an academic. Sometimes, others recognise them as academics or emerging academics and often participants in this study began to traverse this recognition themselves. This process of recognition is central to most of the participants chosen trajectory towards becoming an employed member of the academy. Participants developed this increased awareness of the academic role and began to understand or project themselves into that position. This process of recognition was supported by academic seminars, classes, conferences and publication regimes as all critical sites of learning the 'rules of the game' (Leonard 2001) through which postgraduates can come to understand how it is possible to become recognised as an academic.

Rachel Connelly & Kristen Ghodsee (2011) discuss balancing family and academic work and state that 'going to conference and presenting papers there is the best way to get to know people in your field...having people in your field know you, [and] is essential if you want to establish a reputation as a serious and committed scholar worthy of permanent employment' (p. 130). Connelly & Ghodsee (2011) rate the importance of conference attendance so highly that they argue if your

institution will not contribute to the financial costs of attending ‘use your credit cards; this is an investment in your future’ (p. 130). Connelly & Ghodsee (2011) note the difficulties of attending conferences if you have children, but I suggest that they underestimate the time and costs involved particularly for sole parents, whose capacities to travel for work using credit cards is problematic at best.

Most of the sole parents in this study felt significant amounts of pressure to attend and to present papers at academic conferences. For the most part, the sole parent participants I spoke with were resigned to being unable to attend academic conferences because of financial limitations and child care responsibilities. They regarded the institutional expectation and pressure of seemingly compulsory attendance at academic conferences for all postgraduate students as un-supported by and at odds with institutional structures. This inability to attend academic conferences is supported by Probert’s investigations which explored gender and unequal outcomes based on her case study of a large university in Australia. Probert states that ‘[a]lmost all this group of older mothers commented on the fact that having children meant they no longer felt able to get to international conferences’ (Probert, 2005, p. 68). Here, Probert (2005) discuss academic staff not postgraduate students. This research contributes to this area of research relating to engagement in higher education for parents by adding considerations of sole parent postgraduate students. I suggest that these issues are magnified for sole parent postgraduates who often have less financial capacity and limited ability to co-share their child-care responsibilities.

Research by Minna Nikunen (2014) reported on Finish academics on short-time contracts and reported issues relating to academic staff and international travel. Nikunen found that ‘although there are policies to encourage visits abroad, such as the family supplement for funding in the Academy of Finland (1998), academic parents have to be innovative in arranging their trips, negotiating with their families and minimising the time they are away’ (p. 129). Academic travel funding that considers a ‘family supplement’ would be highly beneficial for sole parent

postgraduates who as students, tend to have less money, flexibility and institutional support than career academic parents.

Postgraduate student recognition through attending academic conferences is an institutional condition of account. This condition indicates an underlying institutional assumption that postgraduate students are free of family work and child care obligations. I suggest that this institutional condition relating to academic conference attendance tends to assume that the small amounts of university funding to support access to these conferences are equitable when applied to all students regardless of their circumstances. These institutional norms arguably minimise or refuse acknowledgement of parental responsibilities to understand parenting as 'private and individual, and therefore it becomes structurally excluded from academic thought' (Standing, 1998, p. 198). Structurally excluding parenting responsibilities from academic practices can be particularly exclusionary for sole parents in the academy who have an increased level of parental care-work that is largely un-avoidable. For sole parents this care-work can be very difficult to transfer and find time and space to attend academic conferences. This collision between child care-work and academic conference work forms the conditions of account (Butler 2005) for sole parent postgraduates and influences how they are able to negotiate engagements in higher education.

In the following interview extract Gillian talks about the conditions in which she manages sole parenting and attending academic conferences;

Genine: Does the financial, or does the logistics of care stop that?

Gillian: Well, no, because when I went to the Queensland conference I did get a travel award but it was only \$500.00 and when I had to factor in flights for both of us, travel there and back, food and stuff I ended up spending an extra \$300-\$400.

Genine: And that's with your Mum doing the childcare.

Gillian: Yes, and if I didn't have Mum there, oh my god...

Genine: The nanny fees...

Gillian: Yes, the nanny fees and the accommodation, oh my god! I mean, trips to Melbourne and stuff are not too bad, if it's just for the day, but yeah, the money thing, unless there is an award, or some help to go I just don't go.

Gillian's account of attending an academic conference with her child, of whom she has 90% care, demonstrates the multiple ways sole parents manage conference attendance. For Gillian, her attendance at the interstate conference is mediated by child-care provided for by her mother, accommodation provided in her mother's house, a university travel bursary and her allocation of her personal finances towards attending a work conference. The complexity in extracting oneself from sole parent duties, financing the travel and conference registration fees in addition to allocating travel and attendance time combine to create difficult conditions for the sole parents in this study to attend academic conferences. These interrelated factors are compounded if/when international conferences are considered.

University travel awards do not take into consideration different conditions that result in different travel expenses such as having to take a child on an academic trip because the postgraduate student is a sole parent. Travel awards that are paid retrospectively are also problematic for sole parents who can find paying for conference registration, flights, accommodation and childcare upfront exclusionary. The expectation to attend conferences, to be in a position to do so and be in a position to pay for it all upfront are examples of how universities establish norms of recognisability for postgraduate students that can have negative effects on how sole parent postgraduates are able to be recognised within those normative structures.

Participants in this study are keenly aware that attending academic conferences is a strategically important way to be recognised as an emerging academic. Tina shares her sense of frustration in relation to her attendance at a forthcoming national academic conference. Tina began studying for her PhD before she became a sole parent. She is an international student currently employed full-time by a GO8 university and was finalising the submission of her doctorate when I spoke with her. Tina's child is nine, an academic scholarship supported her full-time PhD during which time she received limited child support and no Centrelink or medical support because she was not an Australian citizen. As Tina is finalising her PhD, she provides a perspective that is firmly connected to concerns of establishing herself as an academic, creating academic networks and increasing her academic profile. It is with these considerations in mind that Tina describes her current orientation towards her academic career;

Tina: Yes, I do. I feel the pressure especially with the travelling because I am not in touch with his father at all, I have no family here, so now for example, the first week of December is the AARE conference in Sydney, I'm presenting and I'm chairing a session and all of that and I don't want to miss it, but I don't know what to do with him. Then I requested some family to take care of him for one night, so I am spending all this money and all this time for just one day.

Genine: Which then leads into issues about career placement and networking?

Tina: Yes, I think it's unfair for single mothers especially, I don't know about single fathers. But like, I know a couple of guys here who are single and they have nothing else to do, they don't have a family, they don't have children, they can eat canned beans for lunch if they want to and so they are getting into a lot of new research and this guy has started pretty much with me and he's getting a

lot of research grants and getting published and all of that. I have the capabilities to do all of that but I don't have the time.

Genine: The logistics get in the way.

Tina: Exactly, so he tells me about he's worked until 11pm in the night putting this grant application in. Can I do that? No. Do I want to do that? Yes. But can I do that - No. I have absolutely no support over here. Being a single parent, especially in a place where you don't have your parents or siblings, any kind of support is very very hard.

Here Tina shares her experiences of the logistics of attending academic conferences and makes the point that for her as a sole parent career development and opportunity is not about capabilities but about time. She says 'I have the capabilities to do all of that but I don't have the time'.

Tina's conundrum of time was a common concern throughout my interviews with participants. I argue that Tina's conflict of time is a mis-recognition by university institutions relating to who postgraduate students are. This mis-recognition assumes flexibility and that students are not encumbered with caring responsibilities. Tina's comments also draw attention to the conditions of accountability in relation to the expectations and demands on postgraduate students to publish in academic journals.

The competitive culture of postgraduate education focuses heavily on publications as the demonstration of legitimacy and as a critical method for being recognised within the academy. The publish or perish rule of engagement in the academy fails to consider the impact of children on publication outcomes. Steven Stack (2004) conducted into gender, children and research productivity notes 'none of the major books and articles from the last decade of relevant research on scholarly productivity include a measure of parenting in their models' (p. 895). A lack of

consideration for multiple conditions of account in relation to parenting and specifically sole parents is illustrated in this research and draws attention to how diverse students are able to participate in higher education.

My focus on academic publications contributes to the field of gender and higher education by exploring how the publication pressure influences postgraduate students rather than career academics. Publications are increasingly critical in higher education including for postgraduate students for whom publications may determine future employment outcomes in the academy. Previous academic literature relating to sole parents in higher education has largely neglected this area of analysis which is particularly pertinent to postgraduate education. Other scholarly work relating to publication in the academy tends to focus on publications demands for academics and therefore this research highlights this gap in the academic literature.

In summary

Judith Butler's theory of accountability argues that we 'do not survive without being addressed' (Butler, 2005, p. 49). Sole parents cannot become or survive being postgraduates/academics without being addressed and recognised as postgraduates/academics. In this chapter I have argued that participants seek recognition as postgraduate students and that they are only able to seek this recognition and be appropriately recognisable within the very specific and normative institutional structures of universities. One of the ways I have illustrated the ambivalent nature of recognition is by drawing attention to the reticence of participants to discuss their sole parenting in the university context.

Supervisory recognition for these sole parent postgraduates was critically important because supervisors were instrumental in creating productive and/or problematic conditions within which participants were able to account for themselves as postgraduates and becoming academics. I have shown that supervisors were critical in the recognition process because they linked the sole parent

postgraduates to the academic institution, they invited and incorporated them into the academy and were one of the few resources students had to learn the rules of the academic game

The following chapter continues the theme of accountability and recognition through the regulatory regimes associated with Centrelink, the Australian government agency responsible for implementing social security provisions. Centrelink interactions and practices were experienced by these sole parent postgraduates as critical to establishing the conditions of 'possibility for the emergence of an 'I' (Zink, 2010, p. 213).

Chapter Six – Recognition and accountability: Co-parenting with Centrelink.

recognition is not in itself an unambiguous good, however desperate we are for its
rewards
(Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 82).

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on recognition and accountability for sole parent postgraduates within the university context. This chapter aims to examine how Centrelink's delivery of the Welfare to Work policy is illustrative of broader economic and social factors that create the conditions of account for the sole parent postgraduates in this research. Centrelink is the Australian government's agency which delivers social security provisions and as such, is an important and complex site of recognition for the sole parents who participated in this study. It is through Centrelink that the emergent Welfare to Work policies were implemented and all but two of the participants in this study were beholden to this agency and spoke of significant issues in dealing with this agency. These problems are connected with financial means and how sole parents negotiated being recognised by a government agency. This analysis also contributes to understandings of the 'relationship between equality regimes (in post-welfare times) and continued societal inequalities' (Taylor, 2013, p. 243), by considering social welfare policy and equitable access to higher education. These negotiated relationships are prescriptive and productive.

To be addressed is not merely to be recognised for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental dependency of the address' (Butler, 1997b, p. 5).

Applying Butler, in policy terms, the Welfare to Work policy recognises sole parents as ‘un-employed’ parents and their recognition as welfare dependents becomes possible because they are addressed in this way. This loop of recognition within Centrelink policy creates a notion of a sole parent because a parent ‘fits’ a particular policy framework and their reliance on social security means that sole parents exist because of this recognition.

Research by Karen Christopher (2002) provides some contextual foundation as to how prescriptive Australian welfare regimes act towards ‘single mothers’, via a comparison with similar Western countries. Christopher considered welfare regimes effect on poverty for single mothers in comparison with all mothers in nine Western nations including Australia. She found that ‘welfare states in Australia, the United States, and Germany do the least to reduce poverty among single-parent families’ (p.66). Furthermore, Christopher’s (2002) work notes that ‘single mothers are the most disadvantaged vis-à-vis married mothers in Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States, where their poverty rate is more than three times higher than that of married mothers’ (p. 70-71).

My questions to participants in relation to Centrelink prompted angry and emotive responses. As a researcher and interviewer, my experiences and difficulties with accessing social security payments through Centrelink are also present in these exchanges. My use of policy jargon, sympathetic and sometimes leading questions has coloured the interview data I discuss here. My experiences also help to open up my discussions with participants in relation to Centrelink; arguably my positioning here supported their forthright and open reflections and observations and illuminated the critical nature of social welfare policy and its implementation. The importance of Centrelink in the lives of these sole parent postgraduates is illustrated through comments such as;

Nina: Centrelink have no clue – full-stop.

Sinead: Ummm, I find them revolting.

Jean: Ohhhhhh!!! They're horrible.

The emotionality that emerged during my interviews with sole parents underlies the critical nature of Centrelink to these participants. These responses are in line with research by Brady (2011) who explored the governmentality of welfare reform in relation to single mothers and stated that 'Welfare to Work represented a radical change in policies affecting Australian single parents' (p.268). Nancy Fraser (2000) describes the potential for regulatory interactions within social institutions to be experienced as misrecognitions and uses the example of 'social-welfare policies that stigmatize single mothers as sexually irresponsible scroungers' (p. 114). Many of the participants in this study spoke of this 'scroungers' stigma as present in the interactions they had with Centrelink staff and the social welfare policies they implemented.

Eight of the participants were highly dependent on Centrelink's financial support in order to continue postgraduate studies. Having enough money to be able to live, raise children and study is the basic and fundamental issue facing all the sole parents I interviewed in the course of this research. The sole parents I spoke with believed that postgraduate education was a marginal and problematic activity within the Centrelink context but was nevertheless within the rules and structures of recognisability for sole parents receiving government support.

The Welfare to Work policy

The Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Act 2005 – Schedule 4 & Schedule 13 was introduced to Australia in 2006 by the conservative Liberal Coalition government. The Welfare to Work policy represents a political intervention in the lives of sole parent families which in effect limits their choices and autonomy, particularly in response to educational engagement in a move towards post-welfare times in Australia. Increased levels of reporting by and surveillance of sole parents now apply. 'Although

direct and threatened coercion exists as a bottom line, a majority of families are often forced to produce and regulate themselves through dominant, ideologically charged discourses' (Gillies, 2007, p.3). The Welfare to Work policy fundamentally constructs sole parents as requiring interventions and tends to individualise experiences, ignoring other social and economic factors such as the 'feminization of poverty' (Pearce 1978), the de-valuing of caring work, gendered notions of child care, limitations of the child support agency (see Cook, 2013 & McKenzie & Cook 2007) and the casualisation of the workforce. This effectively reinforces a 'privileging of agency over structure' (Francis & Skelton, 2009, p.19) because it places the onus on individuals to 'overcome' their conditions without meaningful reference to the structural conditions that support such movement. Rachel Brooks (2012a) also warns of a problematic minimisation of structural conditions in accountability of engagement within higher education when 'unpreparedness for university life is viewed as the fault of the individual student alone' (p. 430). An emphasis on individual capacity tends to limit a focus on social and economic structures that can act as enabling constraints.

The Australian Welfare to Work measure was projected to save \$728 million dollars over 4 years.⁴ The first phase of the Australian Welfare to Work and Other Measures Act (2005) implemented amendments to the Social Security Act 1991. A single parent (not a member of a couple) whose child has not turned six years old has no participation requirements under the Act. When a single parent's child turns seven they are required to enter into an approved written agreement called a 'Parenting Payment Activity Agreement' and whilst the agreement 'is in force the person must comply with its terms'.⁵ Most commonly the agreement stipulates at least 30 hours of

⁴ See - http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd1112a/12bd164

⁵ EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WELFARE TO WORK AND OTHER MEASURES) ACT 2005 - SCHEDULE 4, sourced from http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/eawrlatwaoma2005885/sch4.html

paid work per fortnight which takes into account a person's capacity in relation to education, experience, skills and age; any disability, illness, mental or physical condition; the local labour market and transport options; participation opportunities; family caring responsibilities; travel time and the financial costs of compliance.

Parenting Payment Activity Agreements are quasi educational policies because they determine recipient's opportunities to engage with education as an activity stipulated within the agreement. In this way 'contemporary neoliberal personalized planning programs are argued to be normalizing because, while these programs may greatly increase income support and recipients' ability to undertake certain activities, they also restrict the behavioral options open to the individual' (Brady, 2011, p. 265). Restrictions are enacted through non-compliance with the activity agreement which is deemed to have occurred if the person fails to attend a job interview, to commence, complete or participate or continue paid employment, without a 'reasonable excuse'. Non-payment of the parenting payment for a period of 8 weeks occurs after repeated failures to comply during a 12 month period. Navigating these policy frameworks was critical to how the participants in this research transitioned into and engaged with postgraduate education.

Navigating the rules and obligations under the Welfare to Work policy intensified in 2012/2013 when the second phase of the Welfare to Work policy was introduced by a Federal Labour government. The new legislation; *Social Security Legislation Amendment (Fair Incentives to Work) Bill 2012*, took effect on 1st January 2013. Effectively this legislation removed grandfathering arrangements which meant that a phasing-out of provisions for sole parents who had previously been receiving the parenting payment (single) prior to July 2006 was cancelled. Previously, parenting payment (single) recipients were eligible to receive this social security support until their youngest turned 16; this is no longer the case. As of 1st January 2013, sole parents with children aged eight or over, were automatically transferred to the NewStart (unemployment) Principal Carer allowance. NewStart (Principal Carer) has a significantly lower rate of payment, (\$557.90 per fortnight

compared with \$720.00 fortnightly on Parenting Payment Single)⁶, more stringent activity requirements and tighter income tests whereby payments are reduced further and earlier when sole parents earn additional income.

The Australian Council of Social Service ⁷ (2012) predicted that the second phase of the Welfare to Work policy would result in

approximately 100,000 sole parent families losing some or all of their income support over the four years from January 2013, with around half facing payment reductions in that month. Most would instead receive the lower NewStart Allowance (NSA). It is well established that sole parent families and their children who rely on income support face a high risk of poverty. A sole parent with one primary school age child receives \$455 per week in PPS and Family Tax Benefits. On NSA the family's income drops to \$396 per week. Over 90% of parents affected are women.⁸

Income testing for PPS cuts in when fortnight income exceeds \$176.60 and for NewStart income testing cuts in at \$62.00. The Pensioner education supplement was payable (\$62.50) per fortnight for PPS recipients, but this supplement will only be paid to sole parents moved to NewStart payments until the completion of their current course. However, government policy determines that the pensioner education supplement is *not* applicable to PhD students.⁹ Similarly, Austudy, a

⁶ See - <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/parenting-payment> And <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/newstart-allowance>

⁷ See - <http://www.acoss.org.au/>

⁸ Australian Council of Social Service. Sole parents won't be helped to find employment by cutting their payments: Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee regarding the Social Security Amendment (Fair Incentives to Work) Bill (2012) [online]. Strawberry Hills, N.S.W.: Australian Council of Social Service, 2012. Strawberry Hills, N.S.W.: Australian Council of Social Service, 2012. 24 p. ACOSS papers, sourced on 5th May 2014, from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/fullText;dn=619796765166517;res=IELHEA>

⁹ Note – criteria states that 'some' Masters students may be eligible for the Pensioner Education Supplement. See - <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/centrelink/pensioner-education-supplement/eligibility>

government financial payment which supports students, is also not available for postgraduate study. The 'work-first' ideology, including the forced transfer to NewStart allowance with its reduced financial support and the removal of the Pensioner Education Supplement and no Austudy provisions, all direct sole parents away from education. This contradicts an understanding that 'investment in education reduces future public expenditure in state benefits' (Klett-Davies, 2007, p.137).

