

**Organisational support throughout the maternity
journey: the perceptions of female academics in
selected UK Universities**

Anmol Abbott Joel

**Salford Business School
University of Salford**

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Prologue

As I sat in my office buried deep in papers with the familiar sound of my fingertips knocking against the keypad one day, I heard a strange creak at the door – it was Laura, my pregnant colleague. Whilst working at a distance from her in the department, I was not privy to her experience at work as an academic mother-to-be. To my surprise, despite her strong and confident exterior, Laura was struggling as a pregnant academic owing to discrimination she faced in many forms, and this point she was stood in my office in tears. I emerged from the papers and stepped out of my circle of assignments towards Laura to sit her down. She then went on to explain, in between tears, the pressure and tension she was experiencing with regards to her maternity leave, in the sense that she felt judged, and was made to feel incompetent by making the decision to have a child at this point in her career, and consequently going on leave.

I found this bizarre; and questioned the existence of this kind of work pressure in the academic environment – did it really exist? Was Laura in fact struggling? What did this mean for academic mothers? As I was pulled out of my circle of work and this was brought to my attention, I felt the compelling need to act – especially as a woman also aspiring to be an academic and a mother in the near future. I decided to ask questions around the department to other women, and to my disappointment, they were not phased or unfamiliar with this sort of pressure. It was almost as if this was a widespread norm against pregnant women in academia: the pressure, the enforced guilt trip, the seemingly bureaucratic burden of colleagues, the endless unsympathetic personal questions, and more. These conversations brought to light an entirely new conversation which, for me, needed research and discourse, hence prompting my research topic. I can say that I relate to Laura on a personal level as a woman, with personal choices to make in the future, which will affect my own career in ways I did not consider prior to this research.

Abbreviation

HE	Higher Education
UK	United Kingdom
POS	Perceived Organisational Support
HR	Human Resources
PND	Post-natal depression
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
HRM	Human Resource Management
HEIS	Higher Education Institutions
LMS	Line Managers [LMS & 'line managers' interchangeably used throughout the study]
The terms 'Women' and 'Female' are used interchangeably through this study.	

Note: The study has relied on pseudonyms for all the research participants. The real identities and names of the participants have been protected and deliberately obscured.

Abstract

This thesis takes the case of female academics to explore an insight into the organisational support afforded to them during their maternity journey whilst working in UK universities. Despite the fact that women represent nearly half of all Higher Education (HE) academic staff, they continue to be significantly underrepresented within more senior academic positions, in particular professorial roles. With this in mind, the workplace barriers that this group faces in pursuing a traditionally successful academic career have been analysed in depth revealing that the decision to have children can act as the primary barrier for career progression. Where balancing motherhood and an academic career are addressed, the focus is mainly on the organisational barriers women face, such as managing work-life balance, and difficulties with part-time and flexible work. In order to curtail such organisational barriers for working mothers, the government and the HE institution has introduced valuable policies and agendas, in particular; shared parental leave, right to request flexibility and the Athena SWAN agenda. However, an insight into the type of organisational support this group experiences to ease the maternity process can have a significant impact on an academic career, and it has yet to be analysed in depth.

The present study therefore seeks to address this gap and aims to gain an insight and understanding into organisational support offered throughout women's maternity journey. The overarching aim of this research is 'To investigate the perceived organisational support afforded to female academics throughout their maternity journey in selected UK universities'. As a means of addressing this, the study sets out to accomplish 3 objectives; to establish existing elements that shape female academics experiences of motherhood, to examine female academics accounts of support before, during and after maternity, and to evaluate collated accounts of support throughout maternity, in order to consider an alternative course of action.

The underpinning methodology used to gather data consists of a narrative interview approach that targeted a sample size of 26 female academics who had experienced the maternity journey within selected UK universities. Narratives from female academics involved four levels of analysis; the pregnancy and maternity leave stage, the transitioning stage from maternity leave back to work, experiences soon after return to work, and the gradual career progression experience. Upon this data being analysed using the thematic narrative analysis approach, the findings were then presented to a small group of 5 HR professionals and 3 Line Managers (LMs), also from a UK university. Semi-structured interviews were then utilised with these participants to gain their views on the findings.

These findings are then examined in line with the underpinning theoretical framework which includes theories derived from the literature review, namely the Gendered Institution and the Ideal worker. In particular, it utilises the Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory as an analytical tool in understanding employee perceptions concerning the extent to which an organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being.

A major finding of the research is that female academics have consistently faced as a result of organisational deficiencies in the provision of support throughout all four stages of the maternity journey. During pregnancy, there were perceptions of direct and indirect discrimination, insufficient arrangements made prior to maternity leave, different expectations of communication, and negative perceptions towards adoption. Whilst on maternity leave, their experience was heavily dependent on the immediate department, for instance, the LMs, colleagues and HR department, and there were related instances of planning an ideal academic baby due to the lack of a phased return. When returning to work both tangible (physical facilities e.g. childcare, breastfeeding) and intangible support (psychological support e.g. with miscarriage, post-natal depression) were essential aspects post return, but there was a general lack of awareness and acknowledgement of intangible support. The research also reveals that reaching motherhood inevitably affected career progression, primarily due to a culture of

inflexibility and presentism, in addition to several other organisational factors that affected working mothers such as part-time working, a lack of role models, pressure to publish, and an unmanageable workload. The research therefore finds that each phase of the maternity journey brought issues and concern for the women, the culmination of the stress, inflexibility and all around poor experiences, meant that women experienced stagnated careers due to the organisations inability to accommodate mother academics, and some women were even put-off from having another baby.

The second stage of interviews with HR and LMs revealed that organisational agents were driven by wider economic and organisational imperatives relating to performance management and to which everything else was subordinated. They lacked training and were ill-equipped to understand the issues and act in a genuinely sympathetic fashion in their provision of support for maternity leave. During this process, both parties appeared to want to pass on the main responsibility to the other, and in their defense they also pointed to inadequacies in broader university and HE policies that establish the framework within which they operate.

Taken as a whole, the evidence at the four different stages shows that organisational support throughout an academic's maternity journey remains lacking and underdeveloped. The issue under consideration thus requires further attention, both in theory and practice in order to ensure more suitable support is extended to working mothers in academia.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The year 2017 will be recorded in history as the start of a collective awakening for a segment of society confined by the artificial constraints imposed by tradition and patriarchy. As with many social phenomena of the 21st century, this awakening has been galvanized under the social media hashtag- ‘metoo’, an online movement whose significance is all the more relevant in the centenary of the suffrage movement (Donegan, 2018). Gender has thus been thrust to the forefront of most discussions, be it the opportunities afforded to women in the entertainment industry (Bennett, 2018), the circumstances faced by women in global rural communities (Sachs, 2018) or the challenges faced by women in the workplace (Warren, Risinger and Loeffler, 2018). A topical example of gender and the workplace is the interest generated by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and her debut speech at the United Nations (UN) during which she was accompanied by her three-month old infant (BBC News, 2018). To this extent, contemporary narratives and rhetoric in general have us questioning our very conceptions and ideas of gender and the extent to which these are ‘real’ constructs shaped by society as opposed to being rooted in biology (Schaffer, 2017; Young, 2017; Longino, 2018). Indeed, anatomically, men and women have fundamental differences, however we find ourselves in an age where we question whether these differences actually begin and end in anatomy.

The late Kate Millett, one of the pioneering figures behind the second wave of feminism and much of what we in the 21st Century have come to know of feminism in its current guise, famously questioned the extent to which differences between the sexes actually existed. More so, Kate Millett suggested that were unlikely to discover these apparent differences until sexes were treated differently. Here, the thinker argues that the purported emotional and psychological differences that were so commonly peddled in the previous century were unlikely to be rooted in biology. Instead for the celebrated scholar, these differences were symptomatic of the patriarchal structures that were so deeply rooted within society as opposed to being dictated by nature (Armitstead, 2018).

