

“I am a person; I am not just the entity that is Julie’s mum”

The Experience of Being a Working Mum with Young Children.

Jo Law

School of Psychology

Canterbury Christ Church

University





Hello!

- Who am I?
- What is my research about and why?
- What will I cover today?



Why does it matter?

- **75.1%** mothers at work in the UK, record high (The ONS, 2019)
- **Negotiations and sacrifices**
- Social expectations: **'daunting expectations'** (Odenweller & Rittenour, 2017)
- But work makes them **happy!** (Guendouzi, 2006)
- **So why exactly do WMs decide to work and how they feel about it? What does it all mean to them?**

Methodology

- **Because:**
 - Occupational and Organisational Psychology
 - Quantitative research
 - Mainstream ideologies, which influence social norms, ignore the variation in individuals' life experiences
- **IPA** (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis): subjective experience
(Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009)
- **Research in the time of Covid:** 6 friends/acquaintances, online



Data analysis

- Transcript
- Case by case analysis
- Cross-case analysis
- Codes – themes – superordinate themes
- Findings



Results

Superordinate Theme

Subordinate Theme

Work-life (im)balance



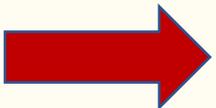
Stress, guilt, sacrifices
Pandemic challenges and burden

**Working improves
mother's wellbeing**



Empowerment and fulfilment
Working re-establishes identity
Escape from the hardship

**Perceptions of a
woman**



Gender (in)equality,
Challenging social norms
Role models
Connectedness and belonging

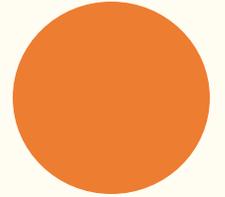


Summary and conclusion

- **'The inexorable motherhood situation' and guilt**
(Forbes, Lamar & Bornstein, 2020)
- **Illusory freedom of choice**
(Elvin-Novak, 1999):
- **Employment to preserve identity**
(Millward, 2006)
- **Persistent gender inequality**
(Leahy & Doughney, 2006)
- **Highly gendered sacrifices**
(Crompton & Lyonette, 2006)
- Shift of social attitudes but **gender norms persist**
– **macrolevel change needed**

Limitations, further directions and the PhD

- But why? Questioning **the value of motherhood**
- **Societal expectations**
- **“Lose-lose” dilemmas**
(Okimoto & Heilman, 2012)
- Issues with the sample: **intersection of a work and family life** considering contextual social and cultural factors
- **Reflexivity**
(Berger, 2015)



So the journey begins!

- Perfectly imperfect working mums
- Critical feminist psychology
- What is said?
- How is it interpreted?
- How is it lived?



<https://twitter.com/JoLawPsych>



Reference list

- Crompton, R., & Lyonette, C. (2006). Work-Life 'Balance' in Europe. *Acta Sociologica*, 49(4), 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699306071680>
- Elvin-Nowak, Y. (1999). The meaning of guilt: A phenomenological description of employed mothers' experiences of guilt. *Scandinavian journal of psychology* 40(1), 73- 83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9450.00100>
- Forbes, L. K., Lamar, M. R., & Bornstein, R. S. (2020). Working Mothers' Experiences in an Intensive Mothering Culture: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2020.1798200>
- Guendouzi, J. (2006). "The Guilt Thing": Balancing Domestic and Professional Roles. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 901-909. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00303.x>
- Leahy, M., & Doughney, J. (2006). Women, work and preference formation: a critique of Catherine Hakim's preference theory. *Journal of Law and Governance*, 1(1)
- Millward, L. J. (2006). The transition to motherhood in an organizational context: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 79, 315- 333. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317906X110322>
- Odenweller, K. G., & Rittenour, C. E. (2017). Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers, *Southern Communication Journal*, 82(2), 57- 72. doi:10.1080/1041794X.2017.1287214
- Okimoto, T. G., & Heilman, M. E. (2012). The "Bad Parent" Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68(4), 704–724. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1540-4560.2012.01772.X>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd
- The Office for National Statistics (2019). Families and the labour market, UK: 2019. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2019>
- *All the images come from Google Images/Getty Images