Welfare policies become educational policies

Centrelink has a regulatory function for sole parent families through government policies it delivers. Through its interpretation, regulation and delivery of financial support, Centrelink is an exemplary case of how the State 'perform[s] countless constituting acts which constitute family identity as one of the most powerful principles of perception of the social world and one of the most real social units' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 25). Butler (2004e) concurs, 'regulation is thus bound up with the process of normalization. Statutes that govern who the beneficiaries of welfare entitlements will be are actively engaged in producing the norm of the welfare recipient' (p. 55).

According to Butler, the conundrum exists because the 'name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a scene of agency from ambivalence' (Butler, 1997b, p. 163). The name 'welfare recipient' both subordinates and enables. It enables because it provides minimal financial support so postgraduate studies can become viable for sole parents, whilst simultaneously 'mutual obligation' measures which mandate and limit criteria of social welfare payments provide strict frameworks of recognition for sole parents. Restrictive financial support and 'mutual obligations'¹⁰

¹⁰ Mutual Obligation is based on a concept that welfare assistance provided to the unemployed of working age should involve some return responsibilities for the recipient. To date, in Australia this has meant unemployed job seekers on newstart and youth allowance should: actively seek work; constantly strive to improve their competitiveness in the labour market; and, give something back to the community that supports them. See http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/dole.

were critical in developing the conditions, in relation to Centrelink, within which these sole parents sought to be recognised and to be recognisable.

We are never free of the constitutive effects of discourse since they provide the very terms of our subjecthood, our recognizability. When we are granted recognition, especially when we are going outside the bounds of that which is already known, we are particularly vulnerable to the one who recognizes. We exist in so far as we are recognized and we exist inside the terms through which the act of recognition is accomplished. We are vulnerable both to the power of the one who recognizes and to the term of their recognition (Davies, 2006b, p. 508)

Eight of the sole parents who participated in this study sought and required to be recognised by Centrelink but understood that postgraduate education was largely outside the bounds of that which this government agency understands or accepts. Participants reported that Centrelink staff did not have any experience of postgraduate education, and whilst technically it was accepted as meeting mutual obligation requirements, it was never explicitly supported. Sole parent postgraduates expressed a sense of vulnerability as Davies (2006b) discusses in relation to the power of the one who recognises, because they sought recognition from Centrelink in terms not of their own making. But without this Centrelink's recognition which facilitated financial support, these sole parents were not able to be recognised as postgraduate students. Without Centrelink's recognition of them as both sole parents and students (postgraduate), a dual recognition upon which was predicated financial support, these participants could not have afforded to continue to engage in postgraduate education.

This financial support represents the exchange within which governments via Centrelink enact their authority to address sole parent postgraduates, the 'encounter is the right of the authority figure to categorise, and the validity of the categorisation that is provided' (Brady & Schirato, 2011, p. 23). The Welfare to work policy framework provides limited scope within which sole parent

postgraduates are able to advocate for their inclusion and validity in the categorisation of student, sole parent and welfare recipient. This policy is one of the ways sole parents are differentiated from other postgraduate students because only sole parents are targeted within this policy framework.

Centrelink's implementation of policies and systems, misinformation and reporting requirements and their rigid policing of recipients are all part of a so-called 'mutual obligation' regime. Together, these regimes of accountability and surveillance had a significant influence on the experiences of each of these participants as they endeavoured to maintain postgraduate enrolment. The interrelatedness of social and education policy for sole parent postgraduates is indicative of Shaw's (2004) research in the USA context which argues that '[w]elfare reform is also clearly a piece of postsecondary educational policy, although not officially so...As a result, it has been virtually ignored among academic educational researchers, particularly at the level of postsecondary analysis' (Shaw, 2004, p. 671). This research strongly demonstrates the veracity of this claim in the Australian context where academic research focuses on important issues pertaining to social welfare policy in terms of poverty and social inclusion. However, very little academic research is concerned with the cross-over between social welfare policy operating as educational policy in terms of the ways in which it shapes sole parent access to participation in higher education.

The Welfare to Work policy is directed at sole parents, its premise being a 'work first' ideology that seeks to reduce the federal government's social security outlay, under the premise that welfare is associated with deficit and dependency. The policy also lacks a capacity to differentiate between recipient experiences, reading them as either in work or un-employed. The Welfare to Work policy and its operational delivery from Centrelink are experienced as authoritative performatives by eight of the sole parents I interviewed for this research. 'Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech...statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed' (Butler, 1993a, p. 171). The Welfare to Work policy is authoritative

and regulatory because it establishes rules of parental care-work and employment and is therefore influential in how a sole parent family can be constituted.

The mandatory reporting and mutual obligation rules embedded in this policy maintain constraints in education opportunity through a bias toward paid work as opposed to education. The policy is also highly gendered because 84% of sole parents in Australia are women. In Australia, caring for children is a feminine response and responsibility that is fundamental to the matrix of normative gender. The Welfare to Work policy is one mechanism by which gender regimes are repeated and constructed. It does this through its directives towards parental care which are embedded in normative gendered regimes. The Welfare to Work policy directs recipients towards paid work, therein reinscribing parental care-work as not 'work' and also fails to implement consideration and/or obligations for co-parenting involvement or support. These factors tend to (re)produce female responsibilities towards children as naturalised and normative.

The Welfare to Work policy is also central to the way the majority of sole parent postgraduates in this study come into intelligibility because they must engage with Centrelink and the Welfare to Work policy in order to access financial support which enables their postgraduate education. Nancy Naples reminds us that the 'use of welfare programs for social control is one of the oldest objectives of social policy' (2003, p. 17). The Welfare to Work policy represents a 'work-first' ideology that places a clear emphasis on 'quick movement into employment as a politically expedient cost-saver' (Shaw, 2004, p. 67). Therefore this policy can be interpreted as unsupportive and/or opposed to educational engagement. My attentiveness to social welfare policy as educational policy highlights that 'exclusions are not simply individual acts of discrimination but are deeply connected to institutionalized policy discourses that work to reconstruct and reproduce privileged subjectivities in higher education' (Burke & McManus, 2011, p.710).

The minimisation of educational options for sole parents is evident within the Welfare to Work policy through its directives towards recipient engagement with Job Network providers. Job Network providers is a 'network of private for-profit and non-for-profit agencies contracted by the Australian government to provide employment services' (Brady, 2011, p. 270). This is a structural move away from educational options because these Job Network service providers are outcomes based and are paid by the government for employment placements. 'The largest outcome payment is paid for the placement of clients in sustained employment (26 weeks of continuous employment) while much smaller payments are paid for the placement of clients in education and training' (Brady, 2011, p. 270). Therefore, a preference for paid employment is built into the structure of the Welfare to Work policy. This effectively minimises education as an option for sole parents. This governmental shift away from education attainment is somewhat at odds with broader social discourses about universal benefits of education and the associated rhetoric of equitable access to education as illustrated in the 2008 Bradley Review of Australian higher education which advocated for increased support for diverse students.

The social constructions of sole parents

The Welfare to Work policy describes, produces and recognises sole parents in particular ways thereby constructing 'available schemes of intelligibility' (Butler, 1993a, p. 170). This section explores the ways in which the Welfare to Work policy creates particular schemes of intelligibility for sole parents; schemes that prioritise paid employment and seek to reduce recipient payments. These schemes are not created in isolation from social discourses associated with sole parents and constructions of families more broadly. The Welfare to Work policy is reflective of sedimented and largely un-contested constructions of sole parents (single mothers). Naples (2003) describes one such construction as the 'lazy welfare queen' (2003, p. 17). An embedded understanding of the deficit sole parent family fuels policy led, politically motivated, rectifying strategies which serve to

avoid encouraging lone motherhood as a lifestyle ‘choice’, combined with a more general male-orientated valorisation of participation in the labour market, [that] sustains an essentially blaming view of welfare recipients as lazy, irresponsible and indifferent to the needs of their children (Gillies, 2007, p.46).

Bronwyn Davies (2006a) reminds us that language is not static but traps us by ‘dragging all its histories of meaning making behind it, histories of meaning making that we have made our own in the ongoing accomplishment of ourselves as academic subjects’ (p. 500). Deficit understandings of sole parents are (re)produced through language and these assumptions and labels create histories and make meanings that are reflected in government policies.

A proliferation of discourses of the deficit ‘single mother’ drag with them meaning making that I suggest reinscribes the centrality of the heteronormative nuclear family. For instance, David Popenoe’s (1996) - *Life without Father: Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society* reinforces the problems caused by non-normative family arrangements, specifically focusing on sole parents (mothers). Popenoe provides ‘evidence’ that, ‘father absence is a major force lying behind ... crime and delinquency; premature sexuality and out-of-wedlock teen births; deteriorating educational achievement; depression, substance abuse, and alienation among teenagers; and the growing number of women and children in poverty’ (p.3). As a professor of Sociology at Rutgers University, Popenoe (1996, 2009) founded The National Marriage Project and is known as the ‘marriage guy’ US media. I draw on Popenoe because his academic work and broader media profile indicate historically created meanings in relation to the utility and practices of the family.

Ann Crittenden’s (2001) book, *The Price of Motherhood* positions motherhood as the most important and least valued job in the world and regards nuclear families as ideal because they are, ‘proving every day that two parents are better than one’ (119). Similarly, Anthony Giddens (1998) rehearses debates of the disintegrating family in his book *The Third Way*. Giddens (1998) refers to

the ‘breakdown’ of the family due to increased divorce rates and calls for a ‘restructuring of parenthood’ (p. 95). He then goes further to argue that sole parent families are at a disadvantage economically but also from ‘inadequate parental attention and lack of social ties’ (Giddens, p. 93). Associate Professor Paula Gerber (2010) argues that it is in the best interests of children for same-sex marriage to be legally recognised¹¹. She argues that a ‘negative impact’ occurs when children from heterosexual families are privileged through access to the stable and nurturing environment of marriage. Gerber (2010) states that children who do not ‘enjoy the recognition and support that comes with marriage may suffer psychological harm as a result of the prohibition on their parents marrying’ (p.33). This is a brief glimpse of academic discourses that constitute sole parenting. I am keen not to reproduce and participate in negative discourses relating to sole parent families. I understand them as not only problematically descriptive but also productively reinscribing troubling parameters of the ‘ideal’ family. I cite these few examples in order to illustrate how negative social discourses about sole parents continues to proliferate, and is reflected in social policies; this repetitive loop becomes normative, a ‘citational legacy’ (Butler, 1993a, p. 171). This legacy appears in the Welfare to Work policy. This social welfare policy influences how families can be constituted because it anchors the ‘the conventional family to financial security in the absence of a welfare state’ (Halberstam, 2011, p. 71). The Australian social security system follows an international shift that reduces and tightens eligibility requirements for sole parents. This is reflected in Australia in the removal of Parenting Payment (Single) for all sole parents with children over the age of eight, in 2013.

In the following section I offer brief consideration of the social articulations of sole parents through media representations. Much of my position in this research is foregrounded by a collective understanding of sole parents as in deficit and ‘othered’. I suggest that this understanding is a result of a long process of accumulated discourses and operate to bolster the ‘ideal’ heteronormative

¹¹ See also: <http://www.australianmarriageequality.org/2012/08/30/gerber-marriage-is-best-for-raising-children-%e2%80%a6-that%e2%80%99s-why-we-need-marriage-equality/>

nuclear family through a process of differentiation from sole parent families, coupled with discourses that constitute sole parents in 'plight' and 'deficit' discourses.

It is not my aim to provide a thorough representation of sole parents in the Australian media. Rather, I take a small sample to demonstrate the presence and power of discourses associated with sole parenting which I argue are performative in that they describe and produce broader understandings. These discourses are important because they 'make sense of social relationships whilst reflecting and influencing how lone mothers are positioned in society' (Klett-Davies, 2007, p.11). The small sample that follows sets the scene of broader social discourses in relation to sole parents, drawing on 'plight' discourses and valorising positions. These are contemporary examples of the 'social problem' discourse whereby 'mothers are positioned as victims of external circumstances who are in need of more support' (Klett-Davies, 2007, p.13). This is important in the context of this research because the performative nature of discourse influences policy design and implementation, and how sole parents are constituted more broadly. This problematic understanding of sole parents was evident in this work in relation to how sole parents discussed their families within academic contexts.

Mum Michelle unable to find a home - so she and her kids live in a car¹²

¹² Retrieved from <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/mum-michelle-unable-to-find-a-home-so-she-and-her-kids-live-in-a-car/story-e6frf7jo-1225877653970>, 1 April 2011).



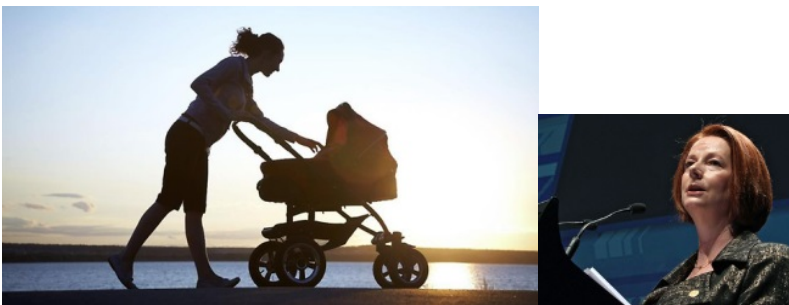
Public sympathy grows for single parents' plight¹³



Single mothers are the heroines, not the villains¹⁴



PM determined to put single mothers on dole¹⁵



¹³ Sourced from: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-18/horin-single-parent-payments/4579190>

¹⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/single-mothers-are-the-heroines-not-the-villains-20140111-30nqz.html#ixzz3Gq5ifV1M>

¹⁵ Sourced from: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/pm-determined-to-put-single-mothers-on-dole/story-e6frf7jo-1226478906573>

Single mums locked out of rental market¹⁶

ELEANOR HALL: They may have vulnerable children but a study has found that it is almost impossible for young single mothers to get a foothold in the private home rental market.

Ten years ago Neryl Joyce traded in her life as a struggling single mother to become a bodyguard in Baghdad. *Mercenary Mum: My Journey From Young Mother to Baghdad Bodyguard* is published by Black Inc.¹⁷

OPINION: The toxic judgment of single parents, shared by Senator Cory Bernardi, must stop¹⁸



The troubled rise of the single parent¹⁹

Ten top financial tips for single mums²⁰

¹⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2011/s3309847.htm>

¹⁷ Sourced from: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/podcasts/conversationspodcast.xml>

¹⁸ Sourced from: <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/opinion-the-toxic-judgment-of-single-parents-shared-by-senator-cory-bernardi-must-stop/story-fnihsr9v-1226800086937?nk=94aa6c278765faac61d786b4c106d65f>

¹⁹

http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/comments/the_troubled_rise_of_the_single_parent/

²⁰ Sourced from: <http://www.perthnow.com.au/business/ten-tips-for-single-mums/story-fn8t4my5-1226347229094?nk=94aa6c278765faac61d786b4c106d65f>

World leaders pay tribute to their single-parent beginnings and 'hero mums'²¹

These brief excerpts from Australian media are indicative of the discourses relating to sole parents. The pictures attached to these reports were of women and children, re-inscribing feminine attachments to children and mothering. The words parent and mother are interchanged throughout, illustrating a slippage between so-called gender neutral constructs of families and work and conventional and naturalised performances of female mothering. The articles use words such as 'struggling', sole parenting as being really really hard, heroic, unstable, poor, vulnerable and experiencing poverty. These descriptions are performative, they describe and produce understandings and identities and this selection is illustrative of discourses commonly attached to the experiences of sole parents. Some of these discourses serve to promote and 'sell' the governments Welfare to Work policy as a necessary intervention. Commonly media depictions draw on a 'plight' and deficit model and others utilise a valorising 'hero' discourse. This section is not a discourse or media analysis, other than to briefly illustrate the social context of welfare reform in Australia that was critical for many of the sole parents I spoke with during this research.

Internationally imported social welfare policy

Australia's Welfare to Work policy was strongly influenced by policy implemented in the US in 1996. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (1996) was designed to 'increase labor force participation and reduce welfare dependency among low-income adults with children' (Zhan & Panday, 2004, p. 661). In the US context, in addition to cost-costing aims 'the result of welfare reform has been to reduce overall access to postsecondary education for welfare recipients' (Christopher, 2005, p. 166; Also see Mazzeo, Rab & Eachus 2003).

²¹Sourced from: <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/world-leaders-pay-tribute-to-their-singleparent-beginnings-and-hero-mums8217/story-fnihsrf2-1226678883658>

Under the PRWORA's 'work-first' agenda 'postsecondary education was to be limited to one year of vocational education, and no more than 30% of the entire state caseload could be participating in educational activities at any time' (Butler, Deprez & Smith, 2004, p. 3). The PRWORA determines that

low income mothers take any job and exit cash assistance quickly, regardless of their human capital, their educational aspirations or abilities, or other circumstances. PRWORA has pulled hundreds of thousands of low income mothers out of education and pushed them into low-wage work and off the welfare rolls (Kahn, Butler, Deprez & Polakow, 2004, p.7).

Similarly, in the UK context, the 'New Deal' programme introduced in 1998 represents welfare reform whereby increased tax credits and minimum wage standards for sole parents were underpinned by 'the imperative that they strive to be both 'good' mothers *and* 'good workers. Good workers are also clearly good citizens as they are both economically productive and able to be active consumers of goods...[meanwhile] coercion now appears to be supplementing support' (Vincent, Ball & Braun, 2010, p. 124 emphasis in original).

These policies have strongly informed social welfare policy in relation to sole parents in the Australian context. Policy emphasis on 'work first' directives, a move which subsequently minimises educational choices for sole parents, whilst delivering significant government social security expenditure savings.