Economic and social development however has been integral in raising awareness into gender issues and the extent to which we as human beings have been socialised and imbued with related prejudices. Female representation in domains which were once prohibited to them

have rapidly expanded. This is evidenced by the fact that the rate of women in the work force has changed dramatically over the course of only half a century (Office for National Statistics, 2018b). Going further, the face of the workplace has also changed significantly over the course of the past few decades, particularly in advanced economies such as the United Kingdom (UK) which has seen a surge in equality and diversity policies aiming to create a more equitable and fair workplace (Hoel and McBride, 2017; Kirton and Greene, 2017). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2018) emphasises the latter arguing for the importance of a more inclusive workplace; inclusivity regardless of gender, race, orientation and beliefs is central to allowing people to reach their ‘full potential’ (CIPD, 2018). Despite this however, a look at current developments in both society and the workplace suggests a sense of collective and cognitive dissonance where gender in particular is concerned.

Beneath the veneer of a progressive and egalitarian society, recent reports suggest that over the past ten years the UK has been ‘slow’ to progress where gender equality is concerned (Schulze, 2018). As such, gender wage gaps continue to persist both in the UK and across the EU and the explosion of women in the workforce is simply not to be used as a measure or indication of workplace equality (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). Věra Jourová, a commissioner responsible for gender equality based in Brussels, upheld that much of what we see of the female experience and representation in the workplace remains nothing short of ‘sad’ (Boffey, 2017). In addition, the commissioner went on to suggest that Europe as a whole is amidst a decade long ‘stagnation’ where gender equality in the workplace was concerned (Boffey, 2017).

1.2 Overview of Problem: Setting the Context

At present, it is estimated that women make-up 47% of the workforce in the UK. Of those in employment, it is estimated that 35% of women are employed in senior managerial roles compared to 65% of males in the workforce. On the contrary, 69% of women are employed at junior levels in comparison to 31% of their male counterparts (Market Inspector, 2018). This raises cause for concern when considering the fact that despite making up nearly half of the workforce in the country, women are yet to stand toe to toe with males when it comes to representation in senior positions. The gender disparity has continued to persist internationally over the past decade, though little progress has been made to address this. Kliff (2018) suggests that perhaps it is fruitless to continue to observe the gender pay gap and simply report on this, rather, she argues that more has to be done to examine *why* this gender pay gap exists. Schulze (2018) goes on to note that over the years a number of studies have attempted to offer possible

insights, all of which have limited the possibilities to the fact that women tend to choose lower paid careers or pursue areas of education which yield lower pay in comparison to men. Interestingly however, there has been little in the way of empirical evidence in recent years to validate such claims at least until (Kleven, Landais and Sogaard, 2018) published their findings. As such, the authors offer compelling evidence using Denmark as the backdrop of their study whilst using Danish administrative data over three decades (1980-2013). Based on this data and its analysis, Kleven et al., (2018) uncover a phenomenon which they term as the ‘child penalty’. This refers to the fact that the arrival of a child was found to create a 20% wage gap between the genders. Upon the birth of a working woman’s first child, she was found to instantly fall behind her peers who were male, both in terms of occupational rank and probability to become a manager. The latter is of special relevance given that the focus of this study is upon women in academia, motherhood and the way in which this impacts their career progression.

On to the focus of the present research itself, the Higher Education (HE) sector in the UK is thrust under the research spotlight despite the fact that women remain well-represented within universities (HESA, 2018). This is illustrated by the fact that very few of these women are actually employed in senior positions, particularly within academic posts. This is further compounded when one considers research presented by the likes of Baker (2012b) Bagihole & White (2013) Aiston and Jung (2015) and Gatrell (2006, 2013) all of whom point to the barriers faced by women in academia when attempting to scale the academic hierarchy and establish themselves in more senior leadership positions. As such, scholarly work which has focused on the plight of women in academia has sought to collectively identify three most common barriers inhibiting career progression. These are grouped along cultural, personal and organisational factors (Aguirre Jr, 2000; Liza Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). These factors tend to be interlinked and seldom operate in isolation, though the present research will specifically focus on those grouped under organisational factors.

In this respect, a survey of existing literature reveals that there remain a slew of organisation specific barriers that hinder and impact the progression of women in general. Interestingly, recent research has pointed to the possibility of a ‘career break’ as being one of the most defining factors (Kleven, Landais and Sogaard, 2018). A career break within this context refers to motherhood, and statistics suggest that up to 80% of working women, will at some point take this ‘break’ from work during their working life in order to enter motherhood (Market Inspector, 2018). As such, the role of women in the workplace has increased dramatically over the past three decades, and despite this, it seems that maternity is not being

given the necessary consideration. Whilst paid leave is provided, it seems that research remains scant on the actual organisational support offered to women during this tentative phase of their lives (Duxbury and Higgins, 2005; Hoskins, 2013). A research gap therefore emerges, insofar as the type and nature of organisational support those women actually need during this stage (Baker, 2016; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Hardy *et al.*, 2018; Huopainen and Satama, 2018; Ladge, Humberd and Eddleston, 2018). In particular, the maternity journey before, during and after leave. The following study seeks to give women a voice and platform through which we can better understand their needs and requirements as well as their perceptions of support offered at present. This remains crucial to ensuring that women as a whole are not penalised professionally for simply wanting to build families and bring life into this world.

1.3 Theoretical Frameworks – Core Theories Relating to Working Women and Motherhood

The research domain has since seen the development of a number of theories relating to the perceived organisational barriers that mothers face, many of which directly contributed to the overarching epistemology of the present study, thus being greatly influential. Of these theories, the following have had the greatest role in shaping the present study; Gendered Institutions (Ackers, 1990, 1992), The Ideal Worker theory (Acker, 1990; Bailyn 2003); The Motherhood Penalty (Baker, 2012b); and Preference Theory (Hakim, 1995).

Gendered Institutions theory emerged as a riposte to the perceived inherent discriminatory ideology against women, firmly established in organisational structures the world over with the theory ultimately seeking to interrogate the manner and method behind such male-dominated organisational cultures and discrimination aimed toward women (Ljungholm, 2017; Carpintero and Ramos, 2018; Porter, 2018). Maternity no doubt arises as a central theme of Gendered Institutions theory and as such, is in keeping with the centralised motif of the present study in so much that working women, often mothers, are at the heart of this thesis (Brinton and Lee, 2016; Goetz, 2018; Seidman, 2018).

The Ideal Worker theory espouses that organisations are firmly rooted in an object-reality wherein employees exist, and are essentially willing, to work long hours in an office or organisational setting detached from any ‘out of work’ responsibilities or time constraints (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Lester, Sallee and Hart, 2017; McDowell, 2017). In the contextual environment that this theory operates from, there are no other demands on employees’ time other than work and the demands that centre upon work life (Howell, Beckett

and Villablanca, 2017; McDowell, 2017). The majority of the discussion regarding Ideal Worker theory does indeed revolve around the role of women, or lack thereof, in the work place. Specifically, much of the work involving the theory concerns mothers and the perception of working mothers; their roles and values as well as the attitude held toward them by the normative, often patriarchal, organisational world (Lester, Sallee and Hart, 2017; McDowell, 2017; Porter, 2018).

The Motherhood Penalty comprises more of a body of research encapsulating gender-based study and particularly inequality, rather than a centralised theory or model, per se. In that respect, Motherhood Penalty research has convincingly demonstrated that mothers tend to lag behind in terms of their respective careers, when compared with non-mother women workers and male workers (Andersen, 2016; England *et al.*, 2016). According to a number of researchers in the field, mothers are generally viewed by both employers and co-workers as being less committed and less ambitious than their child-free counterparts and male co-workers (England *et al.*, 2016; Oesch, Lipps and McDonald, 2017; Bedi, Majilla and Rieger, 2018).