Explaining a PhD to Centrelink?

As sole parent postgraduates, eight of the participants I interviewed for this study are reliant on income support from Centrelink to maintain their households and childcare responsibilities whilst they completed their studies. Therefore, Centrelink was a critical site of recognition for these sole

parents. The participants reported difficulties in obtaining correct information about how their postgraduate study work would be understood by the Centrelink staff and viewed within the Welfare to Work policy. (Refer to appendices 6-9, p 273-277 for examples of Centrelink communication). Policy is not, ‘something made by government and handed down through government agencies ready-made...[policies are] re-interpreted and transmitted’ (Armstrong, 2003, p. 5). Implementation of the Welfare to Work policy creates conditions within which ‘those involved in service delivery do not just implement policy, they also make it’ (Brady, 2011, p. 273).

Megan Blaxland (2013) underscores the importance of this negotiating space; the ‘policy implementation interface, in which the claimant meets and negotiates with an adviser, is highly important because it is commonly at that meeting that workfare obligations are explained and agreed upon’ (p. 794). These negotiations are designed to meet bureaucratic requirements using an interview structure largely undertaken within a ‘welfare dependency’ context. From within this context a particular interpellation brings sole parents into being, in relation to Centrelink policies and the staff member delivering these policies.

Furthermore, the Centrelink interview context is based on searching for and engagement with paid work. Paid employment is only minimally extended to include ‘vocationally oriented voluntary work, training and education’ (Blaxland, 2013, p. 785). Only one participant said that their dealings with Centrelink were mostly good. Seven other participants became animated and often angry when relaying stories, thoughts and feelings about communicating with Centrelink. These strong reactions were largely connected to the vulnerability sole parents experienced due to unknown outcomes of the interviews, particularly in light of the significant changes to policy which occurred during the course of data collection. Complex, lengthy and changeable implementation of policy was also problematic for student parent participants in research by Moreau & Kerner (2013) who found that

student parents struggled to gain a clear view of their entitlements in a quickly changing policy landscape, which also appears difficult to navigate as their multiple identities position them at the nexus of several areas of policy intervention (p. 10)

Participants also shared their sense of vulnerability in relation to Centrelink interviews and outcomes because these largely determined their ongoing financial situation in already marginal family budgets.

I asked each participant to describe their experiences with Centrelink and the following interview excerpts are some of their responses to this question;

Genine: Tell me a bit about your interactions with Centrelink.

Sinead: Ummm, I find them revolting, but I...

Genine: On the phone revolting, or in person.

Sinead: Both (laughs).

Another participant exchange,

Genine: Tell me a bit about your interactions with Centrelink.

Jean: Ohhhhhh!!! They're horrible. (laughs), Um, Centrelink interaction, there is no interaction. I have to report my income every fortnight because I have a part-time job, now, since my little one turned six I have to fulfil activity requirements. I said what? – just because she turned six you are forcing me to – I was already doing something – you have to do 30 hours per fortnight. I said about my postgrad, I'm only part-time, and its only 3 hours contact time a week but I'm required to do 24 hours of private study a week, there, that's 50 hours per fortnight, are you happy with that? So they are happy with that. But

if they ask me to prove it, I can't prove it, I haven't got a logbook to say I've studied.

Eva commented further on this topic;

Genine: Tell me a bit about your experiences with Centrelink?

Eva: Oh, AGHHH. I don't like Centrelink, I don't like them. (laughs) (groans!!)

Genine: Sorry to have to bring it up. (laughs)

Eva: I, (sighs!!!), Oh, (sighs!!), Centrelink don't want me on welfare, but they want...this is my impression, they want to pay me welfare to spruik that they care about people but they clearly don't want me on welfare. And they make it, I think they set up all these hoops and different ways of doing things which aren't logical in order to turn people off it. So you don't...

Genine: That you don't bother with the system because it's so damn difficult?

Eva: Yeah, yeah and I suspect that's the way it is. I even gotten to the point on the phone, I've said, you know, the system makes me so angry. Because when I'm here, (uni), I'm a smart, educated woman and when I'm on the phone to Centrelink I feel like a un-educated welfare-cheat.

These findings concur with international experiences of sole parent higher education students. A study of lone parents at Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh stated that participants 'found the benefits system complicated and difficult to understand due to a lack of information and reliable advice and experienced delays and administration problems. Prior to entering higher education they were unsure of how the system interacted with the student support system and this

made forward planning impossible' (Horne & Hardie, 2002, p.70). This ambiguity and uncertainty is reflected in the experiences of the sole parent postgraduates I spoke with for this research.

Later Eva continued, referring to paid work and Centrelink reporting requirements said,

Eva: I will jump through the hoops at Centrelink and I feel cheap and feel...it makes me feel really yucky, I can't think of words that describe it.

Mia also articulated her difficulties with Centrelink which at one point in her PhD study prompted her to consider terminating her PhD studies and finding paid employment,

Mia: Because the next time I really felt/thought, no, it's all too hard, the stuff with Centrelink, I thought this is going to be too hard I should just get a job and I seriously looked at getting a job.

These responses illustrate the ongoing and relational nature of recognition. By drawing attention to the intersection of Centrelink policy, education policy and family policy as experienced by sole parent postgraduates in this study, I am extending the utility of Butler's theoretical framework of recognisability. My attentiveness to the possibilities of sole parents to be recognised as postgraduate students through a dependence on the Welfare to Work policy opens up considerations for how diverse students experience higher education. In this way, my focus on the ongoing and co-created recognition process opens up broad considerations of the conditions that sole parent experience as postgraduates. These conditions include policies and social practices outside and within the academy, and by theorising recognisability I am able to illustrate the negotiations and vulnerabilities associated with sole parent engagement with postgraduate education.

Butler's theory of recognition is critical to my analysis of existing tensions at the intersection of social policy and educational practices because it is useful to understanding the process and the terms within which recognition as a sole parent postgraduate becomes possible. The participants

who negotiated with Centrelink for recognisability, mediated these terms based on their education and their parenting. These dual roles were understood as positive social contributions and as such worthy of government and social support in the form of social security payments from Centrelink.

Participants are seeking recognition as ‘deserving’ parents and student recipients of social security support and are negotiating ways in which that recognition is able to be given. It is also demonstrative of the ways in which recognition operates through distinctions. A division between what I am and what I am not; a recognition based on differentiation. This is particularly evident in Eva’s comments relating to her feeling of being like ‘an un-educated welfare cheat’. Here, Eva seeks to qualify her recognition as ‘deserving’ of social welfare support by being recognised for what she is not; a welfare cheat. This clear distinction is an operation of recognisability as Eva seems to be recognising other welfare recipients as ‘welfare-cheats’ and in turn recognises herself as a somewhat different welfare recipient. Perhaps Eva is deflecting her sense of vulnerability as she is recognised by Centrelink staff as someone who is seeking social security support by calling on a distinction between the terms in which she receives such support and other various other recipients, such as the unemployed. Certainly, Eva is negotiating Centrelink recognition in a particular way that differentiates between deserving and more un-deserving social welfare recipients. This differentiation may also be indicative of Eva’s classed understanding of herself as middle-class which she attempts to align with her position as ‘welfare’ recipient. The multiple tensions in recognisability for the sole parents in this study within the Centrelink system are central to negotiations of power and the terms that they are able to engage with postgraduate education. Tension resulting in the recognition process between sole parents and Centrelink are also present within the exchanges between participants and Centrelink staff.

Nina’s response to discussion about her experiences with Centrelink policies and the staff who enact the policy, demonstrate how critical and stressful it can be,

Nina: Centrelink could cancel my payments. I turned around to one Centrelink person and said ‘Do you have the right both ethically and morally to make me homeless, by stopping my payments just because I don’t agree with your stupid plan?’ – [They said] ‘We don’t work on ethics and morals – we work on law’. And I said “[laws] which are written by lawyers who have no ethics or morals”. (laughs). Like seriously, so they want to stop my payments.

Nina’s experience of her exchange with the government agency Centrelink is illustrative of the dilemma of recognition. The power of recognition is given to another. In this case Nina’s seeks recognition from the nameless ‘Centrelink person’. The Welfare to Work policy and its delivery are regulatory wherein the ‘formation of the subject thus depends on powers external to itself. The subject might resist and agonise over those very powers that dominate and subject it, and at the same time, it also depends on them for its existence’ (Davies, 2006a, p. 426). Here again, tensions of recognisability exist between dependence on being recognised and the very terms of recognition.

Nina is refusing the recognition she receives from Centrelink by suggesting that a cancelling of her payments might pose an ethical dilemma. In a defensive and protectionist response, Nina questions the moral ‘right’ that a staff member has to refuse social security payments. Nina clearly personalises this exchange. Nina’s slippage tends to blame the deliverer of the policy introduced and designed by the Australian Federal Government; it is not the Centrelink staff member’s policy. Nina tells the Centrelink staff member that she does not agree with ‘your stupid plan’ thus seeking to personalise and individualise recognition in this exchange. I focus on this exchange in some detail because it illustrates the multiple and shifting nature of recognition. This is illustrated by incorporating Nina’s exchange with the Centrelink staff and brings forth or activates her previous exchanges between Centrelink and welfare recipients thereby drawing on pre-existing reputations and anecdotes of broader exchanges and understandings of Centrelink and its clients.

This is an example of the historically based understanding brought forward and infused through policy and this exchange in a process of recognition which is ever-present and far from benign. Nina's exchange with a Centrelink staffer in relation to stopping her payments is also suggestive of Nina constructing herself as morally and educationally superior to the Centrelink staff member she is dealing with. While the participants were clearly subject to Centrelink regulations, some were also complicit in processes of misrecognition that belittled Centrelink staff. Perhaps this positioning by Nina is her attempt to re-align the power of the Centrelink staff member who interprets the terms of Nina's recognition as a sole parent postgraduate. I suggest that Nina's combative exchange is in response to the vulnerability she feels and that is inherent in a negotiation of recognisability. As a sole parent postgraduate Nina is aware that mis-recognition by Centrelink that refuses payment would jeopardise her engagement with her postgraduate studies.

Negotiating the multitude of power relations and structures of recognisability in relation to Centrelink was critical to eight of these sole parent postgraduates. Many of the participants spoke of the workload in relation to Centrelink regulations, rules and in meeting disclosure requirements. Often these requirements were different depending on which staff member of Centrelink was conveying the information and one wonders about the equity and coherence of services provided by Centrelink when services are somewhat determined by the interpretations of particular staff members. Shaw's (2004) policy analysis of US welfare reform as a gendered educational policy supports this concern whereby, 'the implementation of formal policy is not often a seamless process; those that implement the policies, otherwise known as street-level bureaucrats, possess and use a significant amount of autonomy in choosing which regulations will be enforced to which client' (p. 70). Much of the information these sole parents received from Centrelink was incorrect and was subsequently over-ruled or changed.

Often Centrelink staff did not know how to advise sole parents in postgraduate education with specific reference to policy implications. Sole parents in this research reported that different

Centrelink staff provided different interpretations of the policy. Several Centrelink policies and rules applied to undergraduate students but explicitly excluded PhD students, such as JET (Jobs, Education, and Training) childcare payments and the Pensioner Education Supplement. Several participants had previously received JET payments which significantly reduced formal childcare costs; this support is no longer available to postgraduate level students. These changes and uncertainties became an additional concern for these sole parents. When the Centrelink rules that they were subjected to changed arbitrarily, these sole parents experienced increased levels of stress and anxiety. These anxieties were often the cause for questioning their capacities to continue their postgraduate qualification and this was seemingly ever present.

For Nina, arbitrary changes to the Parenting Payment (Single) were a huge dilemma and she faced the real prospect of not being able to support her family, which included herself and three children and remain in the PhD program,

Nina: So, they want to move all the parents off parenting payment and onto NewStart in order to “save money”.

Genine: You’re going to come into that new system?

Nina: In August. I’m going to be seriously seriously screwed. Beyond seriously screwed, even now.

Genine: If you don’t get this scholarship?

Nina: Yep, yep.

Genine: You’ve got 6 months.

Nina: Yep

Genine: And how far through your PhD are you?

Nina: Six months. So I've still got two and a half years.

Thankfully, ten days after this interview, this participant was notified that she was successful in her PhD scholarship application. For Nina, changes to the Welfare to Work policy which cancels her access to the parenting payment (single) creates a critical storm of time, money and uncertainty. This is an example of how policy is experienced as regulatory and can marginalise and control the choices of some sole parents to continue or enrol in postgraduate education. The lack of financial security leaves many sole parents with no buffer with which to respond to and protect against changes to government policy and its recognition of their established entitlements as sole parents in postgraduate education.

The following section details further anxieties sole parents experienced as a result of their dealings with Centrelink. Eva shares her experiences of confusion and a lack of dignity;

Eva: So then they photo-copied all my bank statements and I felt like saying, here, is a naked picture of me, now you know everything about me. There was absolutely nothing - I felt so stripped bare of any dignity or pride, you know, I had more dignity when I was giving birth than I did when I have dealt with Centrelink, they just strip you bare.

Ani spoke about her experiences with Centrelink which reiterated the sentiments of many of the other participants in this study. Several participants described themselves as smart and capable but that their dealings with Centrelink challenged that sense of themselves;

Genine: Tell me about your experiences with Centrelink and the PPS (Parenting payment single).

Ani: Every time I go to Centrelink I wind up in tears. Every single time.

Genine: On the phone or going there in person

Ani: In person, every single time. (sighs), overall, it's been really positive, lots of money, and it's confusing, I find it confusing, and a struggle.

Ani spoke of her frustration in her dealings with Centrelink, which she understood as 'reverse prejudice', conveyed in her view that Centrelink staff believed that if you were capable of working but choose not to work that you were 'mis-using' and taking advantage of the social security system. This is how she explained her idea of reverse prejudice,

Genine: Do you find there is a kind of base understanding of sole parents that you have to navigate through?

Ani: No, I find it really weird. It's a reverse prejudice I find. I speak well, I don't smoke, I don't have tattoos, I don't have a million earrings and I'm clearly not low socio-economic class and there is a lot of 'what the fuck are you doing here?'.

Genine: Oh!! Yep, right.

Ani: It's reversed. If I came in saying 'I need my ciggy's' (uses accent). They'd be like...

Genine: Oh, that we know who you are?

Ani: Yes, we know who you are and we know how to deal with you. But I come in and I say I'm doing a PhD and I'm not really sure if this applies to me or not, could you possibly please help me? And they are like 'What the?!' And they have never dealt with my clauses and they have to run away and have confabulations with 3 or 4 of them going what does this clause actually mean and what do we interpret it with and they've never had to do it before.

The Welfare to Work policy directs recognition of sole parents towards them as potential paid employees. This intended recognition came into conflict with sole parents who were seeking recognition by Centrelink as university postgraduate students. This tension between paid work and education resulted in sole parents in this position feeling vulnerable to the power of Centrelink to recognise their choice to study and the terms of which the recognition of their studies was possible. This exchange also indicates how recognition of education is constituted as useful, indulgent and/or a potential social/individual good within the Welfare to Work policy and within Centrelink. Education qualifications that are fast-tracked towards employment are preferred within the ‘work-first’ regime of the Welfare to Work policy and postgraduate education that takes years with uncertain futures is problematically positioned within the policy framework.

Ani shares her experiences with Centrelink and expresses her position that distinguishes between her and social recipients with ‘tattoos and ciggy’s’. She equates social security with ‘low socio-economic class’ and relays her sense of entitlement to social security support as an educated subject ‘I’m doing a PhD’. This is suggestive of Ani pulling away from the inherently classed exchange between welfare recipient and how she recognises herself and seeks to be recognised by others.

Mia’s capacity to finish her PhD was severely affected by the change in policy that transferred her from Parenting Payment (Single) to NewStart allowance and increased pressure on her to get a paid job. In the following quote she begins to articulate the conflict between university study and Centrelink’s ‘work-first’ demands;

Mia: I’ve got Centrelink on my case. Because now I’ve had to go onto NewStart, instead of the parenting payment and they don’t even count any study as anything so now I have to apply for jobs if I’m not working. But if I am working my supervisor gets upset and says I’ve been doing too much work. If

I don't work Centrelink are upset and say I have to apply for jobs. So I'm kind of stuck in the vicious cycle of how I'm going to get all this done and actually get some sleep because it's huge.

Mia shares one of the difficulties she experienced as she attempted to meet the requirements of two institutions: the academy and Centrelink. The university required academic work to be completed at a particular standard. The university also regulated the amount of outside (paid) work a PhD candidate could do at 15 hours per week. Centrelink's regulations, for this participant, did not regard postgraduate study as meeting mutual obligation requirements and directed her to look for paid employment, which in and of itself is a time-wasting distraction from her full-time PhD and child raising responsibilities. Employment for Mia would have added to the workload of full-time PhD and caring for five children singlehandedly; a combination which would have jeopardised her PhD completion. The university has little understanding of the Centrelink demands on sole parent postgraduate students and Centrelink has very little understanding on the demands of postgraduate study. The sole parents in this study were negotiating between two separate regulatory discourses, discourses that were often in conflict. Each institution remained ignorant of the competing institutions recognisability, university policy, practices and staff tended not to be aware of the sole parent postgraduate obligations within the Welfare to Work regime and Centrelink policies and staff seemed to understand little of the demands of postgraduate education.

Ambiguous recognition at Centrelink

Mia's experience of conflict between Centrelink's demands on sole parents and the university demands for postgraduate students illustrate an ambiguity in recognition that was typical for many of the participants in this research. Sole parent postgraduates commonly discussed their dealings with Centrelink as problematic because Centrelink staff could not provide clear and accurate information

regarding services and payments relevant to sole parent postgraduates because they had 'never had to do it before'. Mia's experience was an example of an ambiguous recognition process that made an already fluid and ongoing process of intelligibility even more troublesome. It was also possible that this ambiguity worked in the favour of the sole parent postgraduates I spoke with, however, the uncertainty and changeability of how policy would be enacted was a source of stress and vulnerability.

Michelle was the only participant who described her dealings with Centrelink as good. However, she also tempered her positive comments by noting that the mis-information she received from Centrelink was problematic. This lack of coherent information from Centrelink was specifically related to postgraduate studies. From these experiences, it is possible to surmise that Centrelink staff have few experiences of implementing social security rules in specific regard to sole parent postgraduates. This lack of efficacy in applying the Welfare to Work policy in response to sole parents in postgraduate education is significant because it identifies a potential site of improvement and support for increasing sole parent participation in and equitable access to higher education. It also draws attention to the ways in which social welfare policy and recognition move beyond explicit terms of policy direction and can work to exclude and minimise participation in higher education.

Centrelink's apparent lack of experience and coherency in advising sole parent postgraduate participants became particularly evident in regard to academic scholarships. Conflicting advice and variable outcomes in processing scholarship 'income' through the Centrelink system was common for these sole parents. Centrelink mostly regarded scholarship money as income, they often did not know how to code this type of income in their systems, they could not definitively advise sole parents how their scholarship payments would affect their Centrelink payments. Participants spoke of these experiences;

Eva: No, even Centrelink doesn't know how the scholarship works with Centrelink. They over-paid me, so I had another \$260.00, they rang me up and said when we adjusted to the APA scholarship it was put in as they wrong code. They keep ringing me up; 'you have got some sort of scholarship'?. They kept wanting more information about it. I wondered whether anyone on welfare had ever got (or declared) a scholarship arrangement before!

Genine: They have no clue about scholarships have they?

Eva: How many times have I given them the paperwork, I've faxed it, I took it in, I think I even re-posted it to them at one stage. I can't be the only person who has ever had a scholarship.

Mia talks about Centrelink's coding of her scholarship as being helpful because it was favourably processed and this increased her social security payments. This indicates the variable nature of Centrelink's client records processing which leaves scope for interpretation by Centrelink staff. This room for policy interpretation raises further issues of equity and reliability.

Mia also mentions the conflicting rules of payment criteria and the type of degree you were studying;

Mia: They coded the honours and then the PhD as something, because I was on the scholarship they coded that as something because that's not in the system. If I'd done a masters or a coursework masters I could have got Austudy. So they coded these other things that meant that it covered all the parenting payment so I was fine.

Mia highlights the potentially tenuous nature of recognition of sole parent postgraduates by Centrelink. Because clear guidelines for processing academic scholarship payments are problematic,

this member of staff at Centrelink processed her scholarship payment ‘as something’ which resulted in her being ‘fine’. The ambiguous nature of this exchange draws attention to the possibility of another time, with different Centrelink staff member, the same scholarship processing may not be ‘fine’. Such ambiguity creates tension and uncertainty in recognisability which influences the orientation of sole parents in this study towards postgraduate education.

The removal of funded student child-care

For many of the sole parents in this study, orientations towards postgraduate education were reliant upon accessing suitable and affordable child-care. JET (Jobs, Education, Training) childcare funding was a source of ambiguity for many of the sole parents I spoke with. In December 2012, the Federal Labour government made significant changes to the JET childcare scheme and this funding no longer applies to PhD students or Masters by coursework students. JET (Jobs, Education and Training) program was introduced in 1989 for all sole parents, particularly teenage sole parents, those receiving the PPS payment for 12 months or longer and sole parents who would be no longer eligible for PPS within 4 years because their youngest child was turning 16 years of age (Whiteford 2001). The removal of the JET childcare program funding for postgraduate students which occurred during the process of data collection placed additional financial strain on many of the participants in this study.

Changes to JET childcare funding demonstrate that sole parent postgraduates are not recognisable by governments as legitimate recipients of taxpayer supported child-care. Ani discusses her interactions with Centrelink which illustrates her concerns and uncertainty in relation to JET childcare;

Ani: And then they fix it or they don't. And you go through all of this crap and then they say no JET doesn't pay for kinder or you go through all this crap and

at the end they say yes you can have another \$125 and you go that's the difference between life and death – thank you.

Similarly;

Eva: this year I've had JET child-care. So child-care has cost me \$1.00 a day. But Masters and PhD students don't qualify for JET child-care as per the new directive handed down in July, so that ends now for me. Right at the time, next year I'll probably need it the most. So I'm really annoyed about that. I just find that discriminatory.

For Sinead, the changes to JET childcare funding meant that she was no longer able to access the JET childcare payment;

Genine: Do you get JET funding for childcare?

Sinead: No. I was told I couldn't

Michelle received JET childcare support but it was revoked under the new changes;

Genine: Do you get JET childcare support?

Michelle: I was, I sneaked in just before they changed the law saying that PhD student can't get it. So I was assessed up until December 30th 2012. And then, now, when he goes back that won't be there... when they took JET away that was a bit scary.

Gillian talked about childcare funding and the implications for sole parents who rely on child care;

Genine: What about JET?

Gillian: Yes, I got JET, but that was only for 18months so that was really good. I got that while I was studying my bachelor [degree] so was more important. I don't qualify for that anymore.

Ambiguous recognition of postgraduate study for sole parents by Centrelink and government policy is again indicated by the specific targeting of sole parent postgraduates by the removal of JET childcare funding to this group of students.

This shift away from governmental support for sole parents in education is also evidenced in the media release issued by the Assistant Minister for Education on 14th July 2014 that confirmed the government's increased 'active compliance' relating to the JET programme. In efforts to reduce 'exploitation' through 'engaging with sharp practices' the government states in this press release, [t]his programme is not there...[for] parents using more care than they need to complete their study commitments, just because taxpayers are footing the bill. It's not on' Ley (Assistant Minister for Education, press release 14/07/2014, sourced from <http://ministers.education.gov.au/ley/statement-child-care-sharp-practices-jetccfa-programme>). I argue, this press release detailing the governments reasons for tightening access to JET child-care support, reflects the political landscape in Australia in relation to recent moves away from support for sole parents in education.

The move to restrict postgraduate student access to government support programs is also evident in the revoking of the Pensioner Education Supplement for postgraduate education. Schedule 13 of the Welfare to Work and Other Measures Act 2005 – Pensioner Education Supplement determines that Parenting Payment (Single), Youth Allowance and Newstart Allowance recipients are able to apply for a \$62.40 per fortnight payment to undertake full-time study²². This supplement was payable to sole parents who undertook secondary or tertiary study. The Gillard Labour government removed this supplement from sole parents who were also transferred to the

²² See - http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/pes_rates.htm on 3-3-2011).

NewStart allowance in January 2013. Providing financial support is a crucial way that governments direct particular people to constitute themselves in particular ways. Excluding sole parent students from JET childcare and the Pensioner Education Supplement is performative because it brings into being a certain type of educable subject.

This chapter has examined the process of recognition between Centrelink staff and the Welfare to Work policy that they implement. I now turn to a consideration of how the sole parents in this study were able to begin to question and potentially refuse problematic recognitions created by these exchanges. My following analysis aims to be ‘radically deconstructive because it focuses on questioning the motives underpinning the inscription of people into particular categories and attempts to free up our understanding of often taken-for-granted assumptions’ (Gowlett, 2012, p. 888). Difficulties arose within negotiations between Centrelink staff and sole parent postgraduates because of an embedded power imbalance, whereby Centrelink staff held the authority to speak, through both their job and through the policy that they were charged to employ. Nevertheless, these exchanges of recognition were mutually created and in many ways participants were able to disrupt and speak back to disagreeable recognisability.

Enabling constraints: Centrelink recognition and regulation

Eight participant sole parents shared their understandings of the problematic nature of their obligation to be recognised by Centrelink and the hierarchical nature of their interactions with Centrelink. These participants noted a conflict of recognition as they were often constructed by Centrelink staff and the policy the staff were delivering in ways that they did not reflect their own experiences and conceptions. Within these conditions effective and productive recognition as a sole parent postgraduate by Centrelink ‘depends on our ability to function as subjects who can instrumentalize state power without becoming subjugated by it’ (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 83). The participants were very aware of the political rhetoric that foregrounds the anti-welfare turn and

strongly argued against it. This was evident in their angered responses, their tenacity in navigating the changing policy landscape and an awareness and refusal of Centrelink judgements that participants often perceived as anti-sole parents in postgraduate education.

Participants were cognisant of the anti-welfare turn but they purposefully disavowed its stranglehold by maintaining their postgraduate enrolment despite pressure towards paid employment. Participant negotiations with Centrelink, their acceptance welfare payments despite the difficulties I have highlighted in this chapter, illustrates participant re-working of recognisability. This re-working of recognisability involves a series of performative acts; pragmatic and conscious. They played the rules of the Centrelink game; they acquiesced to the rules and procedures in order to access government financial support that enabled them to maintain their studies whilst also critiquing the regime itself. For these sole parents the threat of no financial support which would lead to no postgraduate study was ultimately worse than negotiating the constraining, frustrating and potentially demoralising interactions with Centrelink.

Butler draws attention to the interrelatedness of the power, and this is evident in the exchanges between Centrelink staff and the sole parent postgraduates in this study. 'A power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming' (Butler, 1997b, p. 11). In this section I ask - To what extent to these sole parents 'assume' the powers of subjection by Centrelink? This question directs my analysis towards the capacity for choice, options and refusals in the very act of assuming, or taking up subjectivities through which we are constituted. The participants in this study are mostly reliant on Centrelink's financial support and therefore they must seek and submit to being recognised by this government agency. These sole parents choose to be postgraduate students, however, this is not a free choice, it comes with costs and constraints. However, they have sought recognition as postgraduate students and one of the costs of this decision is dealing with Centrelink. But these participants have calculated that these problematic negotiations are preferable to not

having this liveable life as a postgraduate student. The participants reconciled this process drawing from an understanding that ‘no subject comes into being without power’ (Butler, 1997b, p. 15). In doing so, participants do not fully assume the subjection of power expressed in this instance through the Welfare to Work policy and the Centrelink staff who are required to implement the policy. Participants, while partially constituted by these powerful instruments of policy, practice and subjection also ambivalently re-worked this by placing an importance on their education, their parenting and their capacities to combine both.

Centrelink provisioning of NewStart allowance or Parenting Payment (Single) only partially constituted these sole parents because this subjection was temporary, purposeful and understood by participants as part of an opportunity for renewal that was crucial in bringing their sole parent postgraduate subjectivity into being.

To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other’ (Butler, 2004d, p. 44)

Subjection within this recognition process is *only* a site of subordination if the participant cannot reconcile to and accept the social welfare contingencies that are necessary within their postgraduate education conditions of account. Whilst these participants felt ambivalent about this negotiation with Centrelink, they begrudgingly reconciled the benefits available through Centrelink as necessary to instigate a transformation through a postgraduate qualification. The process of recognition between Centrelink and the participants in this study is effectively ‘producing a scene of agency from ambivalence’ (Butler, 1997a, p. 163).

In summary

This chapter has extended my exploration of recognition of sole parent postgraduates by focusing on their interactions with Centrelink. Centrelink was an ever-present factor in the lives of eight of the sole parents in this study. Their interactions with Centrelink, the rules and reporting that they are regulated by are particular to them because they are sole parents *and* postgraduate students. The majority of participants expressed difficulty in dealing with Centrelink; they articulated their frustrations at a lack of information, mis-information or changeable information about policies and rules that affected them and their studies. These participants all noted that Centrelink do not have clear and efficient processes to manage sole parents who are postgraduates and this resulted in time consuming and stressful negotiations between the sole parent and this government agency. This reported stress was due to participant's heavy reliance on Centrelink because this government agency determined and distributed income support.

However, these sole parents were not passive or apolitical in their understandings and responses to Centrelink regulatory frameworks. They mediated their interactions with Centrelink with a pragmatism with which they sought recognition and financial support from this agency with the clear purpose of pursuing postgraduate education. Butler (2008) acknowledges this negotiated position, 'norms are there, at an exterior distance, and the task is to find a way of appropriated them, taking them on, establishing a living relation to them' (p. 21). Norms attached to deficit understandings of sole parents as social security recipients do not open up the possibility of postgraduate education. Participants in this study constructed liveable lives in relation to norms attached to the Welfare to Work policy by partially appropriating them. They appropriated the policy directive of mutual obligation by fulfilling these obligations with study and not paid-work. Centrelink was understood as a site of tension and ambivalence but also a site of transformative potential because it facilitated continued engagement with postgraduate education.

In the following chapter I continue my examination of some of the ways in which sole parent postgraduates in this study respond to ambivalent conditions of account. Specifically I draw from

Butler's theory of agency to demonstrate some of the ways these sole parents (re)produce liveable lives as intelligible postgraduate students.

Chapter Seven – Paradoxical Agency: sole parenting and postgraduate study.

Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated and defended
privately by each person
(Csíkszentmihályi, 1992, p. 2).

This chapter will explore some of the negotiated re-workings of conditions sole parents in this study undertake to account for themselves as postgraduate students. Drawing from Butler, I explore the possibility of change and renewal within enabling and constraining conditions that become the site for responsive action and agency, ‘producing a scene of agency from ambivalence’ (Butler, 1997a, p. 163). I suggest that agency is similar to Csíkszentmihályi’s notion of happiness, therefore in this chapter I am interested in how sole parents prepare for, maintain and defend their capacity to engage with postgraduate education. ‘That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility’ (Butler, 2004e, p. 3). A question I pose in this chapter, following from Butler, is; how do sole parent postgraduates open up the possibilities of agency within paradoxical conditions?

Introduction

The paradoxical conditions explored in this chapter include how responsibilities of child care-work are re-worked as forms of motivation and through extended kinship care. Following Taylor (2012), I acknowledge that not ‘everyone can flexibly cast themselves through trajectories of future potential’ (p. 79). However within the parameters of agency and constraint negotiations are possible and productive. Indeed, the sole parents in this study shared a sense of contingent autonomy as they

discussed negotiations to combine sole parenting and postgraduate study, which I theorise as a 'doing' of agency. The decision making in relation to family finances, flexibility of time and management of childcare responsibilities are illustrations of agency within enabling constraints that are discussed in this chapter. Normative constructs of mothering are examined in this chapter by considering the performative acts of mothering outside the heteronormative bounds of the family as potentially disrupting and/or re-working female motherhood. The paradoxical conditions of sole parenting and postgraduate study 'sets the stage for the subject's self-crafting, one that takes place always in relation to an imposed set of norms' (Butler, 2008, p. 28). This chapter articulates some of the ways the sole parent participants in this study captured a sense of agency that is more than resistance, and which I argue is agential 'self-crafting' facilitating their orientation towards postgraduate study.

Theorising Agency

Judith Butler's notion of self-crafting agency is significantly different from individualised and valorised rhetoric's of an autonomous person striving and overcoming adversity to achieve a sense of accomplishment. 'For Butler, agency is radically different from the western liberal concept of agency that sees an agent intend to accomplish something and then do so' (Cosgrove, 2011, p. 4). Butler theorizes that agency is possible through the ambivalence embedded in the never-ended process of performative repetitions; it is this uneasy and unstable process that creates spaces for alternatives and/or subversion. Variations to norms (gendered and otherwise) become possible in the gaps that opened up in the repetition of norms. That norms need to be repeated and reinscribed allows them to be questioned and potentially revised. 'Agency exists when this radical uncertainty is exposed' (Cosgrove, 2011, p. 4). I argue in this research that sole parent postgraduates expose and illustrate 'radical uncertainty' by creating families outside the hetero/partner-normative construct whilst engaging with postgraduate education. It is the combination of sole parenting and

postgraduate education that I argue are the intersecting and conflicting conditions within which alternatives to normative students, families and gendered parenting constructs can potentially emerge.

Following Davies (2006b) I ask how/if negotiated and contested sites experienced by the sole parent postgraduates in this study open up the possibilities of alternatives. Davies states that norms are ‘open to subversion both in singular acts of understanding and in collective movements in which the momentum for change gathers its own force’ (p. 509). Butler’s theory of agency ‘acknowledges the paradoxically empowering, unpredictable, and transformative potential of human agency’ (Carle, 2005, p. 341) albeit within social terms that created the conditions of agency. Povinelli (2011) describes such paradoxical conditions as ‘at the threshold of being and not being’ and notes that assessing this threshold ‘arises not via some transcendental gesture, no matter how fragile, but from a continual reflexively practiced dwelling, within the worlds to be adjudicated’ (p. 33).

Sole parents are recognisable as postgraduates within conditions of limited financial support, a low and insecure position in the academic hierarchy and with heavily conflicted commitments to children and to study. I regard the negotiation of postgraduate education by sole parents as ‘the artistry of handling indeterminate zones of practice’ (Leonard 2001 p. 42). My analysis in this chapter considers how these participants negotiated the indeterminate zones of sole parenting and postgraduate education. I consider responsiveness to the conditions of sole parenting and postgraduate education and how it is related to agency. Following Barad (2012) ‘agency for me is not a matter of something somebody has but it’s a doing, it’s the very possibilities for reworking and opening up new possibilities’ (p. 17). This chapter seeks to explore how sole parents reflect, rework and revise their liveable conditions by ‘doing’ agency. There I refer to agential ‘doing’ to support my analysis of how sole parents in this study open up new possibilities as postgraduate students and infuse those conditions into a specific academic context.

Butler's theory of agency refuses individualisation by understanding that agency depends on power which constrains a subject in the processes of constitution. University based structural norms such as timetabling, scholarship criteria and childcare are examples of institutionally based power relations that both practically and discursively establish particular conditions of account for the sole parent postgraduates who participated in this study. These policies and practices constrain postgraduate experiences for sole parents but do not determine or produce them. Rather university policy and practices set the institutional scene within which sole parents are able to 'do' agency in order to be constituted as postgraduate students.

Agency depends on power; it is complicit with it, so that exceeding power is not synonymous with escaping from it: indeed, the subjects remains bound to power, so that both the subject and the scene of agency depend on what constrains them for their very constitution' (Salih & Butler , 2004, p. 243)

Theorising agency as something we 'do' not something we 'have', is useful in exploring adjudications and choices. Choices in this framework, are not free-floating options, they are a reworking and movements by these sole parent postgraduates towards engaging with postgraduate education.

Agency then, is purposeful but always and already within constraints that do not exceed nor produce them. Butler (1997b) states that the 'agency of the subject is not a property of the subject, an inherent will or freedom, but an effect of power, it is constrained but not determined in advance' (p. 139). Research by Hinton-Smith (2012) considered adjudications by sole parents in higher education, noting that there is a 'clear weighting in experiences toward negative short-term effects of university participation, compared to more positive residual changes...counterbalancing immediate negative effects with deeper long-term implications (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 180). This 'counterbalancing' is a demonstration of agency.

In this research Ani succinctly describes this negotiation of the self in regard to maintaining a co-existence between sole parenting and continuing postgraduate education,

Ani: Yeah, there is a tension with the negative tensions to stop having to be outweighed by the positive tensions to continue.