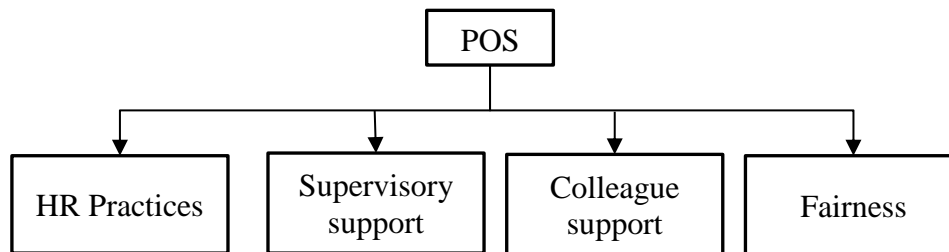
Pioneered by social scientist and feminist Catherine Hakim, Preference Theory veers wildly away from most theories concerning the role of women and mothers in the work place and by extension, society as a whole. The Theory thus upholds that some women prefer to place their career at the side line and instead focus on being ‘adaptive’; for these women, work-life takes a background position as they prefer to be ‘home’ or ‘family’ centred (Hakim, 2016; Lewis and Simpson, 2017). Post-structuralist researchers have often critiqued Hakim’s work on Preference Theory, often simply citing it as ‘wrong’ yet it cannot be so easily dismantled on a purely academic level (Hakim, 2016; Lewis and Simpson, 2017). It becomes apparent when taking a glance through the theoretical looking-glass of the above theories that there are indeed challenges for returning mothers in an organisational context and as such, many have attempted to explain why such challenges exist.

1.3.1 Perceived Organisational Support Theory

The present study focuses on the exploration, analysis and discussion of the proverbial mother academic and the perceptions academic mothers harbour regarding organisational support delivered to them after a period of maternity leave and their subsequent return to work. This exploration is facilitated by (Eisenberger et al, 1986) Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory which essentially posits that employees develop a perception concerning the extent to which they are valued by their organisations, both in terms of their output and well-being. The

central tenets of the theory that go on to underpin this present study are illustrated within Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: **Perceived Organisational Support Theory (POS)**



(Sources adapted from: Eisenberger et al., 2016; Puah et al., 2016)

In line with the above figure, the Theory in question tends to be underpinned by four main principles. To this extent, the first of these, ‘HR practices’ shapes the investigation through an examination of working contexts and conditions within universities at present, specifically as far as maternity support is concerned, both during and after an academic’s pregnancy. The next facet relates to ‘supervisory support’, here employees, based on their interaction with supervisors; transfer their feelings to the organisation as a whole. As a result, if a supervisor is perceived in a favourable light, so too will the organisation and vice versa. This in turn is also extended to the organisation as a whole as if employees are likely to view agents within the organisation positively when treated favourably, hence the term ‘colleague support’. The final dimension as per the Figure above, relates to ‘fairness’ and the extent to which employees regard their organisation as being just. Singer (2018) develops this further by pointing to the ‘theory of justice’, which has emerged within the context of business ethics. Here, three main factors are relied upon when judging organisational fairness; these include distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. In keeping with these, the research sought to specifically explore these areas and examine the perceptions and views of mothers working in academia.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Research

The focus of this thesis is upon the organisational support offered to female academics. The research also intends to gain insights into the interactions between the academics in question, their organisations and agents acting on the behalf of these very organisations. More

specifically, the research aims to *investigate the perceived support afforded to female academics throughout their maternity journey in selected UK universities*

In doing so, the research will attempt to explore the perspectives of those involved in this journey, mainly maternity and the return to work phase. The study is particularly interested in the experiences of actors who have to take a career break to accommodate maternity and the nature of support they receive during these periods, including their return to work. With this in mind, the following objectives have been identified.

In the context of HE, and selected universities in the UK, the objectives of this research are as follows:

- **Objective 1:** To establish existing elements that shape female academics experiences of motherhood
- **Objective 2:** To examine female academics accounts of support before, during and after maternity
- **Objective 3:** To evaluate collated accounts of support throughout maternity, in order to consider an alternative course of action

The objectives will be achieved through a research process, which will critically evaluate the *literature* to establish the current support elements for working women in general, with a focus on female academics and mothers. Primary *data collection* will establish female academic's perceived organisational support throughout their maternity journey in selected universities in the UK. Furthermore, a critical *analysis* of the data will establish themes and patterns in the treatment of female academics in their maternity journey. This will allow researcher to draw *conclusions* from the literature review and data to make recommendations that can enhance the support of female academics.

1.5 Importance of Study

The present study is important for several reasons, chief amongst which relates to understanding the current barriers facing mothers in order to contribute to the development of fair and equitable organisational practices. Perceptions of women have rapidly changed as our erstwhile view of regarding them as the 'fairer sex' and a group which had to be shielded from the ills of mankind have rapidly diminished. A secular society built on the principles of freedom and autonomy thus holds little place for views which reduce womankind to mere subordinates.

Indeed, the latter are a powerful pledge navigating society towards a more progressive and equitable existence, though the current state of affairs in the workplace would suggest otherwise. As highlighted in the previous section, we are yet to achieve fairness and equality as far as wages and career progression opportunities are concerned. The study devotes specific attention to motherhood and the maternity process in particular given that nearly 80% of women employed in the UK will at one point give birth and enter motherhood. This in itself should not be a reason women fall short of the career ladder and fail to progress and attain the same level of professional heights as their male counterparts. It is also worth noting that the issues under investigation is also pertinent to policy makers given that research suggests that harnessing women's full potential is worth between £18 billion to £23 billion a year to the UK economy (Market Inspector, 2018).

The literature reviewed (Bailyn, 2003; Barrett and Barrett, 2011; Baker, 2012ab; Bagihole & White, 2013; S Aiston and Jung, 2015; Gatrell 2013, 2006; Hoskins, 2013; Duxbury,2005) highlights a distinct lack of support at organisational levels as being one of the major issues for professional women in academia. Spiteri and Xuereb (2012) and O'dell (2012) inform us that often, the lack of support leaves a lasting impression on the women who upon giving birth are likely to stay at home due to perceptions that their new lifestyle will not be accommodated at work. Even if working mothers perceive the lack of support during maternity as being 'unfair', recent changes to the law which necessitate having to pay a fee of £1,200- in addition to the costs of raising a baby renders them unlikely to take the matter further to the an Employment Tribunal (ET) (EHRC, 2013). Furthermore, their reluctance to do so may also be compounded by the level of stress this process exposes a new mother to and thus something they may prefer to avoid altogether. This brings with several implications, as the once working mother may be put-off from returning to work, whilst creating unexpected vacancies at work and a loss of intellectual capital within both the HE Sector as well as the economy as a whole.

From a holistic perspective this in itself raises cause for concern given that this sector generates over £95 billion per annum for the wider economy (Bothwell, 2017). In addition to accounting for 3% of the total workforce in the country as UK universities employ nearly 1 million people, universities are said to play an indispensable role in providing the knowledge and skills that the economy depends on (Bothwell, 2017). This in particular is echoed by Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson who argues that universities essentially provide the 'fuel' for our economy and thus, these institutions have "*little room for complacency*" (Bothwell, 2017).

In light of this, the research will be of value to a number of stakeholders though the primary beneficiaries will be women working within the HE sector in the UK. The intended outcomes are also likely to benefit human resource policy makers in universities and allow them with a better understanding of the needs of new mothers in academia. The present research is also very important given the current lack of understanding and gap in the research as far as female representation in senior academic positions are concerned. Despite an increase in female PhD holders and women in academia in general, this demographic group continues to be grossly underrepresented as far as more senior positions are concerned (Bagihole & White, 2013; Aiston and Jung, 2015).

1.6 Research Journey

Having established the background of the research as well as guided the reader through the problem context and issues being investigated, the author wishes to take this opportunity to offer insight to the reader into her own research journey. This journey has been crucial to allowing the researcher to arrive at the juncture at which she finds herself at present. In this regard, this research has undergone considerable evolution and change since its initial inception; at the onset of this journey, the focus was very much on the policies offered and the experiences of women in the workplace, however this rapidly evolved into a study, which was preoccupied with the engagement of the key actors involved in the research.

As far as the actual research area is concerned, this was borne from the researcher's long standing and unwavering interest in issues surrounding equality and gender. These interests had naturally led the researcher to the discovery of stances such as humanism which embodied so much of her own belief system and personal values. It was through a, discovery that the researcher was able to pinpoint areas, which she was passionate about and more importantly uncover areas where inequality existed. Having a close network of working mothers, these inequalities became more apparent as it was observed that a considerable number of women devoted more time worrying about their working prospects following childbirth than they did anything else.