In ‘doing’ the summing up of the costs both in the present and future, many of the sole parents in this research were negotiating within the radical uncertainty of postgraduate education, a qualification requiring many years of work with no clear or certain beneficial outcome. This tension of temporality opens up possibilities. Participants in this study considered and invested in the transformative potential of education and set about mitigating the immediate costs of their engagement with postgraduate education by reworking current possibilities.

This research extends this previous work relating to sole parents in the academy by theorizing agency and conditions of account. Autonomous decision making is a misnomer, acting autonomously is impossible since we are never outside conditions that precede us and act on us. There are no free-floating acts of intent, as Butler (2005) reminds us ‘any regime of intelligibility, constitutes us *at a cost*’ (p.121, emphasis in original). For the participants in this study, reconciling the ‘costs’ of engagement with postgraduate education became a question of logistics. Central to forecasting and managing these logistics was a reconciling comparison of flexibility and finances between paid employment and further study.

‘Having a kid and raising it by yourself’ – reworking constraints

In the following passage, Sinead discusses how she has reworked her understanding of her academic standards in response to the tensions of combining sole parenting and postgraduate education. She opens up the possibility of being both ‘very successful’ and ‘mediocre’;

Sinead: But I always thought I'd be very successful and I realise having a kid and raising it by yourself and trying to do something, like I'm definitely going to be mediocre, but that's just what you do.

Genine: Is that the payoff that you've accepted, does that bug you though?

Sinead: It depends on my mood and when my child's behaving like an angel I think I've made all the right choices and I love my life, but when she's an evil brat I'm like, this is a lifetime of mediocrity. Sometimes I feel like I'm mediocre at her and at this because I'm doing both and you can't do both well. Sometimes I feel that.

Sinead's position here can be interpreted as a 'doing' of agency as she acknowledges that her conditions; both postgraduate study and 'having a kid and raising it by yourself' may constrain her, but this 'doing' does not fully determine her. She adjusts her thinking from 'very successful' to an acceptance of 'mediocrity' in order to negotiate these conditions which she understands may offer the potential of change; to a well-paid and secure academic job.

Sinead has reworked her understanding of the 'ideal' student and the 'ideal' mother by adjudicating her situation and by adjusting her expectations. She has neither conformed nor rejected parenting (by yourself) nor postgraduate study, but has adjusted her understandings of combining sole parenting and postgraduate within her conditions of account. Sinead's comments reflect her taking up, an acceptance of, how conditions can be materially different when one person raises a child and studies at postgraduate level. It is the tension between these roles that has created the space from which she can reflect and transform her thinking about what she alone can get done. I read Sinead's comments here as a re-crafting of the elite high achieving postgraduate student. Her desire to exist as both a sole parent and a postgraduate student coupled with her modifications of the

parameters of success ‘you can’t do both well’ is a performance of agency that is ‘alteration and re-crafting of the rules that enables a viable form of social existence’ (Gowlett, 2014, p. 406).

Sinead continues to discuss her ongoing evaluation and mediation of sole parenting and postgraduate study,

Genine: It’s interesting, that parenting can make the logistics of study difficult but it can also be a form of motivation.

Sinead: I find that so much. Like when I didn’t have my daughter, and I had all this time, I was often incredibly lazy and spent every second, no, every weekend getting horribly drunk and as soon as I found out I was pregnant it was like H1, H1, H1, like I always thought I have to do this for her. But it also makes it, yeah, impossible, so definitely both.

Sinead talks here about the double bind, that her child is her motivation to study and ‘makes it impossible’. She understands this double bind as an implication of living outside the heteronormative family construct and her agential response is to adjust her expectations and to acknowledge her conditions of account.

The tension between her child-free life is reflected on and reworked to incorporate the ‘doing’ for her, ‘I have to do this for her’ which motivates her engagement with postgraduate education. She equates postgraduate credentials as meeting important elements of parental responsibilities by comparing her previous ‘lazy’ and carefree life before-babies. This providing for and responsibilities discourse is strongly articulated in the work of Hinton-Smith (2012) who interviewed 77 sole parents in UK higher education and discussed the clear child-orientated motivation and logistics of juggling education and sole parenting. Hinton-Smith notes that for sole parents ‘[m]otivational factors for HE engagement, including new opportunities, career

advancement, providing a better future, and improved quality of life, are *all* discussed in terms of projected benefits to children' (p. 51, my emphasis).

Gillian, talks about motivation in a slightly different way, whilst also noting the importance for her postgraduate studies as working towards providing better opportunities for her son, she articulates an additional movement that related to her research project, as distinctly separate from her child, that was highly motivating for her. In this sense she was able to distinguish between her parenting self and her academic-in-the-making self ;

Gillian: So intrinsic motivation. Part of it comes down to, wanting to achieve, wanting to be known and I guess those two things combine to challenge that social stigma of sole parenting especially female sole parenting. But, also I want a better life for my child than what I had growing up in a sole parent family and the opportunity to give him more opportunities and I see that by getting my qualification, being in a better paid job, being in a better paid job, ummm, will provide him with that. Hmm; intrinsic motivation...But it also comes down, I mean that's the external factors or that side of things, but in terms of the academic work, it comes down to knowing what I'm doing will make a difference and seeing that that difference needs to happen in the area that I'm doing my research in.

This quote illustrates how being constituted 'through an array of discourses subsequently provides an individual with a variety of tools' (Gowlett, 2014, p. 414). Gillian's tools here are a passionate attachment to parenting and providing 'opportunities' for her child *and* her attachment to her academic work which will 'make a difference'. Gillian is assessing and mediating her study and parenting practices within 'indeterminate zones of practice' (Leonard 2001). One zone of parenting seeks to provide better opportunities for her child 'I want a better life for my child'. A second zone

is established as important by Gillian, a researcher zone, within which she is completing an important project and contributing to an academic community 'what I'm doing will make a difference and seeing that that difference needs to happen'.

Gillian assesses the space between herself, her child's needs and the academy and this interface creates the space where agency is enacted. 'I would be an agent insofar as that which affects me does not determine my actions, but leaves room for a decision' (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 190). Gillian's sole parenting does not determine her actions, it is central to her conditions and she cannot escape it, but her decision to undertake postgraduate studies is a clear response to being the sole provider for her child. This unavoidable relation to her child has established the possibilities of agency; it is from this connection that she is able to participate in the process of becoming which she actions as engagement with postgraduate studies. However, Gillian does not only rely on providing opportunities for her child to motivate her postgraduate education, she also includes the sense that her academic research is worthwhile.

Gillian's orientations towards her postgraduate qualification as an act of providing for her son reflects Andrea O'Reilly's (2012) discussion of conditions in the academy for mothers. O'Reilly provides a comparison of experiences of partnered and 'single' mothers in the academy and notes the importance of financial stability is more critical for sole parents;

Here is where we see traditionally gendered partnerships, more so than single motherhood, working against the career advancement of academic mothers. As evidenced in many of my interviews, single mothers have no choice but to stay with and in their academic careers, despite the many challenges they face; as the sole breadwinner, they are responsible for the family's financial stability and well-being. As single mothers, they must have paid employment, and ideally in a career such as academe that is relatively well-paid, secure, and

with the required benefits for the family...Therefore, “opting out” is simply less of an option for single mothers (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 206)

O’Reilly’s (2012) position illustrates the positive projection sole parents make towards a relatively well-paid and secure academic career; however, this projection is tenuous for postgraduate students who have not secured such an academic role. Also, the potential for ‘opting out’ of an academic career, given the intensive and unbounded nature of academic positions, may indeed promote options for many other forms of employment, not simply, no employment. However, O’Reilly (2012) does capture the sense that the participants in my research also shared, that they acknowledged and sought to meet the financial and care commitments to their children and families. They understood these commitments as heightened because they were sole parents. The sole parents in this study re-shaped their resources to orientate themselves towards academia because they perceived it had the potential to provide financial security and flexibility of work.

Re-Shaping resources through contingent autonomy

Sole parents demonstrated agency, in a Butlerian sense, by reworking the constraints they experienced. I purposefully premise the idea of autonomy with contingency to qualify and recognise that power relations are shaping the accomplishment of subjectivity, ‘not because they limit our capacities to act, but because our capacities to act are moulded via these relations’ (Bell, 2007, p. 22). In this research participants purposefully manoeuvred their resources to open up possibilities, but they did this work always and already attached to *and* in relation to conditional power.

For the participants in this study being a sole parent was experienced as constraining, in regard to time, money and space to study, the participants in this study re-worked these conditions to enable their capacities to study at postgraduate level. They shared a sense that it was *because* they were sole parents and ‘masters of their own modest means’ (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 121), that they

were able to engage with postgraduate education. In this way sole parenting became part of the conditions of enabling constraint.

In this research, participants discussed these conditions as a sense of bounded autonomy, that is, a non-marital autonomy that allowed them to determine almost all directions and decisions for themselves and for their families. They re-worked their finances, time and child care responsibilities with a clear focus on opening up the possibilities of postgraduate education. Edin (2000) confirms this point as participants in her study articulated a willingness ‘to take on the responsibilities of child rearing if they were also able to make and enforce the rules’ (p. 360). Similarly, research by Brown & Watson (2010), included interviews with two sole parents who noted that ‘being a single parent was the major determinant in their ability to start a PhD and to make academic progress; the free, often lonely time associated with single parenthood could now be gainfully occupied’ (p. 392). This prioritising form of agency was also reiterated by the lone parent in higher education study by Hinton-Smith (2012) who argues that ‘[b]eing, to a greater extent, masters of their own time, lone mothers frequently perceive themselves as benefiting from being able to make autonomous decisions to skimp on housework, cooking or attention to children in order to devote time to academic study’ (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 90). The scope of decision making by sole parents to facilitate their postgraduate education demonstrates agential responses and also illustrates my position that these are ‘parents’ who cross-over and through boundaries established by the gendered binaries of motherhood and fatherhood.

Money or study: flexibility or financial stress

The participants in this study reflected previous research in which further education ‘is actively chosen as a relatively manageable alternative compared to paid work, offering increased flexibility, and hence more easily reconcilable with the responsibilities of lone parenthood’ (Hinton-Smith, 2012, p. 136). In the following interview extract, Sinead discusses how the conditions of

postgraduate education and sole parenting can be experienced in relation to a carving out of time for both.

Genine: So, part of the attraction to study is about the flexibility.

Sinead: Yes, the flexibility for now and the higher pay rates for later.

Genine: Is it the flexibility of the study or the flexibility of the work you get after at the higher rate of pay?

Sinead: Both, I think prior to having my daughter, I hadn't thought about things like this, but now I'd love to work as an academic because of school holidays and things like that, so more options. But definitely the flexibility of hours now is appealing to me.

Genine: Because you have to do a lot of work, but you can dictate when, around the parenting?

Sinead: Yes, absolutely. I do most of my work after my daughter goes to bed every night. So, it feels like something really productive whereas there aren't many paid jobs I'd get at this point in my life where I could be working in the next room while your child is sleeping.

In discussing her ability to undertake postgraduate education, Ani spoke of the 'ultimate flexibility' of completing a PhD as a key factor.

Ani: So I looked at the scholarships and I realized it actually is the same amount of money as three days work. I thought, shit hey!!? I could actually do that. I had always wanted to and it just seemed perfect. The ultimate flexibility,

childcare money from Centrelink and stuff like that, umm, and fulfillment, you know, and I think I learnt to put myself on the line.

The doing of agency by Ani here is an opening up of the possibility of postgraduate education with its possibility of ‘ultimate flexibility’. Butler situates ‘agency within the processes that constitute the self’ (Gowlett, 2014, p. 416). Ani’s negotiated decision takes into account finances, university scholarship schemes, Centrelink support and flexibility for her child care-work. It has been constrained but not pre-determined. Ani does not have the freedom to be a sole parent and a postgraduate student without the constraints of limited financial support, Centrelink regulations and scholarship provisions. These factors act in this situation as constraining effects of power.

In addition to flexibility of time, the sole parents I interviewed for this research reworked their family finances in ways that became central to their self-crafting as postgraduate students. Financial insecurity is critical in how sole parents engage with postgraduate education demonstrating the ‘possibilities of performative agency from and against precarity’ (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 167).

Money’s too tight to mention²³: postgraduate study instead of paid work

The financial capacity of sole parents is critical in enabling them to undertake and maintain engagement with postgraduate education because, ‘Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks’ (Beck, 1992, p. 35). Adept management of limited family finances is an important demonstration of agency, a reworking of the constraints of financial stress. Sole parents account for themselves in a Western, capitalist and consumer economy whereby ‘having is constructed as an essential prerequisite of proper human being’ (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 13). Precarious finances that the sole parents in this study experienced somewhat disrupt the consumerist

²³ A song written and recorded by The Valentine Brothers, John & Billy (1982)

prerequisite, because they were mostly social security recipients and relatively poor. Financial means is a critical issue particularly for sole parents because they do not have another adult in the household to contribute financially, whilst also having the expense of raising children. Agentic manoeuvres of financial management under relatively stringent financial limitations was one of the tools sole parents utilized in order to maintain postgraduate study.

Sue Jackson's (2004) study of women beginning or in their first year of a degree program in a post 1992 UK university noted that financial hardship was a key issue and that, 'economic restraints of higher education are particularly powerful for women dependent on a male partner for support, and for lone mothers' (p. 52). I argue that the difficulties associated with poverty cannot be over-estimated. 'For women living on a low income, the sheer day-to-day effect of living in poverty leaves little time or energy for anything else' (Standing, 1998, p. 198). Ani provided insights into the pressures of financial strain as she combined sole parenting and postgraduate studies;

Ani: But I'm at that point where my knickers are starting to run out and I need a new bra and there isn't anywhere to get that. Umm, so I can feel that sort of across the board, I'm at the point where...

Genine: It's a kind of attrition.

Ani: It is attrition, you know. The little bit of reserve that I had is going and things are getting closer and closer.

Genine: Which has an impact when getting a PhD takes years.

Ani: Because the PhD takes years, but I just can't afford it.

Ani talks about the enabling constraints of her family finances, 'things are getting closer and closer'. Whilst household budgets for sole parent postgraduates were extremely limited, many of the participants also spoke of the benefits of being in control of the little money they did have. Agency

is demonstrated through the reworking of finances, an ongoing process of determining how they could access various streams of money, where they would spend it and adjusting to the everyday minutiae of family expenditure. This reworking is a useful example of a Butlerian inspired notion of agency, because even within the uncertainty of financial constraint these sole parents maintain postgraduate study and family households and childcare. They bend and redirect the money they have in order to maintain their passionate attachments to their children and their studies.

Six of the sole parent postgraduates who participated in this research receive an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship. This award is paid at a rate below the minimum wage at \$25,392 per year or \$972.87 per fortnight (tax free). Four of the sole parents I spoke with did not receive scholarship support from their university. This is particularly the case for part-time study because few postgraduate scholarships are offered for part-time study mode. To put the financial stress into context, in Australia the minimum wage is \$1,244 per fortnight which is less than half the average full-time weekly wage of \$3,092 per fortnight (ABS).²⁴ These payment rates are further contextualized by considering that the rates of NewStart (unemployment) allowance, for single principal carer is \$557.90 per fortnight.²⁵

Gillian discusses the financial pressure she experiences as she completes her PhD part-time whilst raising her child without the financial support of an academic scholarship;

Gillian: And I don't mind saying that over the last, no since I separated, I have needed assistance from Salvation Army to get through and its shit and the first time I went it was a real hit, it was an emotional hit but now I just go in and think oh whatever, I just need some help. But I think it's that type of stuff that is invisible, more so than, oh right – you've got a kid, you do it by yourself,

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics: Census Data - <http://www.abs.gov.au/census> Sourced 15.06.2013.

²⁵ Australian Department of Human Services; Payment Rates - <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/centrelink/newstart-allowance/payment-rates-for-newstart-allowance> Sourced 10.03.2014.

fantastic, good job – it's all the other stuff that goes with it the emotional pressures the time pressures and the financial pressures, more so.

Gillian's situation here is far from ideal, but the repetitive and everyday pressure of limited financial support has opened up a reworking of her understanding of support, "I just need some help". Gillian shares a sense of shame when she initially sought help from charity providers, 'it's shit and the first time I went it was a real hit, it was an emotional hit', however, she has reworked this understanding to 'oh whatever, I just need some help'. She also articulates a sense of interconnectedness in how agency can operate from multiple discourses. She nominates emotion, financial and time pressures as being 'invisible' to others. However, she illustrates that her movement towards 'some help' is motivated by her desire to study and raise a child by herself and seeking and receiving 'some help' can be read as an agentic response to these conditions *within* the social and educational structures that constrain her.

Mia summarises the financial costs of postgraduate work, using the example of how \$50.00 a week can make a significant difference to highly marginal family finances. Mia's experiences of raising five children and completing a PhD also illustrates the problematic nature of universal payment levels for academic scholarships.

Genine: And the scholarship doesn't cover it?

Mia: Oh, no way. No. So, I don't know. Now I say, we'll have to go and get jobs actually. We'll all suck it up and survive and hopefully... They put the rent up \$50.00 a week last year and hopefully this year they don't do the same or I don't know what I'll do.

Genine: How do you think the instability of the money that you have and the low income effects your motivation and your stickability to completing your PhD?

Mia: It is critical. I guess there is probably a few times a week, I probably seriously think, ‘what am I doing...I should just go and get a job’.

Genine: Even this close to finishing?

Mia: Yep, even now I still think, how am I going to do this?

Being poor for a significant period of time is a challenge. The security of savings are depleted, forms of family capital dwindle over time and the gap between financially managing and poverty is reduced over time; a type of fiscal attrition. The effects of this attrition are evident in Mia’s experiences as she is finalising and editing her PhD thesis, but her financial insecurity remains a potential roadblock to submitting her thesis.

Butler’s theory of agency, as a reworking of constraints from within the site of constraint is useful to explore agency, *not* as a means of escape from normative constraint or a free acceptance of normative constraint but as a re-crafting of constraints. Mia’s discussion in the above quote illustrates her capacity for ‘doing’ otherwise, she refers to financial pressures that direct her towards paid employment at the expense of completing her PhD, but she reworks her finances through this process of negotiation and holds to her desire to complete her doctorate.

Mia’s experiences illustrate the problematic nature of postgraduate academic scholarships that are not means tested. Scholarship payments are at a set rate and fail to take into consideration diverse conditions of account for postgraduate students. Educational aims to enabled wider participation in higher education and encourage students from low-socio economic backgrounds (Bradley Review 2008) are undermined by institutional practices that fail to take into consideration student’s financial capacities and responsibilities. For example, a postgraduate student living with another adult who contributes financially to their household with no children, or a student who is

able to live in student residences on campus have very different financial and educational conditions within which to engage with postgraduate education.

Becoming academic: aspirational agency

The strategies taken up by the constituting subjects in this research are orientated towards and ‘motivated by a desire to exist’ (Gowlett, 2014, p. 406) as postgraduate students. In the context of this study the desire to exist as a postgraduate student was intrinsically linked with participant’s expectations of becoming an academic. Sole parent postgraduates who participated in this study projected a concerted and somewhat aspirational desire and trajectory towards an academic career. They clearly linked their postgraduate qualifications with future employment, secure and well-paid, as an academic. This trajectory was a self-crafting, a motivation based on the desire for an academic position, a career that they regarded as transformative.

Participant projections towards an academic career enabled current re-workings of financial, time and childcare restraints throughout a relatively long-term postgraduate project. Aspirational intentions for taking up academic positions were motivating for the sole parent postgraduates in this study, however, employment outcomes are obscure and tenuous. This uncertainty establishes postgraduate education as something of a gamble. I suggest that the gamble towards a possible and hopeful academic position for postgraduate students is increasing as Jill Blackmore (2013) discusses in relation to the radical restructuring of higher education through reduced government funding. Blackmore (2013) notes that unprecedented challenges determines ‘what counts and who benefits [in an] entrepreneurial performative university’ (p. 192-193).

Blackmore’s comments and this research’s focus on equitable engagement in higher education are timely in the Australian context as the Higher Education and Research Reform

amendment Bill 2014²⁶ was introduced into the House of Representatives on 28th August 2014. If passed, this legislation will alter the foundations of higher education in Australia by introducing deregulated university fees and extending demand driven funding to higher education. The Bill also allows universities to charge research student's tuition fees, introduces new indexation arrangement for Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) recipients and directs universities to include 20% additional revenue to government funded university places. These are potentially structural changes to the Australian higher education landscape that will result in increased fees for under-graduate courses and research training. This re-structuring to university fees and student debt accumulation will have material impacts on under-represented and non-traditional students including sole parents in higher education.

The problematic nature of a trajectory towards higher education culminating in a secure and ongoing academic position for postgraduates is discussed by Greteman (2014) who argues that securing an academic career is a 'pipe dream it seems for new scholars in these neoliberal times' (p. 428). Greteman's assessment of scholarly appointment as a 'pipe dream' poses greater risks for sole parents. This is because sole parent postgraduates have certainly experienced an undermining of their solely maintained financial position over the course of their qualification. They have no other income support to provide a buffer through transitions to employment and often combine these conditions with the sole responsibility for childcare costs and household costs.

The following section explores some of the ways the participants in this study mitigated the risks associated with combining sole parenting and postgraduate study by re-shaping their 'mothering' practices.

²⁶ See - http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r5325

Inhabiting the 'motherhood' norm but mobilising alternatives?

Creating alternatives through the 'doing' of agency is evident in the way some participant's altered the repetition and operation of mothering/parenting signifiers. Altering this constituting process of mothering/parenting is made possible from *within* the norms and practices that constrain it, 'a culturally sanctioned doing' (Brady & Schirato, 2011, p. 49). I am interested in exploring participant agency to critically reflect and rework naturalised and normative constructions of mothering, wherein 'parenting is collapsed and condemned as still a 'mothers' responsibility' (Allen & Taylor, 2012, p. 2). Such a reworking of mothering/parenting practices does not require a rejection of the frameworks that have conditioned the normative structures of mothering/parenting. Rather, '[a]dhering to the norms is what creates the potential for them to be modified' (Gowlett, 2014, p. 406). This section asks; Does the participant's adherence to mothering norms open up the potential for them to modify, through agency, the construct and the category of 'mother'?

The ongoing project of mothering/parenting is constituted through ongoing and everyday performative acts which create moments in which those repetitions can be opened up to alteration and new possibilities. Sinead's discussion below introduces an alternative to childcare, a reworking of care for children largely done by mothers (female) and/or in the formal childcare industry (mostly female).

Genine: Tell me what you think the main issues that you have are with juggling
 studying and parenting.

Sinead: Time and money and personally I think, getting back to my feminist rants, the
 only reason I can do it is because of family members and friends who are all

female. So people are basically doing free childcare regularly for me. So that...

Genine: Which in a way is subsidising your study.

Sinead: Yes, and if I didn't have those female family members prepared, and friends, prepared to do that for me, I couldn't do this, there is no way you can do it. Like I couldn't afford the childcare based on the money, even if I get my scholarship next year, I could not afford enough childcare to do it. My Mum is far way, but the Dad's Mum helps, the Dad's sister and all my girlfriends especially because none of them have kids and they are all gay they all help all of the time. I just don't know how someone could do it without that because I barely do it with that help.

Genine: Would you then say that even when your daughter is asleep, you couldn't get through the amount of work it takes to do a PhD, in those hours – between 7pm and 6am?

Sinead: No, I couldn't.

In this passage, Sinead is commenting on social norms that tend to impose and direct the care of children towards females. In order to study at postgraduate level as a sole parent, Sinead is reworking how her daughter is cared for by extending kinship networks. She acknowledges their importance and the value of caring for children. She does this reworking through critiquing normative structures that bring forward normative expectations of women and childcare. Sinead offers this critique whilst submitting to and working within the norm of the female responsibility for childcare.

Sinead demonstrates a critical awareness of the norms which designate child care as women's work. She illustrates this critical awareness of this norm and occupies it at the same time; by noting that additional child care for her child is provided by 'family members and friends who are all female'. Butler (2006a) asks 'Is there a way to submit provisionally and critically to such norms, and to do so in ways that change the norms themselves? Is it possible to inhabit the norms in order to mobilize the rules differently?' (p. 532). Sinead is not escaping the care of children, nor is she fully submitting to the norm of female care of children, rather she is re-crafting how care of children can be experienced through her critique of the gendered operation of the feminisation of child care-work. This re-crafting is enabled by Sinead's conditions and specifically the contradictory combination of sole parenting and postgraduate education.

Sinead continued to expand on her ambivalent sense of motherhood by offering a critique of gendered assumptions associated with male and female parenting. In the following interview excerpt Sinead discusses her dual role, her responsibility for financially providing for her child whilst maintaining a clear and strong connection to her 'mothering' identity,

Sinead: And I think, as a single parent, you have to think about both a lot. Like I'm both, I have to provide for her but I also have this, I want to be home with her being a Mummy.

I asked Sinead about her understandings of how 'being a Mummy' is constituted specifically in relation to gendered expectations of parenting,

Sinead: I'm always getting people going, 'oh, you're so lucky, that's really nice that he does that'. That he does that 'for me' because it's 'my' child, you know, and he wanted to have her probably more than I did. But somehow because I have a vagina it's my child, I find that really frustrating.

In this interview excerpt, Sinead shares that the father of her daughter wanted her ‘probably’ more than she did and discusses some of the performatives that reinscribe female motherhood. She provides examples of exchanges that illustrate her daughters father involvement is interpreted as ‘lucky and nice’ for Sinead. Conversely, Sinead notes that because she has a vagina her care for her child is always and already assumed and naturalised.

Sinead’s thoughts here indicate that she is firmly embedded in her ‘doing’ of motherhood. However, her adherence ‘to the norms is what creates the potential for them to be modified’ (Gowlett, 2014, p. 406). Sinead critique’s the recognisability of gendered mothering that it is because ‘I have a vagina it’s my child’. In re-citing these mothering and fathering norms Sinead opens up moments for them to be altered through her critique and her frustrations. Through this discourse, Sinead is highlighting the (re)productive nature of performatives and is disrupting the gendered assumptions of motherhood and fatherhood but she also remains firmly embedded in the ‘Mummy’ discourse

In my interviews with sole parent postgraduates I asked about constraining and enabling conditions of normative motherhood and the ways in which they have mobilised the rules of motherhood to suit their sole parenting conditions. I asked this question to draw out and open up the possibility of ‘doing’ child care in ways that refused the gendered binary of mothering/fathering. This interest stems from my researcher positioning through which I argue that sole parents are mothers or fathers but are, to some extent’ traversing this gender boundary. I wondered if sole parenting outside hetero and partner-normative structures is conducive to re-crafting gender constructs that constitute mothering and fathering?

Largely I found that the sole parents I spoke with were strongly aligned with being ‘mothers’. They inhabited the normative construct of motherhood and this passionate attachment was strengthened rather than re-crafted in response to experiences of sole parenting and postgraduate

education. Participant performances which combine both normative father *and* mother care-work did not result in their critical reworking of discourses relating to gendered constructs of motherhood and fatherhood. Alternatives such as Sinead's case of kinship care were rare. Rather, participants seemed to be non-provisionally and un-critically attached to understanding themselves as mothers.

Attachments to existing gendered constructs of mothering are illustrated in participant discussions based on intensive mothering discourses. One such discussion is with Eva who spoke about her experiences and seemed to be saying that if she couldn't blend the sole parenting and postgraduate work into her subjectivity, then it would be the studies she would sacrifice;

Genine: Because you have not got buffer to adjust to and manage those changes.

Eva: No, you don't have the freedom to manage them because if anything really bad happens the first thing that will have to go is the study.

Genine: So studying is the pressure point?

Eva: Yes, that is the pressure point. If it gets really bad that's the thing that will have to go.

That it would be Eva's studies 'that will have to go' seemed non-negotiable. I suggest that Eva's position reinscribes naturalised and essentialised mothering. I interpret this as an example of gendered constructions of selfless motherhood. I do not suggest that parenting should or ought 'have to go' but that a re-shaping and/or critique of normative binaries associated with mothering and fathering may open up.

The participants overwhelmingly accepted the inevitability of their child rearing responsibilities.

Polly: Well for me it wasn't just living on that amount of money to enable me to do study. It was me living on that amount of money so I could be there for them. That the study didn't get in the way.

From these comments we can summarise the Polly and Eva are largely being mothers, not doing parenting. These comments fail to significantly challenge the sedimented connection between women and child-care. They did not seem to consider that the 'fact that women do the birthing does not mean that the allocation of child rearing to women is inevitable, or that child rearing inevitably is linked with marginalization' (Williams, 2000, p. 188). They were performing gender through (re)constituting motherhood as an everyday feminine responsibility.

The sole parents I spoke with also shared a sense of ambivalence in their understandings of families and how their sole parent families were constituted differently. In the following interview excerpt, Eva discusses the financial and personal difficulties she experiences as a sole parent, but premises those concerns with the following;

Eva: But all that [financial and personal difficulties] is not enough of a deterrent to not become a single parent...even though it's so dysfunctional, it's kind of funny that it is so dysfunctional.

For Eva, sole parenting is a 'deterrent' but not 'enough of a deterrent' to stay in her marital situation. The cultural norm of the family is articulated by Eva through an 'othering' discourse as she offers that being a single parent is a deterrent, something that ought to be avoided. She goes on to say that the sole parent deterrence was not significant enough to stop her from initiating divorce proceedings. This articulation of 'not enough of a deterrent to not become a single parent' is an example of how norms operate whereby the 'subject is constituted through the anticipation or fear of having recognition conferred or denied' (Butler, 2006a, p. 532). Eva seems to fear not being recognized as a legitimate family, indeed she goes on to describe her sole parent family as 'so dysfunctional'.

This excerpt from Eva demonstrates her embeddedness in notions of the ‘ideal family’. She is able to reflect on *her* negative experiences of the hetero nuclear family but she is unable or unwilling to critique cultural norms about families.

Eva: It’s that...it’s that whole, the thing I mourned the most is the family unit, that I don’t have, mother, father, child, in a family unit working together.

Genine: The ideal family?

Eva: Yeah, you know, when they release land and houses they have a man and woman, a daughter and a son, and they are all holding hands and running through a park. It’s like, you know, you are putting it up there for everyone to see, it’s meant to entice us to buy some land, okay, well it’s not having that which is stressful.

Butler argues that a ‘norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm’ (Butler, 2005, p. 19). Here Eva demonstrates an attachment and a sense of longing for ‘the thing I mourned the most’, the normative structure of the nuclear family. She offers the marketability of the idealised happy nuclear family as an indication of what she is ‘not having’. Eva’s ambivalence is illustrated in that she has not escaped or fled the ‘dysfunctions’ of her sole parent family, rather she opts into that choice, but she still accepts and mourns the hetero nuclear family as an idealised norm. She is ‘doing’ family differently, even as she describes her family as ‘so dysfunctional’, but she is seemingly unable to constitute her sole parent family as a viable and legitimate social existence.

Eva’s ambivalence is further illustrated in the following thoughts. I asked her about the role her postgraduate education has in her ‘so dysfunctional’ sole parent family;

Genine: Is studying one of the ways you are carving out that space for yourself.

Eva: And I would never have done it if I was still married.

Genine: That's really interesting.

Eva: Well, that's the other thing, he wouldn't have let me, no matter how well I was able to cope with bills and budgets and things now, now that I don't have that guilt associated with every dollar I spend.

Here Eva articulates a taking up of postgraduate study as made possible by the fact that she is no longer married; the master of her own modest means (Hinton-Smith 2012). She constitutes herself as a postgraduate student using a performative of alternative autonomy, from 'he wouldn't have let me' to 'coping with the bills and budgets' and without 'that guilt'.

Halberstam (2011) discusses the reticence I understand Eva is articulating. Halberstam seeks to deconstruct the idealised nuclear family, arguing that '[i]ndeed so committed are we to these cumbersome structures and so lazy about coming up with alternatives to them that we bolster our sense of the rightness of heteronormative coupledness' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 35). Even as Eva is able to nominate benefits, a realigning of power through her use of resources in new and productive ways, she seems unwilling to extend this reworking of her conditions to a disrupting of and an opening up of the possibilities for alternatively 'doing' family.

My attempts to open up a dialogue with participants in this study regarding possible deconstructed gendered parental practices follows Halberstam (1998) who asks, '[w]hy are we comfortable thinking about men as mothers, but we never consider women as fathers?' (p. 269). My questions sought to explore whether women who are sole parents, to some extent, merge fatherhood and motherhood as repetitive and performative acts of parental care and in doing so destabilise the gendered binary. Butler (2006) understands deconstructive destabilising as 'unlearning' which 'would have to make room for an alternative agency, a creative deployment of power, and so a way

of entering the matrix of rules that allows for an exposure of their porousness and malleability, their incompleteness, and their transformability' (p. 533). The matrix of rules in relation to motherhood and fatherhood are indeed porous, sole parents bend and redirect normative parenting rules because their parental care-work is beyond the (re)productive gendered bounds reinscribed and fundamental to the hetero-normative nuclear family. Questioning the transformability of normative motherhood and fatherhood is important because over-determined motherhood, as only a female act, restricts how women can constitute themselves and be otherwise constituted. Conversely and just as importantly, constituting females as mothers and as providers of childcare also restricts male strategies and subjectivities as care givers.

In summary

This chapter has sought to demonstrate some of the limitations relating to normative motherhood and the ways in which this influences how women are constituted. Drawing on the reflections of participant sole parents, I have particularly focused on mothering as a normative female act that structures the conditions of account within postgraduate education, with implications for equitable engagement in the academy and research more broadly.

My exploration of the ambivalent conditions that sole parents experience as postgraduate students draws on Butler's theory of paradoxical agency. Theorising agency in this manner is useful because it enables me to draw close attention to the existence of a set of cultural norms which create conditions of account that are not of our own making. Butler's theory of agency understands agency as not something someone has but as an effect of power, it constrains us but does not determine us. This theoretical framework illuminates how participants in this study re-worked their viability as sole parents and postgraduate students by modifying their expectations; they viewed their children as a source of motivation, as both carers and providers for them. The participants re-shaped their resources as a self-crafting response to their conditions of constraint, utilising flexibility of

postgraduate study and re-working their family finances. My theorisation of Butler's agency facilitated an awareness of participant aspirational desires and trajectories towards becoming an academic as a productive motivator.

While I was interested to explore a re-working of the binary of mothering/fathering as gendered constructions of parenting, I found that the participants were largely un-critically attached to normative discourses of 'intensive mothering'. Eva's reference to her sole parent family as 'dysfunctional' and her sense of 'mourning' about the loss of the traditional nuclear family unit was illustrative of a general reluctance to deconstruct understandings of gendered binaries associated with mothering and fathering. Self-crafting in radically uncertain times for sole parent postgraduates was possible albeit incrementally and ambivalently.

Chapter Eight – Conclusion

In the fore front of my mind as I complete this research project is always my capacity and obligation to juggle my two jobs. Over the last four years I have worked towards completing my full-time doctoral studies, which I regard as a full-time job. During this time I also have raised my son singlehandedly which I regard, again, as a full-time job. However, I do both these full-time jobs within a community and a political landscape that regards me as unemployed and requiring a NewStart²⁷.

It is from this contradictory position that I have sought to explore and trouble the recognisability of sole parents and their agential engagement with postgraduate education. The insights I have analysed in this study contribute to new understandings of how postgraduate education is experienced and my aim has been for ideas in this thesis to invite and support other sole parent students to share in the entitlement and opportunities of higher education.

My initial interest in this research topic emerged during my transition into an Honours program when positive sentiment for my vocationally orientated bachelor degree studies evaporated and my continuing postgraduate education was largely regarded as a luxury a sole parent could not or ought not to afford. This shift in sentiment prompted my thinking about who was able to access postgraduate education and the conditions within which they did so. I also questioned whether other sole parents were having similar experiences and if so, how did they negotiate and maintain their engagement with postgraduate education. This experience opened up my thinking in relation to recognition; Who is able to be recognised as a postgraduate candidate and how the process of

²⁷ NewStart – My reference to the ‘redemptive’ undertones of the Welfare to Work policy and also the government name for unemployment benefits.

recognisability operates? To extend this line of thinking I drew from Butler's theory of recognition which framed my consideration of the notion of recognition and how power and social norms operate within this interrelated process.