Following this particular discovery, the study had initially attempted to critique existing policy surrounding maternity however the deeper the researcher delved, the more apparent it became that organisational support was amongst the most pivotal issues as far as the women themselves were concerned. The research journey has thus been characterised by a shift in focus to reflect the researcher's own learning and discovery; the initial study was specifically focused

on the experiences of women in academia. Though later on, line managers and HR representatives were also included to get a more holistic understanding. The latter decision was very much influenced by invaluable discussions with HR practitioners and highly regarded academics who emphasised the importance of offering balance in research. It emerged that a study which only focused on the views of one group of actors, who were regarded as being disadvantaged (a stance later validated by recent research, see Kleven et al., 2018) would veer on the side of emotion as opposed to rationality. To ensure academic integrity, maintain rigour, and reduce the probability of bias, it would therefore be necessary to involve other actors who in this context were also rational, thinking agents. This additional group of actors would likely offer the ‘other’ side of the story and allow for the development of a more balanced study.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

As a means of better understanding the research questions and objectives set out previously, the following conceptual framework will provide an insight into the ways in which the underlying concepts and themes of this study fit together. In this respect, the conceptual structure for the research is adopted from the *Traditional Image of Research Design* (Babbie, 2013), which displays process used during research design. The initial *interest* of the researcher was rooted in the challenges academic mothers face when returning to work after taking time off for having a child. This initiated the *idea* of whether academic mothers are supported by the organisation throughout their maternity journey. Perceived Organisational Support Theory (POS) is used as a framework to question what kind of organisational support is experienced by returning mothers. This *conceptualises* into four themes of organisational support (but is not limited to); Human Resource (HR) practice, supervisory support and colleague support, and fairness. A narrative Inquiry *research method* is adopted to collect and analyse data, and the *population and sampling* of participants consists of academic mothers in five different universities. The qualitative data collection *operationalises* through in-depth open-ended individual narrative interviews. Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) argued that, because the world is understood in narratives, it makes sense to study the world in this way. This is specifically relevant to this study because the researcher aims to gain in-depth insights into academic mothers’ experiences and perceptions of organisational support throughout their maternity journey.

Then further interview questions with a group of Human Resource professionals and line managers in a university to elicit a different opinion. Gill et al (2008) confirmed that the goal of an interview is to elicit the perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of

individuals on particular aspects. *Observations* made in the literature review on identified challenges academic mother face on return to work aid the interview question themes, and the qualitative *data* collected is *processed* using manual coding and MS word and manually analysed using thematic analysis.

1.8 Thesis Structure

Chapter One: Introduction- Up until this particular point, this chapter has sought to provide the reader with not only a background of the topic under investigation, rather also provide an outline of the importance of the study as well as the underlying aims and objectives. To better illustrate just how these objectives will be attained and the steps the researcher will take to fulfil the intended purpose of the study, this next section provides an overview of the thesis' structure.

Chapter Two: Literature Review- this chapter has been streamlined into a set of distinct sections; the first of which intends to provide the reader with a robust insight into both the history and trajectory of women in the workplace as far as the UK is concerned. Here, the interaction that takes place is mainly with historical data, facts and figures, all of which are used to better frame the current problem context. This is followed by the second section of the literature review which draws upon current theories surrounding gender equity, the impact of motherhood on female academics and organisational practices in general. The third section acts as a continuation of the previous in that it continues to focus on gender and equity, though this is done against the backdrop of organisational theories such as 'ideal worker' and the Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology- the third chapter of the thesis goes on to establish the theoretical foundations of the thesis through a presentation of the philosophical and epistemological assumptions. As a means of facilitating this, the dominant paradigms and lenses are appraised before going onto; identify critical realism and interpretivism as those, which will shape the design of the research. The chapter also relays the various techniques and methods available to business researchers before identifying those, which best align with the aim and objectives of the current research. A detailed account of the decisions made during the research design, data collection and data analysis are also provided within this chapter, as the reader is guided through the steps taken in the design of the data collection tool, mainly narrative interviews.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussions: the fourth chapter of the study will convey to the reader the perceptions, attitudes and insights of the research participants that were involved within the research context. The chapter seeks to present a rich description of the views of both female academics as well as management and human resource professionals. The chapter is structured as to firstly provide insights into the key themes that emerged during the discussion before casting a theoretical lens over the assertions put forward by the research participants. In doing so, the chapter contrasts the key findings from the interviews with those of the literature as a means of determining the extent to which practice mirrors theory. During this inquiry, the chapter reveals that the level of support received during each key phase of the maternity journey is indeed a precursor into determining the likelihood of women in academia succeeding to higher academic positions. Furthermore, higher levels of perceived support are also likely to positively impact upon returning mother's careers and overall progression. Interestingly, the chapter also highlights the relative consensus amongst HR and management insofar as the lack of pregnancy support currently extended to women academics in universities.

Chapter Five: Conclusions- The principal focus of the final chapter is upon addressing, and reflecting upon, the extent to which the underlying objectives and aim of the study have been fulfilled. In addition to this, the theoretical and practical implications of the research are offered and special attention is cast on the research 'gap' and how the current study contributes to the existing body of knowledge. The chapter itself is drawn to a close by discussions on how the research can be developed further as well the limitations of the current study

1.9 Chapter Summary

The leading chapter of this thesis sought to equip the reader with an insight and understanding into the central issues under investigation as well as established the overarching research context. It is felt that the chosen area provides an idea setting for an inquiry examining career progression and maternity support and the women affected by this. The chapter has further looked to introduce the underlying theories that will form the foundations of this study and the extent to which they represent each of the individual participant groups at the focal point of this investigation. Having done so, it is felt that the subsequent step necessitates the reader gain grounding into the fundamental areas of research, which have been used to launch the remainder of this investigation. With this in mind, the next chapter offers an in depth investigation, evaluation and critique of the theories and streams of literature that provide the basis of this research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Having set out the parameters of the research in the introductory chapter, this next chapter will provide the theoretical foundations, which the remainder of this review will be built upon. In doing so, this second chapter will highlight the importance of conducting this research on women academics and their experience of the maternity journey in the Higher Education (HE) sector. As a means of doing so, the chapter utilises a multi-level analysis framework to contextualise the research problem. In addition to this so, it also engages with theories related to the area, in particular the Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory (Eisenberger et al, 1986; Eisenberger et al, 2002) as a lens to understand the issue under consideration.

A central theme of the present study is the exploration of organisational support during the maternity journey for women academics, and the extent to which this impacts eventual career progression. This is arguably contributed to by a number of reasons, chief amongst which include: *cultural factors* - societies view of women and motherhood, secondly *personal factors* - a woman's own choice, or *familial context* or circumstance, and thirdly, organisational factors - the organisation's perception of motherhood or support available (Aguirre Jr, 2000; Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). The study is preoccupied with the last point- ***organisational factors***; however, it is prudent to note that these factors are intertwined and can often be understood in relation to each other. This chapter adopts a multi-level analysis framework to review related literature in the following manner;

- **Macro- level:** Interactions over a large population, which for the purpose of this study include societal and national influences
- **Micro-level:** The smallest unit of analysis, an individual in their social setting, which in the context of this study is women academics
- **Meso-level:** A population size that falls between the micro- and macro levels; within the present context this has been identified as universities in UK HE.

(Blackstone, 2012)

It is prudent to note that the three levels of analysis cannot be understood in isolation, given that they are interconnected and influenced by each other. Through the process of a multi-level framework analysis of literature, *objective one* can be addressed- to establish existing elements that shape female academics experiences of motherhood.

2.2 Macro-level analysis of women's workforce participation: the national context

In order to understand the broader context of women's workforce participation in the UK, this section looks at a brief history around perceptions of women in work, as well as the most recent statistics of women's representation in the workforce. The section will also provide an overview of some related governmental legislation introduced to support working women in the UK.

2.2.1 Brief history of women's workforce participation in the UK

The Industrial Revolution (1750-1850) and the suffrage movement (1823-1928) had a profound effect on the nature of women's paid work and their role in the home. The expansion of the factory system separated 'home' and 'work'; women now earned independently, and were afforded the right to participate in areas which were once closed off to them. Women found themselves being able to participate in both war and work, and the effects of extended HE for women were being noticed (Pinchbeck, 1930). This particular paradigm shift however, remained disconcerting to many as it stood at odds with the prevailing thought at the time, an example of which is offered by Banks (1969) insomuch that "*motherhood was the consummation of the world's joy to a true woman*" (Banks, 1969, p. 61) meaning their role was to devote themselves completely to their husbands and their children. Neff (1929, p. 36–7) elaborated further, adding that a woman's role was confined to motherhood, any role or thought that deviated from this was seen as a threat to nature. The workplace and labour in general were therefore viewed solely as the domain of men.

Labour in general was viewed as an unbearable burden on women who were regarded as being physically weaker than men. Additionally, it was a major concern at the time related to the potential damage of work on women's health and childbearing capacity (Pinchbeck, 1930). In keeping with such themes, and Neff's findings, the advent of women in the workplace raised further concerns as it was felt that this would result in the negligence of home and therefore unnatural. Echoes of this can be found in the following excerpt by Lord Ashley, (1801-1885) who was an English politician, philanthropist and social reformer, mainly:

“You are poisoning the very sources of order and happiness and virtue; you are tearing up root and branch or all relations of families to one another; you are annulling, as it were, the institution of domestic life decreed by providence himself”

(Hewett, 1958, p. 49)

The concept of women working was essentially viewed as an attack on the traditional family and society as a whole. Moreover, women’s capacity to earn more was regarded as being problematic given that it was said to cause ‘improvident’ marriages, ultimately leading to the ‘demoralisation’ of husbands, who had to live off their wives’ earnings instead of fulfilling their “*true role as a breadwinner*” (Hewett, 1958, p.51). It was well established that women only worked if their family needed the financial support for survival, a woman working because she desired to work was not acceptable. This is contextualised further by Davin (1978, p. 58) in so much that:

“In the eyes of most people the workman’s wife is a creature of limited intelligence and capacity, which neither has, nor ought to have, any desires outside her own four walls. She is not so much an individual, with interests and opinions and will of her own, as humble appendage of husband and children”

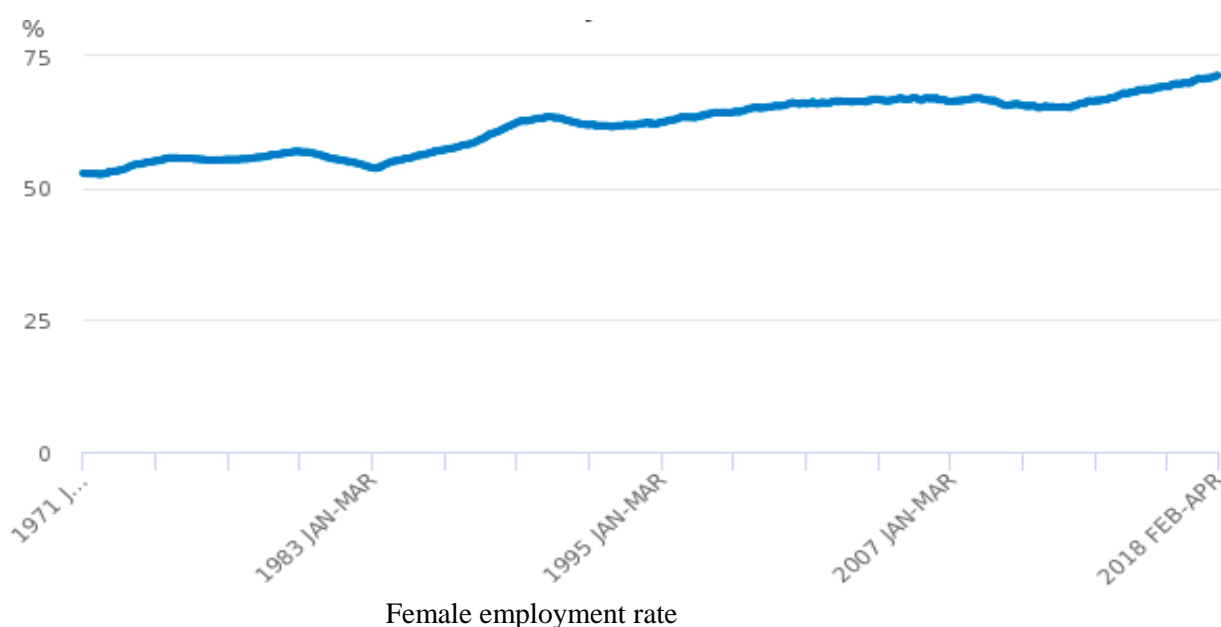
As a means of emphasising the limited sense of self afforded to women as well as the dissolution of their identity, Davin refers to women as a ‘workman’s wife’ or simply a ‘creature’. She further emphasised the pressure on women to be known only as wives and mothers and have no ‘interests’ or ‘opinions’ of their own. This also highlights the need to reaffirm certain sets of social values to readers of the time living in a chaotic society. With many revolutionary changes taking place including: turn of the century, scientific progress, industrial revolution, wars, end of colonisation, all causing anxiety in society towards progress and change alike, Neff, Hewett and Davin highlight a sense of reaffirming familiar and longstanding values which were starting to be challenged in a chaotic society.

Over the years, however, through various campaigns; the two World Wars, Industrial Revolution, the suffragette movements, the many waves of feminism and legal landmarks, women’s participation in the workplace has increased dramatically. The next section highlights this increased workforce participation and the key foundational legal landmarks that have been at the forefront of driving this change within the context of the UK.

2.2.2 Advancement of women's workforce participation in the UK

Over the past 47 years, there has been a steady rise in the percentage of women in employment with 52.8% in 1971. Progress in women's work participation is partly due to the two waves of feminist pressure for equal opportunities, especially the second wave in the 1970's which was built on the social science theory (Braybon, 1989). This argued that women's roles in society are defined by social construction not biological realities, implying that biological arguments are used as a way of denying women equality of opportunity and as an excuse for men not to share the traditional caring and nurturing tasks for as women at home (Hufton, 1984). Through many developments, women's representation came a long way to an outstanding increase to 71.3% of women in employment in 2018 (Office for National Statistics, 2018a).

Figure 2.1: Female employment rate (aged 16-64) between 1971-2018

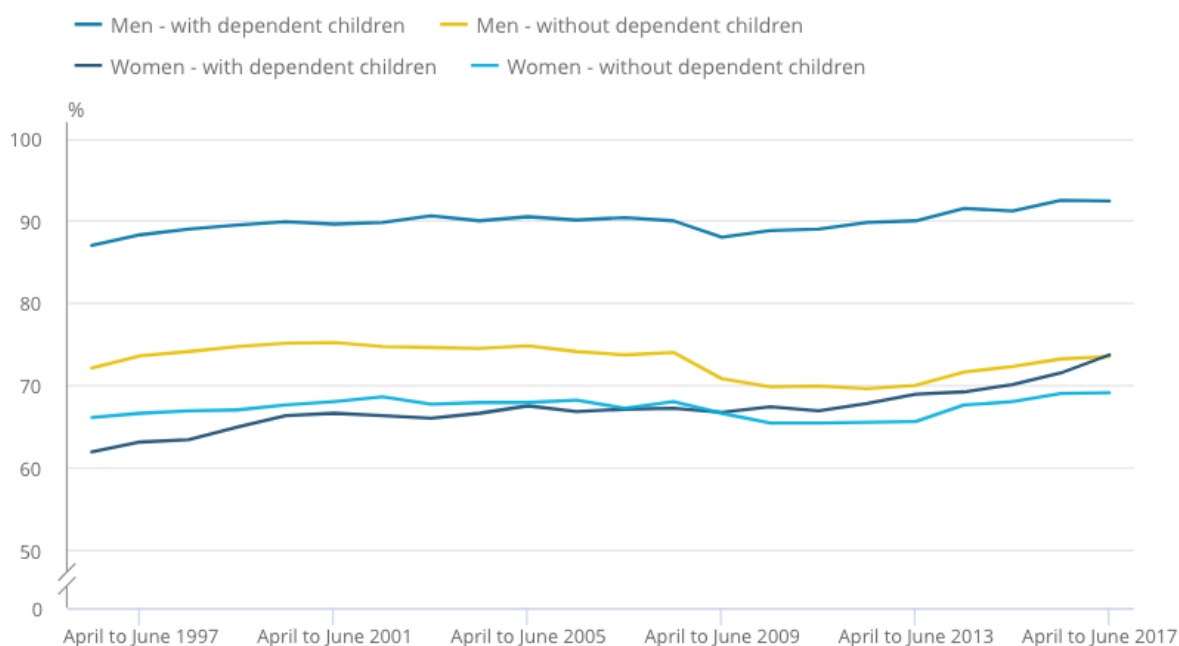


(Source: Office for National Statistics, 2018)