I also connected my experiences of university timetabling at postgraduate level with concerns of recognition for diverse students. I shared my dilemma between attending scheduled evening classes, at a time when formal childcare was unavailable, and attending to my child with no co-parent with whom to share the task child-care. This experience prompted my research interest in institutional structures that create interrelated conditions of account. I utilised Butler's theoretical framing of accountability to try and capture the fluid and mediated conditions that the sole parents in this study experienced as they navigated their studies. Judith Butler's writings enabled me to take into consideration multiple factors that participants understood were critical in mediating their connection to postgraduate education. I utilised Butler's work in relation to agency, performativity and recognisability in order to identify, un-settle and re-work norms and taken for granted practices that are useful in examining institutional structures of power and privilege that operate in higher education. I considered performativity in relation to gendered parental practices, recognisability in regard to social welfare policy acting as education policy for sole parent postgraduates, and agency to consider the mediations the sole parents in this study undertook to adjust finances and time to engage with postgraduate education.

I considered my own problematic understanding of sole parenting illustrated through an apology I delivered to my seven month old child upon the unanticipated breakdown of my marriage. Reflecting on this apologetic exchange, I began to think of the histories of discourse and how they precede our experiences whilst also establishing conditions through which we come to understand subjectivity. I theorised this apology through understandings of shame and vulnerability as the two overarching emotions I reflected upon in regard to this apologetic exchange. These reflections motivated my line of enquiry relating to how understanding of sole parents infused into educational

contexts. I followed this enquiry by asking participant sole parents about their perceptions and experiences in regard to university awareness of their conditions of postgraduate education.

In this research I have explored how participants imagined themselves as postgraduate students and cultivated their sense of belonging in the academy. I asked these questions to excavate participant practices and perceptions of their parenting work particularly in response to their studies. I also wanted to find out some of the ways participants mediated and enabled their continuing engagement with postgraduate education - How did they manage this financially? How did they weave their studies throughout their child-care and familial attachments? How did their university institutions assist/constrain this negotiated subjectivity of sole parent postgraduate?

My contribution to knowledge

In this thesis I have made a number of significant contributions to scholarly understandings of how gendered constructs are negotiated in relation to sole parents in postgraduate education within an Australian context. I have addressed a gap in academic research by considering sole parents as student parents and have contributed an Australian perspective to the existing international literature relating to student parents.

Disrupting gendered care constructs in the academy

Firstly, I have illustrated that parental practices and discourses are performatively gendered. I have applied Butler's theory of performativity to gendered constructs of parenting to disrupt the binaries associated with female mothering and masculine fathering. Performativity is useful in drawing attention to the everyday repetitions of gender that reinscribe norms yet also allow space for re-working and un-settling of those norms. It was important to me to move discussions and research about sole parents and postgraduate education away from individualised description. Rather, I aimed

to examine the social, political, historical and institutional conditions that shape the conditions of possibility for sole parents in postgraduate education. This aim is supported by Butler's theory of accountability because it takes into consideration conditions that are not of one's own making and subject to power through the interrelatedness of evolving subjectivity. The utility of Butler's gender performativity for this research allows for an un-settling of sedimented attachments of female care for children. Throughout this thesis I have explored and disrupted the naturalised common-sense constructs of mothering. I suggested in this work that sole parents open up the possibilities for traversing across and through gendered parental binaries as they fulfil the parental care-work associated with raising children. I have also argued that this re-working of parental care-work, as caring work done by any body can extend and revitalise alternative kinship connections and alliances.

I elaborated on the operation of performative parental binaries to illustrate how mothering and the tightly held association of female care for children becomes critical to how sole parents are able to engage with postgraduate education. The socially reinscribed norms of female mothering frame the conditions within which the sole parents I spoke with are able to navigate through postgraduate research degrees because they effectively have two full-time jobs. This analysis contributes to and complicates feminist research that explores the effects of women's mothering work in the academy and contests the institutional frameworks that marginalise women because of their mothering and domestic work, work that I argue is performative in that it describes and produces the feminine subject.

In this research, I have also sought to think about how norms and practices of mothering are reinscribed and largely stabilised; to investigate how the category of mother is mobilised but also to disrupt the category itself. An important contribution this study makes is applying Butler's theory of gender performativity to (re)productive parental binaries. This is a key interest that I have brought to this study, and one that is rarely given research prominence. This work contests the compulsory

heteronormative assumption that is evident in existing academic research that tends to assume that academic mothers have the financial and childcare support of a co-parent/male partner. Gender norms operate through and in parenting because binaries of mothering and fathering are embodied in particular idealised gendered norms associated with femininity and masculinity. By exploring the gendered constructs of parenting in relation to the academy, I have disrupted the naturalised assumption of women care-givers which contributes to the scholarly conversation relating to gender in higher education.

Gendered spaces in universities

Secondly, this study contributes new understandings of how the delineated spaces of university institutions can influence the orientation of diverse students. My exploration of how ‘child-free’ spaces at university operate has opened up considerations of belonging and differential engagement with educational spaces as the experiences of the sole parent postgraduates in this study have shown. Participants created a sense of belonging and recognisability as postgraduate students through interpretations of university spatial arrangement that tended to (re)produce the academy as child-free. Adhering to university spaces designated as child-free reinscribed gendered norms through rules of access, boundary markers and accepted conventions which established legitimate use of university spaces through processes of repetitive engagement, particularly those with younger children. Child-free university spaces were read by these participants as potentially exclusionary. They interpreted child-free spaces as institutional conditions that failed to account for their parenting work and responsibilities. My analysis of the readability of university space as a source of engagement and belonging for under-represented students opens up examination and awareness of how diverse students experience university spaces and critically influences their participation in higher education.

I incorporated overt and more subtle performative speech acts that I theorised were acts which sought to reinforce university spaces as child-free. I continue this analysis to consider ways in which the institutional structures of universities tend to assume and/or privilege the unencumbered academic subject as demonstrated through timetabling of university classes outside child-care operating hours. This type of analysis contributes to new awareness of how higher education operates because it offers a theoretical analysis and draws attention to taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in institutional structures of universities. This is important because it also opens up the possibilities for disrupting and un-doing existing academic norms, thus potentially increased equity and engagement with higher education. Academic assumptions that students are unencumbered for example is often the foundation for institutional decisions relating to timetabling, space allocation and financial support through scholarships. These are mechanisms through which universities can demonstrate a commitment to non-traditional and under-represented students which can contribute to retention and engagement in higher education.

Recognition of and by academic supervisors

Thirdly, this analysis illustrated the critical nature of recognition by supervisors and also the limited recognition by these postgraduate students of the complexity and limitations of the academic supervisory role. Butler's theory of recognition is useful because it is not bound to individualisation nor abstracted from structural and institutional conditions. In this research I begin to detail the experiences of the sole parent postgraduate participants within the conditions of higher education, discussing their experiences 'through and against structuring institutional regimes' (Taylor, 2010, p. 634). This research demonstrates that for sole parents to become postgraduate students they must recognise others and be recognised by others. Butler states that recognition is always directed towards someone and dependent on others. This theoretical framework supported my analysis of sole parent postgraduate's recognition by academic supervisors which I argued was intensified and

compounded by a sense of isolation articulated by these sole parents. This provides new insights into supervisory relations, particularly pertaining to non-traditional and under-represented cohorts of postgraduate students.

I have considered how pre-existing understandings of ‘struggling single mothers’ influences subjectivity and frames recognition. My research has sought to open up considerations of parental care-work by sole parents which refuses the idealisation of hetero-normative families and exposes the sedimented nature of the nuclear family. Constituting sole parent families in deficit, as ‘other than’ the normative and ideal hetero family was present in the experiences of the sole parents I interviewed for this study. This was reflected in the thoughts of many participants who spoke of a reticence to discuss their sole parenting in the context of their postgraduate studies because they were anxious this disclosure would draw forward negative assumptions and attitudes. This reticence was particularly evident in the exchanges and relations between the sole parents I interviewed and their supervisors.

This line of enquiry has illustrated a lack of awareness of postgraduate candidates of the problematic conditions within which supervisors work. This lack of awareness of supervisory conditions was evident in chapter Five through Anais’s comments that supervisors ‘dominate your life’ and that they are ‘either not engaged or wrongly engaged’. This discussion was also an important contribution because it demonstrates the often random and un-structured nature of academic exchanges which direct potential students towards postgraduate education. The lack of institutional structure associated with connecting students and supervisors is illustrated in Sinead and Gillian’s comments in chapter Five (p.165 – 166) where they state that conversations with one academic prompted their decision to begin a postgraduate qualification. These exchanges were examples I used to show the contingent nature of recognition in operation. It also opens up considerations of how university institutions invite and facilitate engagement with postgraduate education.

I also theorised recognition in the university context through an analysis of the rules of recognition for postgraduate students in relation to conference attendance, high academic publication rates and university timetabling of essential classes outside childcare opening hours. I have illustrated how these considerations were critical in establishing the conditions that sole parents sought to be recognised as postgraduates. My discussion of these university based factors has demonstrated how normative engagement is (re)produced and how sole parents can only be recognised as postgraduates within these institutional structures. By theorising how recognition is formative in multiple ways I have disputed the existence of the unified university student subject and demonstrated ways in which university institutions may be able to be more responsive towards non-traditional students. This is an important contribution because increased awareness can support retention and enable wider participation in higher education.

Social Welfare policy = educational policy

Fourth, my aim to explore how sole parents experience postgraduate education as parents and students was enabled by my attentiveness to the cross-over between social welfare policy, the Welfare to Work policy and educational practices. By illustrating the overlap between social welfare policy acting as educational policy I have demonstrated how sole parent postgraduate experience materially different conditions as postgraduate students because they are answerable to the Welfare to Work policy and largely dependent on social welfare to provide limited financial support for raising children whilst completing an education qualification. The Welfare to Work policy directs Australian sole parents towards paid employment rather than education and this policy directive has significant effects on how the sole parents in this study were able to engage with postgraduate education. This analysis demonstrates the performative nature of policy, as it describes and produces sole parents as workers/tax-payers and limits the potential for sole parents to be recognised as postgraduate students. This has key implications for university practice in efforts to broaden

participation for students from low-socio economic backgrounds and students who are under-represented in higher education.

Agency within enabling constraints

Fifth, I intended for this research to explore the experiences of sole parent postgraduates and also to equally focus on their responsiveness to the enabling constraints of higher education to ask; How do sole parent negotiate their conditions of postgraduate studies in order to maintain their engagement? To begin this work, I drew from Judith Butler's theory of agency which enabled me to contend with the paradox of agency; the idea that agency depends on power and is therefore only possible through ambivalent conditions embedded in the ongoing process of repetitive performatives of norms. Theorising agency in this way counters meritocratic and individualised notions of agency often foregrounded in educational contexts.

The sole parents in this study shared their understandings of themselves as sole care and financial providers for their children which provided motivation for them to engage with and sustain their postgraduate education. I articulated a clear manoeuvre by sole parents to re-work their resources of both time and money to open up possibilities of postgraduate education. The participants shared a sense that it was because they were single, that a contingent autonomy exists whereby they were 'masters of their own modest means' and directed their time and money in ways that supported and facilitated their postgraduate studies and their child raising obligations. Agentic re-shaping of resources was in response to participant's limited financial capacity, a less powerful and secure position within the academy and limited ability to co-parent and/or share their child-care responsibilities. Many participants utilised the flexibility of study time as opposed to paid employment, as well as pointing to lifestyle adjustments participants made in order to live on restricted incomes and manage the long-term 'fiscal attrition' that sole parent postgraduates spoke of.

In chapter Seven I began to explore the potential for sole parent participants to agentially revitalise the process of constituting gendered parenting norms because they are operating within the normative structures of parenting and it is from this position that they open up the potential for them to be modified. However, I found that alternatives of kinship care or the use of linguistic performatives such as parent as opposed to mother, mum, or motherhood were not articulated in the interviews I conducted. The absence of a parental discourse was initially disappointing to me as I sought to affirm my researcher 'hunch' that sole parents potentially traverse the gendered constructs of motherhood and fatherhood. On reflection, rather than a disappointment, I suggest that this absence is a reflection of historically sedimented and powerful norms that reinscribe motherhood and fatherhood as performatives of gender. I also suggest that the absence of queering the category and practices of motherhood by participants reflects on my privileged time as a doctoral student focusing on this area of interest. This time has enabled me to contemplate Butler's theory of performativity which has framed my thinking and opened up my considerations of a continuum of parental care-work. This may offer some explanation as to why participants in this study did not share my researcher position in relation to parental care as opposed to mothering and fathering, as I was asking them about their experiences, not exchanging in a theoretical discussion.

With this in mind, I noted that largely, the participants were firmly aligned with normative constructions of female mothering. I regard this as important in how these sole parents experienced postgraduate education because it seems to diminish their parental work that I suggest (in so far as is possible) covers dual (usually) hetero parental work. Sole parents are not both mothers and fathers but provide care that cannot draw on and is therefore not reliant on gendered parental roles that designates acts of male parenting and female parenting. Many sole parents cover the parental work that is often done by two people and this increased responsibility for parental care-work influences how sole parents allocate their time and money in order to engage with postgraduate studies.

The absence of a (re)constituting of motherhood as an everyday feminine responsibility was illustrated through Eva's comments about mourning the loss of her nuclear family unit, even as she choose to dissolve her unhappy marriage. I regard this lack of critique of nuclear heteronormative family structures as an indication of the power and sedimented nature of the social norms of the family. Even as they were living outside of this normative structure, many of the sole parents in this research contributed to a repetitive (re)production of this idealised norm by constituting themselves as compulsory mothers, inevitable child carers, being a 'Mummy' and indeed describing their sole parenting as 'dysfunctional'. Drawing attention to and critiquing these powerful norms associated with motherhood and familial norms is important in extending our understanding of how care-work impacts on capacities for engagement with higher education. For example, university institutions nominate a limit of 15 hours a week in paid work to avoid distraction away from study, which recognises the time it takes to successfully complete a postgraduate qualification. Conversely, there is little or no recognition of parental work and the impact this has on completions of postgraduate education. I suggest that this lack of recognition of parental care-work is embedded in the practices and discourses associated with mothering, as a labour of love, naturalised and defining idealised and normative femininity.

Contributions to practice in the academy

My hope in illuminating the experiences of sole parent postgraduates is that university institutions may adapt and introduce programs to facilitate and encourage increased participation in higher education for sole parents. Because these insights have focused on postgraduate education they are particularly beneficial to postgraduate student associations in informing their advocacy and resources for diverse students.

Access to and payment rates of academic scholarship emerged as a key university practice that formed the conditions of account for the sole parent postgraduates who participated in this

research. The lack of scholarships for disadvantaged students and a lack of recognition of financial attrition for sole parents who manage household and childcare costs was embedded in university scholarship policy. The ‘one rate fits all’ academic scholarship award fails to take into consideration diverse conditions of account for postgraduate students that can result in under-represented students leaving postgraduate education because they cannot afford to maintain their enrolment. For example, a postgraduate student living with another adult who contributes financially to their household with no children, or a student who is able to live in student residences on campus have very different financial and educational conditions within which to engage with postgraduate education.

Similarly, this study shows that university travel awards do not take into consideration different conditions for students that can result in different travel expenses such as having to take a child on an academic trip because the postgraduate student is a sole parent. Academic travel funding that considers a ‘family supplement’ would be highly beneficial for sole parent postgraduates, who as students tend to have less money and flexibility to participate in academic conferences. A family supplement for funding academic conference travel could be introduced to acknowledge responsibilities of care-work and financially facilitate student and academic carer’s funding for professional travel that supports their academic and research work.

This study draws attention to the prohibitive up-front costs of academic conference travel. Travel awards that are reimbursed retrospectively are particularly problematic for sole parents who can find paying for conference registration, flights, accommodation and childcare upfront exclusionary. Additional research that explored the need for disadvantaged students to have conference attendance fully supported via upfront payments could explore this issue in more detail.

Informed and accessible professional and academic staff are critical in all stages of postgraduate education but particularly pertinent in transitioning periods. The provision of ‘parent

resource centres – or even just one parent resource specialist – can provide valuable information on available policies, childcare opportunities, and links to the community’ (Springer, Parker & Leviton-Reid, 2009, p. 449). In this study I found that information relating to part-time scholarship availability for postgraduates and study criteria and expectations were limited, often incorrect and therefore problematic. Additional research in this area could develop additional professional development for academic and administrative university staff to combat this gap in service delivery.

One of the main findings of this research is the critical nature of professional and responsive supervision to the postgraduate sole parents I spoke with which points to the effectiveness in increasing retention and well-being for postgraduate students. These benefits would particularly apply to sole parent postgraduates who tend to be academically and socially isolated. An increased allocation of time per student for supervision, professional development for supervisors, and mentorship programs have all been cited in this research as important factors for sole parent’s engagement with higher education.

Future research directions

This research project failed to attract any male sole parents, and whilst the absence of male participants reflects that 16% of sole parents in Australia are male, it nevertheless limits the analysis available in this research. Further research that incorporates male sole parent perspectives and experiences would be beneficial.

A study with a wider scope, with more sole parent participants, from broader educational sectors and incorporating the experiences of academic staff, university based professional staff, policy writers and political stakeholders, media and potentially children from sole parent families would provide a rich extension of the research work I have offered in this thesis. Considerations of co-parenting support levels would also provide more depth to further studies relating to how sole

parents experience higher education. Discussions in relation to co-parenting may also open up possibilities for further considerations of kinship connections and how sole parents potentially broaden notions of the caring for children. It would also be useful to chart the pathways for each of the sole parents. At what rate do they complete their postgraduate qualification? Are they subsequently able to access academic careers? Do they seek and obtain employment outside the academy.

I have attempted to incorporate multiple international perspectives to support the analysis I offered in this study. However, further international comparisons would provide important information about social welfare policies in relation to sole parents in terms of their outcomes of budgetary savings to government and social equity concerns. Incorporating additional international perspectives could incorporate diverse experiences of sole parents in higher education. Future research that internationalised sole parent experiences in postgraduate education could facilitate a transfer of scholarly knowledge. International programs such as the Parents as Scholars Programme²⁸ in Maine USA, The Parents as Scholars (Pass) program²⁹ and the UC Faculty's Family Friendly Edge³⁰.