Between 1971 and 1991, more women started participating in the workplace; this could be due to several factors, including the decline in the manufacturing sector and growing demand to employ people in the service sector. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) report, the rise in women's employment is partly also due to an increase in the percentage of mothers in work (ONS, 2018). Reasons for this might include more flexible working practices and changes to government policy on the availability of childcare.

Employment rates for mothers (and fathers) have also generally increased over the years. Figure 2.2 shows the employment rates of men and women with and without children over a period of time.

Figure 2.2: Employment rates of men and women with and without dependent children (aged 16-64), 1996-2017, England



(Source: Office for National Statistics, 2017)

Figure 2.2 shows that over the past 20 years, mothers with dependent children have experienced the largest increase in employment rates. As of 2017, there were 4.9 million mothers in employment, which equates to 73.7% of all mothers. In comparison, 3.7 million mothers were in employment in 1996, which was equivalent to 61.9% (Office for National Statistics, 2017b). However, whilst there has been a vast improvement of the percentage of mothers in the workplace (both with and without dependent children), it is evident that they are still significantly less than their male counterparts, fathers (with or without dependent children) in the workplace. There is a higher percentage of working mothers with dependent children rather than without dependent children making this research more pertinent. In addition, mothers with a youngest child aged between three and four years have the lowest employment rate of all adults with or without children, and are the most likely group to work part-time. Men on the other hand are always more likely to work full-time than part-time, irrespective of whether they have children or not (ONS, 2017).

It is argued that an estimated 80 more years are needed to achieve global gender parity in the workplace (Schwab *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, though the Equal Pay Act was enforced 40 years ago, there is still an existing gender pay gap (Fawcett, 2014). Women are also under-represented in senior level positions, accounting for 26.1% of FTSE Board members, although this is an improvement from 12.5% in 2011, it is behind other leading European countries, like Norway (35.1%), Sweden (32.6%), France (32.50%), Finland (29.4%) and Belgium (28.50%) (Davies, 2015).

The next section highlights some of the governmental landmarks that have helped change the legal framework due to which women's experiences of the labour market have developed, but there is still evidence of persisting problems in gender equality

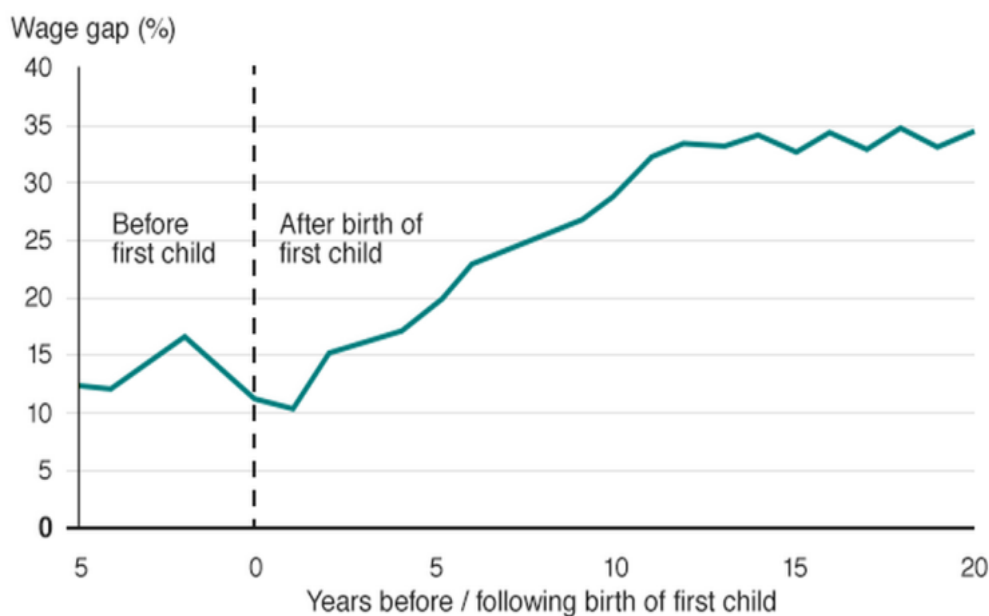
2.2.3 Legal policies to support families but with persistent problems?

To help aid a more family-friendly work practice the UK government has introduced various legislations. This section discusses some of the more pertinent ones.

2.2.3.1 Addressing the Gender pay gap

Despite amendments such as the Equal Pay Act (1975) (Employment Group Department, 1994) and Equality Act (2010) (Employment law guide, 2010), a sizeable gender pay gap continues to persist as unequal pay remains an ever present issue in the UK (Gow, Laura; Middlemiss, 2011; Dias, Joyce and Parodi, 2018). Debates around the need to tackle the gender pay gap are constantly in the news. As such, Prime Minister Theresa May has made no attempt to skirt around the issue as during her very first address as UK Prime Minister, she frankly stated "*If you're a woman, you will earn less than a man*" - setting the note of the current political stand on the matter. Elsewhere, the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn also laments the ever present pay gap which he acknowledged inasmuch that "*Last year Britain was ranked 18th in the world for its gender pay gap ... We can and must do far better.*" (Institute for Fiscal Studies, p. 04, 2016). Since then, there have been widespread reports of gender pay gaps across notable organisations in the UK. For example, the BBC have been met with nationwide scrutiny since media reports which have accused the national broadcaster for failing to tackle its own disparities in gender related pay (Moore, 2018). Elsewhere, there have been some reports that UK employers are taking action to address their gender pay gap (Faragher, 2018) though, reports highlight that working mothers face an even higher disparity of pay in the UK. In particular, the wage gap widens when women have children, as seen in Figure 2.3:

Figure 2.3: **How the gender wage gap increases gradually for mothers after the arrival of a child**



(Source: The Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2016)

The findings of a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS, 2016) revealed that working mothers earned significantly less than their male counterparts. More specifically, the gap between hourly earnings of the two sexes is said to become steadily wider after women become mothers; women’s hourly pay rate falls 33% behind men’s. The IFS explain this is partly due to the fact that women who return to work after childbirth often opt for part-time work; this also impacts their opportunities for promotions. Figure 2.3 displays the gradual increase in gender pay gap after the arrival of children. The Associated director at IFS, Robert Joyce (IFS, 2016) reported that:

“The gap between the hourly pay of higher-educated men and women has not closed at all in the last 20 years. The reduction in the overall gender gap has been the result of more women becoming highly educated, and a decline in the wage gap among the lowest-educated”

Within the context of universities, an independent report on HE many years ago (Bett, 1999) found that women were systematically underpaid at all levels in universities. The Association of University Teachers (AUT), a higher education trade union, later outlined in 2001 that the gap between average salaries for male and female academic staff in UK HE had widened in the previous five years (AUT, 2001). More recently in 2016, University College Union (UCU) presented data in a report for International Women’s Day that showed that the gender pay gap across HE equated to a shortfall of £6,103 per year for each female academic.

This means that in total, the salary spent on female academics is £1.3 billion less than it is for male academics. Furthermore, at 154 HEIs in the UK, women are paid less than men on average, and at only eight HEIs are women paid equal to or more than men. This gap is even larger at Russell Group institutions where the gap is 16.3% (UCU, 2016, p. 02). UCU claims it is evidently clear that women are not being promoted to the top academic posts, and by looking at the rate of progress over the previous 10 years, they estimated that it would take until 2050 to close the gender pay gap (UCU, 2016, p. 02).

For women, the gender pay gap can be explained by focusing on role differentiation in within the home and the work market. Historically, Mincer & Polachek (1974) argued that many years ago women had different job skills than men; this was due to the fact that women assumed the bulk of household and childcare responsibilities and consequently developed quite different patterns of investment in on-the-job training. Women not only spent less time overall in the labour market than men, but they were also less likely to work continuously. They interspersed periods of paid market work with periods of labour force withdrawal due to family responsibilities, particularly childbearing. This influenced wages in three ways; firstly, women acquired less total work experience, job tenure, and seniority than men. Secondly, women's human capital could actually depreciate during periods of labour force withdrawal for childrearing and, thirdly, women who planned to leave the labour force for familial duties tended to defer on-the-job training until they re-entered the labour market.

It was also argued that the sex division of labour within the home also affected women's wages (Ferber, 1998). When women worked, they had to balance the demands of work and family and were maybe forced to accept lower paying jobs that were closer to home, or jobs which not only allowed for compatible work schedules, but also accommodated any absenteeism due to children being unwell. The latter would force working mothers to stay at home and care for their children and thereby miss work at very short notice. These factors may have lowered women's productivity and wages relative to men's. In more recent times, reportedly the mean average pay gap across UK sector stands at 15.9 per cent, with 30 institutions reporting gaps in excess of 20 per cent (Pells, 2018). Moreover, the long-term narrowing of the gender pay gap, which predominately reflects relative improvements in women's productivity-related characteristics in the public sector, is found to stall in 2010 within each sector (Jones, Makepeace and Wass, 2018).

Moreover, the long-term narrowing of the gender pay gap, which predominately reflects relative improvements in women's productivity-related characteristics in the public sector, is found to stall in 2010 within each sector (Jones, Makepeace and Wass, 2018). Davies (2015) recommended that in order for these issues, including the stall in 2010, to be addressed, it would be necessary to consider and introduce additional measures. More specifically, Davies (2015) raises the possible introduction of Human Resource audits in public and private sectors. However, it is acknowledged by Baker (2012a) that universities have made substantial improvements towards gender balancing over the recent decades. That said however, these institutions have also had to respond to industry drivers and trends; this includes encouraging academics to increase their research productivity, funded research, and other entrepreneurial activities. These new priorities have served to contribute further to gender inequalities within academia (Baker, 2012a).

2.2.3.2 Addressing Gender discrimination

As well as inequality in pay, women in the workplace continue to struggle with discrimination, specifically on the grounds of sex, and pregnancy and maternity (Vonts *et al.*, 2018). Whilst these are both protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and give women the opportunity to take unlawful acts to the Employment Tribunals (ET), they do not eradicate the existence of such discrimination (Perren *et al.*, 2012). Analysis of previous data on ET claims shows a positive correlation between sex discrimination cases and female claimants (Burgess *et al.*, 2001). Likewise, Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) responsible for providing advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law, carried out an analysis on gender distribution of sex discrimination and equal pay cases and found that 90% of former and 80% of latter applications were female (Fox, 2005, p. 04). The increasing numbers of discrimination cases of female applicants were also closely related to pregnancy discrimination. The Equality and Human Rights Commission undertook extensive research based on interviews with 3,034 employers and 3,254 mothers. From this, it emerged that up to three in four mothers (77%) said they had a negative or possibly discriminatory experience during their maternity process. If scaled up to the general population this could mean as many as 390,000 mothers a year (Beaston *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, women miss out on £12 million in Statutory Maternity Pay annually (Beaston *et al.*, 2016). This is another form of undervaluation for mothers and women returners due to childcare restraints, disruption in career and low pay or status they may be forced into accepting.

2.2.3.3 Addressing Childcare

Childcare costs in the UK are significantly high (de Muizon, 2018). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a body of 35 member countries reported data on childcare costs. As such, the OECD revealed that if considering the actual cost of childcare, before any subsidies or tax credits, this remains relatively high in the UK, which subsequently ranked as the 7th highest in the grouping nations (OECD, 2016). However, when considering a two-parent family on an average wage, then the UK has the highest childcare costs of any country in the OECD.

The UK government, over the years has acknowledged the need to address childcare as part of a wider agenda to tackle other concerns such as, unemployment, poverty and inequality. This has included policies such as, the National childcare strategy (1998) to establish high quality, affordable childcare within communities, free nursery places for three to four year olds (2004), entitlement to 15 hours of state-funded education for three-four year olds (2010). As well as, tax credit to support families who use formal childcare, childcare vouchers to support parents in work, and the Early Years Premium as additional funding allocated to early years education providers for disadvantaged three-four year olds. More recent developments include Universal Credit (2016), which covers up to 85% of childcare costs for parents who qualify (Roberts, Ellie; Speight, 2017).

However, childcare costs are still identified as the single largest obstacle in regards to returning to work, by more than four in ten mothers (42% of those in work and 41% of those not working) (Boca, 2015). Additionally, shadow childcare minister, Lucy Powell, pointed to international figures showing that Britain lagged behind many European countries such as Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden in helping many mothers return back to work. The Scandinavian countries mentioned have tended to heavily focus attention to such matters and are known to have in place heavily subsidised childcare (Ronzulli, 2014). In the UK, just 21% of women were the main earners in their relationships, compared to workers in Sweden, where each child is guaranteed a place at a public pre-school and no parent pays more than 3% of their salary for it. Over 78% of mothers with children under seven are therefore at work. The main difficulty that new mothers in the UK face involves the cost of childcare in relation to their earnings, where it is prudent financial sense not to return to work even if they wanted to, in order to save on costs. Often this has a negative impact on the desired career progression and leads to organisational and economical loss (Nowak et al., 2013).

2.2.3.4 Addressing further family-friendly rights

Employees in the UK workplace have a number of fundamental family-friendly rights. These include the right to maternity leave, paternity leave, and adoption leave. There has also been introduction of further legislation. In 2011, the UK passed the Additional Paternity Leave policy, but the take up of it has been low over the years (Kaufman, 2018). Investigation into the reasons for the lack of take up were found to be; financial costs, gendered expectations, perceived workplace resistance, and policy restrictions (Kaufman, 2018).

Later, in 2015 the UK brought into effect Shared Parental Leave, where eligible parents can have up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay shared between them, however take up of that has also been reportedly limited (Atkinson, 2017). Shared Parental leave has received criticism that it is flawed as a policy because while the UK government argues for a more equal division of childcare between both parents, it seems unwilling to challenge the expectation that mothers provide the primary care for young children. Therefore, it should include a higher rate of pay and a period of leave reserved for fathers (Atkinson, 2017).

There was additional introduction of the legal right to request flexible working. Initially the right was only available for parents. The right, however, was later extended to cover all workers as of 2014 (ACAS, 2014). The Institute for Public Policy Research reported that, since the extension of the right to request flexible working in 2014, 36% of women in employment with children under six have requested more flexible hours, with 80% of requests either partially or fully agreed (Silim and Stirling, 2014) .

The report from Modern Families Index (2017) was completed by 2,750 parents across the UK in 2016. It found that overall many parents expressed positive views about their relationship with their employer. In this respect, 46% of parents agreed that flexible working was a genuine option for mothers and fathers. An identical percentage (46%) agreed that their organisation cares about their work-life balance. Furthermore, 51% thought that their employer would take account of their family responsibilities and treat them fairly and the same number said they felt confident discussing family-related issues with their employer (Working Families, 2017). On the whole, family-friendly policies are borne out of recognition of employees' changing needs as they enter new stages of their life; the most pivotal of which is parenthood. Hence, family-friendly working practices will be among the most compelling elements of an organisation's value proposition for people planning to have children. Offering such benefits can have a positive impact on retention, however it is imperative that the policies are accessible and implemented in practice (Ke and Deng, 2018), unlike certain heavily criticised political

policies put in place which have been challenged. This is in order to gain the best possible outcome for organisations and employees alike – improving employment rates to match those of our Scandinavian counterparts who are ahead in gender parity.