In the UK context, the effectiveness of the Access to Learning Fund (ALF)³¹, which provides assistance to students in financial difficulty, and gives priority to students with children, especially

²⁸ See - <http://www.mejp.org/sites/default/files/PAS.pdf> accessed on 24.11.2013

²⁹ A student aid program that helps low-income parents in two or four-year college programs. Only parents who are eligible for, but not necessarily receiving, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, formerly AFDC) are eligible for Pass

³⁰ Designed by Mary Ann Mason the family edge program seeks to support and retain academic parents in the academy at the University of California, see <http://ucfamilyedge.berkeley.edu/ucfamilyfriendlyedge.html> access on the 11.10.2013

³¹ Also see: Student Finance England - <http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/policy-information/access-to-learning-fund.aspx>

lone parents. The Nuffield Foundation³² in the UK funds research programs which consider parent students and women's education. One longitudinal student survey will track more than 2,500 student mothers aged 21 or over who began their studies in 2005/6, other programs consider childcare, transitions, support and cross-national comparisons for student parents in the UK. These programs administered through universities are practical mechanisms for higher education institutions to acknowledge and support student parents. I suggest similar programs in the Australian academy would support increased retention of under-represented students and therefore contribute to the social equity goals of universities to widen participation and to reduce the gendered hierarchical nature of the academy.

Participant postscripts

As I finalised this thesis and wrote about the participant's experiences, I was interested in how the participants were almost two years after I interviewed them for this study. I sent each participant an email and asked them for a brief update on their PhD/Masters/Diploma work, news about their academic scholarships and any major changes to their study/parenting since we spoke during the interview process. I received no response from Sinead, Ani, Polly or Jean. The other six participants did respond to my update request.

Mia has completed a pre-submission seminar at her faculty and now studies part-time to enable her to work as a sessional associate academic and pre-school teacher as her academic scholarship ended. *Mia* is aiming to submit her PhD thesis by the end of 2014.

Michelle submitted her PhD thesis in July 2014 after receiving special permission from the Dean for a lapsed candidature submission. *Michelle's* final stages of her PhD were complicated by the death of her step-father and the end of a relationship. She accepted a post-doctoral position but resigned after 5 months due to work/family pressures. In October 2014, *Michelle* received

³² <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/tracking-student-mothers-he-participation-and-early-careers>

confirmation that her thesis has been accepted, she is now preparing to sit the GAMSET (medical entrance exam) to pursue studying medicine.

Eva is half-way through her PhD maintaining her part-time study mode which she describes as necessary and ideal. She combines parenting her two children, her PhD work and sessional associate academic tutoring and is enjoying contributing to her academic community. She shares that she feels 'more settled' than during the time of our interview. Despite this, Michelle writes that she still remains reticent to discuss her reliance on welfare in the university context, or her PhD study outside the university context.

Gillian wrote that her PhD studies are progressing well, she's finalising her methodology section, drafting academic papers for publication and involved in faculty-based committees. Her son has changed schools which has prompted increased interventions for his 'additional needs' and Gillian notes that this has placed additional strains on her finances and time. Mediation with her son's father has resulted in more settled co-parenting arrangements whereby Gillian has the care for eleven nights in a fortnight. Gillian has taken a semester break from her work as a sessional associate tutor at her faculty to concentrate on her PhD work and family.

Nina received an academic scholarship days after our interview in 2012 and has purchased her own home and has begun a new relationship. Nina discusses ongoing difficulties in dealing with Centrelink who have transferred her to unemployment benefits and this coupled with difficulties with her children, culminated in her taking stress leave from her studies. She writes that she is struggling with her PhD stating that "the studies haven't been going that well. I am feeling like I have wasted the last 2 years of my life!" However, Nina shares that she successfully managed an academic conference presentation in her home town and is re-working ethics clearance for the next stage of her research project.

In closing

In this thesis I have provided a unique contribution to further understandings of how sole parent postgraduates experience higher education. Sole parents in Australian higher education are almost invisible in academic research and literature. To speak back to this invisibility, this research has begun an exploration of how sole parent participants experience postgraduate education in Australian universities. Academic literature rarely considers the educational opportunities or experiences of sole parents, rather, it is concerned with academic mothers and student parents, a focus that does not accurately reflect the conditions of account for sole parent postgraduates as discussed in this thesis.

The close attention I have paid to the mediated conditions of account for sole parent postgraduates in this study has been framed and motivated by my own experiences. I have purposefully focused on enabling constraints and the interrelatedness of individual capacities and their conditions of account that are not of their own making. Australia promotes the emancipatory potential of higher education as an opportunity for all, yet a university education is still a stratified privilege (Bradley Review 2008, Connell 2011, Rizvi & Lingard 2011). I have demonstrated that attending to the under-representation of sole parents in higher education requires a nuanced investigation into the conditions of account that tend to reinscribe traditional access and participation. I have provided a detailed investigation by considering university spatial arrangements, institutional and supervisory recognition, social welfare policy analysis, a re-working of parental care-work practices through a lens of gendered subjectivities.

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Appendices



MONASH University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 10 September 2012

Project Number: CF12/2112 - 2012001146

Project Title: How do sole parents experience postgraduate education in Australian Universities?

Chief Investigator: Dr Mary Louise Rasmussen

Approved: From 10 September 2012 to 10 September 2017

Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Ben Canny
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Ms Genine Hook

Consent Form – Sole parents who are currently enrolled in postgraduate education

Title: How do sole parents experience postgraduate education?

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

I understand I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records.

I understand that:	YES	NO
- I will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- unless I otherwise inform the researcher before the interview I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

and

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

and

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interviews for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics without my signed consent below.

and/or

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

and/or

I understand that I may ask at any time prior to my giving final consent for my data to be withdrawn from the project

and/or

I understand that no information I have provided that could lead to the identification of any other individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party

and

I understand that data from the interview will be kept in secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

and

I do/do not give permission to be identified by name and understand I will remain anonymous at all times in any reports or publications from the project.

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Explanatory Statement

6 July 2012

Explanatory Statement – **Sole parents who are currently enrolled in postgraduate education**

Title: *How do sole parents experience postgraduate education?*

This information sheet is for you to keep.

My name is Genine Hook and I am conducting a research project with Dr Mary Lou Rasmussen a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education towards a PhD at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a 300 page book.

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

Why were you chosen for this research?

From your initial interest in this research project, I invite you to participate because you regard yourself as a sole parent and are also completing a postgraduate qualification at an Australian university.

The aim/purpose of the research

The aim of this study is to gather and explore the experiences of sole parents in higher education. I wish to find out the enabling and constraining factors that exist for sole parents in postgraduate education. I am particularly interested in how sole parents decide to continue studying through to postgraduate level and how they negotiate combining parenting and studying.

Possible benefits

It is hoped that this research will benefit universities to attract sole parents to further education and to increase understandings of the specific needs of sole parents within universities. This research has the potential to benefit all postgraduate sole parents by sharing experiences and illustrating issues particular to their experience.

What does the research involve?

Your participation in the study involves a 90 minute tape-recorded semi-structured interview at a mutually agreed location. You may also be involved in further on-line discussions to clarify issues you raise. Your involvement would also require you to read and correct an interview transcription.

How much time will the research take?

I estimate your involvement in this research will include 90 minutes for the initial interview and a further 2 hours of your time to check interview transcripts and provide clarifying information if required.

Inconvenience/discomfort

This research is interested in your sole parenting experiences only where they relate directly or meaningfully to your postgraduate studies. However, there is potential for discussions about children, finances and ex-partners to be uncomfortable and distressing. Pseudonyms will be used at all times in this research so no participant will be identifiable.

Counselling services:

Relationships Australia - Victoria

Phone: 1300 364 277 Email: contact@relationshipsaustralia.com.au Website: www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au

Lifeline

Phone: 131114 Email: www.lifeline.org.au

University counselling services.

Payment

No payment for your involvement is available.

You can withdraw from the research

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw from further participation at any stage but you will only be able to withdraw data prior to your approval of the interview transcript.

Confidentiality

All interview data will be transcribed and de-identified using pseudonyms. Any activity or event that may limit the confidentiality of this research will be removed from the data set and the thesis.

Storage of data

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes

The de-identified data you provide to this research project may be used for other research purposes in academic journal articles and conference papers and presentations.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Genine Hook, on genine.hook@monash.edu.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted, please contact:
Dr Mary Lou Rasmussen, [REDACTED]	Executive Officer Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 [REDACTED]

How do sole parents experience postgraduate education?

I'm interviewing sole parents who are currently completing a postgraduate qualification. I am interested in how you came to decide to continue on postgraduate education and how being a sole parent influences your studies.

Your participation would include an initial 90 minute interview and your participation is confidential.

To find out more and/or participate please contact Genine:



This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Project No. CF12/2112 - 2012001146

Title: How do sole parents experience postgraduate education?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Describe your experiences of transitioning from under to post-graduate studies?
- What are the main reasons for choosing to engage with post-graduate study?
- How does the university space impact on your studies and your parenting?
- How do you think sole parents are understood at your university?
- Describe some of the ways that sole parenting influences your studies.
- Has the 'Welfare to Work' policy affected your experiences as a post-graduate student and/or sole parent?
- What strategies do you use to balance sole parenting and studying.
- Have you ever wanted to drop out of post-graduate studies? Why?

Lb 3 Regents Park Dc NSW 2143



CLK2LETTERJ206837950001

Your reference: **304 028 412S**



Ms Genine Anne Hook
[REDACTED]



Australian Government
Department of Human Services

centrelink

13 December 2013

Dear Ms Hook

Changes to Pensioner Education Supplement

The Pensioner Education Supplement is being extended to Newstart Allowance single principal carers. This supplement helps with ongoing study costs. From 1 January 2014, you may be eligible to receive the Pensioner Education Supplement if you are:

- studying full-time or part-time, and
- a single principal carer receiving Newstart Allowance, and
- enrolled in an approved secondary or tertiary course.

To make a claim, go to **humanservices.gov.au/pensionereducation** and click on the 'Claiming' tab to download the claim form. You can return your completed claim form by:

- going to **my.gov.au** and signing in to your account to access Centrelink services. You can upload your evidence (up to 5MB) by selecting 'Documents and Statements'. If you do not have a myGov account, you will need to create one first and then link it to Centrelink
- using your Express Plus app and the 'Upload Document' option. If you do not have an app, you can download it to your smart device from the App Store or Google Play™. App Store is a service mark of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. Google Play is a trademark of Google Inc.
- going to **humanservices.gov.au** and logging on to Centrelink services online and selecting 'Documents and Statements', or
- posting it to the Reply Paid address listed in the claim form.

Information you should know

If you have any questions or would like more information about Pensioner Education Supplement, please go to **humanservices.gov.au/pensionereducation**

Yours sincerely

Kristian Blake
Manager



Support you can access

Changes to the income test for single principal carers

The income test for single principal carers on Newstart Allowance is changing too. You will be able to earn up to \$400 more per fortnight before losing your payment than you could under the current Newstart Allowance rules. The new test means payments will reduce by only 40 cents for each dollar of income a parent earns above \$62 per fortnight.

Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance

This is a payment to help with the cost of your approved child care. It covers some of the amount that's left over after Child Care Benefit has been taken out of your fees. You need to be receiving Child Care Benefit at the maximum rate to get this extra assistance. Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance payments are made directly to the child care service on your behalf. You will also be eligible for the Child Care Rebate, but will still need to make a contribution toward the cost of care.

Pensioner Education Supplement

You may be receiving Pensioner Education Supplement (PES) if you're studying and receiving Parenting Payment Single. If you switch to getting Newstart Allowance you can keep getting PES. You just need continue your existing course of study and you'll continue to get PES for as long as you're receiving Newstart Allowance. If you change courses or want to start a new one while you're on Newstart Allowance, you won't be able to get PES anymore.

Career Advice for Parents

Career Advice for Parents is a free telephone service that provides professional, informed career advice by qualified Career Advisers. Career Advisers have a good understanding of what employers are looking for when they review candidates for a position. They will look at your application letter, resume or selection criteria to help you market yourself as effectively as possible. Talk to your Job Services Australia (JSA) provider for an appointment. If you don't have a provider yet, we can help link you with one.

Managing your money

If your payment changes or the amount you receive reduces, you will need to talk to us if you have any Income Management, Rent Deduction Scheme or Centrepay payment deductions. We will talk to you about how changes to your Centrelink payment may impact your deductions.

The MoneySmart website has information you can use to help make the best choices for your money. They have tips and calculators to help manage your money in your day-to-day life. You can also find information on how to access free financial counselling services in your local area. Visit their website at moneysmart.gov.au

Training

You may have spent a bit of time out of the workforce since you became a parent. There is extra help you can get to build your skills and get back into work.

A JSA or Disability Employment Services (DES) provider can refer you to different registered training organisations to gain a qualification or work skills. You may be able to access a government-subsidised or concessional training place.

JSA providers can also offer employment and job search support, which may include access to financial assistance from the Employment Pathway Fund.

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Parenting Payment changes—
what you need to know



Australian Government
Department of Human Services

humanservices.gov.au

When your child turns six (if you are partnered) or eight years of age (if you are single) you will no longer be able to receive Parenting Payment. To keep receiving a payment from us, you will need to apply for another type of payment. This could be Newstart Allowance, or you may be eligible for Disability Support Pension or Carer Payment.

Parenting Payment compared to Newstart Allowance

Any changes for you will depend on whether you're receiving the single or partnered rate of Parenting Payment. You might still be able to access a lot of the same allowances you could while on Parenting Payment. Have a look at the table in this factsheet to find out more.

If you're on Parenting Payment Single and you move to Newstart Allowance your payment will be less. Some parents will be eligible for a higher rate of Newstart Allowance, which is the same amount as Parenting Payment Single. Single principal carers with large families of four or more, foster carers, or those who are home schooling or providing distance education have access to this higher rate. If this applies to you we can help you with your claim in your interview.

Participation requirements

You may already have participation requirements and an Employment Pathway Plan. If you don't, and you start receiving Newstart Allowance, you will need to have one.

To keep getting payments, you will need to look for work for at least 15 hours per week or spend 30 hours a fortnight in a combination of paid work, training or study. You may already be meeting these requirements.

There is more information about participation requirements on our website, visit humanservices.gov.au/parentingpayment to have a look.

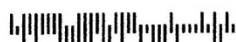
	Parenting Payment Single	Newstart Allowance single principal carer	Parenting Payment Partnered	Newstart Allowance partnered
Maximum rate per fortnight	\$663.70	\$533.00	\$444.70	\$444.70
Income test	Income over \$176.60 per fortnight (plus \$24.60 for each additional child) reduces your payment by 40 cents in the dollar	Income over \$62 per fortnight reduces your payment by 40 cents in the dollar <i>\$176.60 + \$24.60 = \$201.20</i>	Income between \$62-\$250 per fortnight reduces your payment by 50 cents in the dollar Income above \$250 per fortnight reduces your payment by 60 cents in the dollar Partner income above \$835 a fortnight also reduces your payment by 60 cents in the dollar	Income between \$62-\$250 per fortnight reduces your payment by 50 cents in the dollar Income above \$250 per fortnight reduces your payment by 60 cents in the dollar Partner income above \$835 a fortnight also reduces your payment by 60 cents in the dollar
Maximum income so still can receive part payment	\$1,835.85 per fortnight (plus \$24.60 for each additional child)	\$1,394.50 per fortnight	Combined income of \$1,669.50 per fortnight	Combined income of \$1,669.50 per fortnight
Advance Payment	Every 12 months	Every 12 months	Every 12 months	Every 12 months
Pensioner Concession Card	Yes	Yes	No	No
Health Care Card	No	No	Yes	Yes
Pensioner Education Supplement	Yes	Only until you complete your current course	N/A	N/A
Pharmaceutical Allowance	Yes	Yes	Must be over 60 years of age and on income support for nine months	Must be over 60 years of age and on income support for nine months
Rent Assistance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobility Allowance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Telephone Allowance	Yes	Yes	Must be over 60 years of age and on income support for nine months	Must be over 60 years of age and on income support for nine months

Lb 3 Regents Park Dc NSW 2143



CLK2LETTERJ188402310001

Reference: **304 028 412S**



Ms Genine A Hook
[REDACTED]



Australian Government
Department of Human Services

centrelink

15 December 2012

Cancellation of your Parenting Payment

Payment from 01/12/2012 — 14/12/2012 due on 18/12/2012 [REDACTED]

Payment from 15/12/2012 — 28/12/2012 due on 31/12/2012 [REDACTED]

Payment from 29/12/2012 — 31/12/2012 due on 02/01/2013 [REDACTED]

INFORMATION USED FOR CALCULATING YOUR FINAL PAYMENT

Annual Income [REDACTED]

► IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- The Australian Government announced changes to Parenting Payment in the 2012-2013 Budget. These changes affect you because you were granted Parenting Payment before 1 July 2006.
- Your Parenting Payment has been cancelled. This decision has been made because you do not have a dependent child under 8 living with you.
- Your Pensioner Concession Card is valid until 31 December 2012. Please destroy this card immediately after this date.

Organisations providing concessions to card holders can check electronically with Centrelink to see whether you are still entitled to use your card. For example, now that your card has been cancelled, an electronic check by a pharmacy will show that you are no longer entitled to the concessional rate of Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme medicines.

If you have any questions about the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme please contact the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme Information Line on 1800 020 613.

Contact information

If you have any questions about this letter please ring:



136 150 OR
13 1202 for Multilingual Services

Monday — Friday 8.00 am — 5.00 pm
(Please quote reference number **304 028 412S**)



Your local Centrelink Office:
33-37 Evans St
Sunbury VIC 3429



Office Hours:
Monday to Friday 8.30am — 4.30pm

www.centrelink.gov.au

Lb 3 Regents Park Dc NSW 2143



CLK2LETTERJ189578709001

Customer Reference Number: **304 028 412S**



Ms Genine Anne Hook
[Redacted address]



Australian Government
Department of Human Services

centrelink

15 January 2013

Dear Ms Genine Hook

Your entitlement to a Pensioner Concession Card

You recently received a letter from the Department of Human Services advising you that your entitlement to a Pensioner Concession Card ceased on 31 December 2012 and that the card should be destroyed.

This advice was wrong.

As a Newstart recipient and principal carer for your family, you remain entitled to the Pensioner Concession Card. The card you were issued whilst on Parenting Payment is still valid and can continue to be used until your new card arrives in the mail this month.

We apologise for any confusion or concern your family may have experienced as a result of these events.

New cards will be mailed to all affected parents by the end of this month. If you have destroyed or lost your existing card and have an urgent need to prove your concession status you can go to your nearest Centrelink office and be issued with an interim card.

Please contact the Department on **132 468** or go to your nearest Centrelink office if you have any further questions about the status of your card or any other concerns, including if you have had instances where you could have used your card but were unable to.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Campbell CSC
Secretary
Department of Human Services