A macro analysis of the broader national context in the UK indicates that there are topical issues with women's employment, in particular, a mother's employment. It shows that the UK has come a long way in its advancements towards more gender parity, and there is evidence of increasing legislation to support women in the workplace. With this in mind, it is important to conduct a meso-level analysis that looks in detail at the organisational context, with a focus on the UK HE sector, and the group of women that are the focus of this study, academic women.

2.3 Micro-level analysis of women academics workforce participation and motherhood: the individual context

At the micro-level of analysis, the research population is typically an individual in their respective social setting. In this case, this section looks at a brief overview of some key personal factors that women academics, in particular mothers, may struggle with. This include factors such as; confidence, apprehension to ask for what one wants, guilt, and household responsibilities.

2.3.1 Lack of Self-Confidence

One argument is that women tend to undervalue their skills and may lack self-confidence (Chapple and Ziebland, 2018). It is also contested that any woman who waits until she feels 100 % confident before offering a big idea or asking for a raise or promotion will struggle to be promoted (Baker, 2012a); as appearing self-confident is instrumental for progressing at work (Guillen, Mayo and Karelaia, 2018). Lerner (2015) encourages women to use practical strategies to beat this 'confidence myth' and overcome obstacles like gender bias.

Specifically, in terms of the academic profession, developing new projects, submitting articles for publication and applying for funding or promotion all require confidence and sustained belief in one's abilities. Researchers therefore need to 'sell' their ideas to publishers, granting agencies and colleagues. Studies (e.g. Brooks, 1997; Fels, 2004) have suggested that males are more likely to believe their scholarship is worthy, to portray themselves as experts, and to apply for grants or promotion – even when they think it is a 'long shot'. Cokley et al., (2015) speculated that given differences in gender confidence is usually because when compared to their male counterparts' women are more susceptible to the 'imposter

phenomenon’- the experience of intellectual fraudulence or phoniness among other achievers. Thus, the lack of this elusive and intangible concept ‘self-confidence’ can be a key factor in holding some women back from the potential opportunities for progression, as there can be reluctance to put themselves forward.

2.3.2 Reluctant to put self forward

As well as having confidence in ‘selling’ one self with a positive attitude, it is found that women are not as comfortable, as some of their male counterparts perhaps, to ask for what they want from their workplace (Maliniak, Powers and Walter, 2013). A survey asked respondents to rate along a seven-point scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with some statements. Low scores were to indicate people who saw little benefit to asking for what they wanted because they perceive their environment as unchangeable, and high scores would indicate people who perceive most situations as adaptable to their needs and regularly look for ways to improve their circumstances. The results revealed that 45% of women were more likely than men to score low(er) on this scale, indicating that women are much less likely than men to see the benefits and importance of asking for what they want. This, exacerbated by a lack of confidence, can lead to women missing out on potential opportunities. The survey also found that women recounted stories of not realising what could be changed by asking- a problem that is claimed to arise early and persist well from old age (Babcock and Laschever, 2009).

Another piece of research reported women’s reluctance to put themselves forward for progression, even when they met the stated criteria (Doherty and Manfredi, 2006). The seeming reluctance of women academics to put themselves forward or engage in self-promotion activities is often discussed in the literature about women in higher education (Camille, Howson and Croix, 2018). Scholars urge female academics to become “*involved in the competitive, self-promotional behaviour traditionally associated with dominant masculinities*” (Leonard, 2001, p. 4). While, this stereotype is backed by research, Camille et al (2018) contended that it can lead to the type of ‘fix the women’ approaches, common in universities, whereby special training (e.g. assertiveness training) is provided to ‘help’ women academics overcome their inhibitions in this regard. Instead they argue that what is harder to tackle is the structural disadvantage women face, if men do not see women academics as having the same status as them, or as able to assume the leadership roles that they do, or as producing scholarly output that is worthy of citation at the same rate as men. This situation is also exacerbated by inconsistent advice and support, or even by outright discouragement. There are suggestions that this could be tackled by providing more centrally delivered support mechanisms and

by establishing mentoring/networking schemes amongst women academics (Doherty and Manfredi, 2006; Leonard, 2001). In addition, it appears that working mothers continue to take on the bulk of household chores, which makes the work-life balance harder to maintain.

2.3.3 Mothers carry out majority of the Household work

Another issue that mothers in the UK and possibly in most societies face, is the unequal share of household and care giving responsibilities placed upon them (Fetterolf and Rudman, 2014). Gender equality in terms of who does the bulk of the chores and who is primarily responsible for looking after the children has made very little progress in terms of what happens in people's homes. Men's uptake of unpaid domestic work is slow, and women continue to feel that they are doing more than their fair share (Harkness, 2008). Research shows that, as in the early 1990s, women still undertake a disproportionate amount of unpaid labour within the home and are much more likely to view their respective contribution as being unfair. Women report spending an average of 13 hours on housework and 23 hours on caring for family members each week; the equivalent figures for men are eight hours and ten hours (Park et al, 2013). This has often been termed the 'double shift'- both doing a paid job and the bulk of family care and housework chores. Whether women's 'double shift' is sustainable is an important question for the future.

However, this is cause for public concern because gender inequalities in the home undoubtedly make it difficult to achieve gender equality in the workplace (Sabrina, Askari and Mindy, 2010; Andringa, Nieuwenhuis and Gerven, 2015). Women's 'caring role' is seen to extend even within the academic profession. This is in the sense that women academics tend to be clustered in departments valuing 'pastoral care'; such as, social work, education and language teaching, which expect longer teaching hours and more student-related meetings, leaving less time for research specialisation- which is what ultimately counts when considering potential for promotion (Leahey, 2006).

2.3.4 The working mother 'Guilt'

There is also the feeling of constant guilt that most mothers express in their working lives (Sutherland, 2010)- it is prevalent in our culture to an extent that it is considered a 'natural' part of motherhood (Seagram, Judith and Daniluk, 2002). Liss et al., (2013) proposed that guilt results from perceived discrepancies between one's actual and ideal selves. The fear of evaluation by others enhances the effects of self- discrepancy. Adding to this, Henderson et al.,

(2016) suggested that even women who do not subscribe to these ideologies experience self-efficacy in the face of pressure, and guilt for not living up to high mothering expectations. This includes guilt at work for leaving a young child in childcare, and guilt at home when not working in the after hours on a project. Guendouzi (2006) termed this ‘The Guilt Thing’ for women balancing domestic and professional roles. Guendouzi (2006) further found that balancing domestic and professional roles resulted in a dialectical dilemma reported as feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Managing both domestic and professional responsibilities was a difficult task that placed stressful demands on the women’s time, and induced personal stress that resulted from attempting to balance these conflicting roles (Guendouzi, 2006). This is an internal battle that most working mothers maybe struggling with constantly. However, it is a personal feeling, and the organisation or those around the working mother may or may not even know about it (Cuddy, Fiske and Glick, 2004).

The brief overview so far shows various macro-level factors that impact women’s, in particular mother’s workforce participation in the UK, and some micro-level personal factors that influence women’s working life experiences. The next section discusses meso-level factors.

2.4 Meso- level analysis of women’s workforce participation in UK HE: the organisational context of women academics

This section looks at the representation of women academics in the UK HE sector as a whole, as well as initiatives to support gender equality. It discusses various theoretical views to underpin the root cause of women’s lack of representation in senior level positions. It also illuminates the importance for organisations to support working mother academics by providing suitably adjusted working arrangements. Finally, the section provides the rationale for adopting the Perceived Organisational Theory as an analytical tool in carrying out this study.

2.4.1 The representation of women academics in UK HE

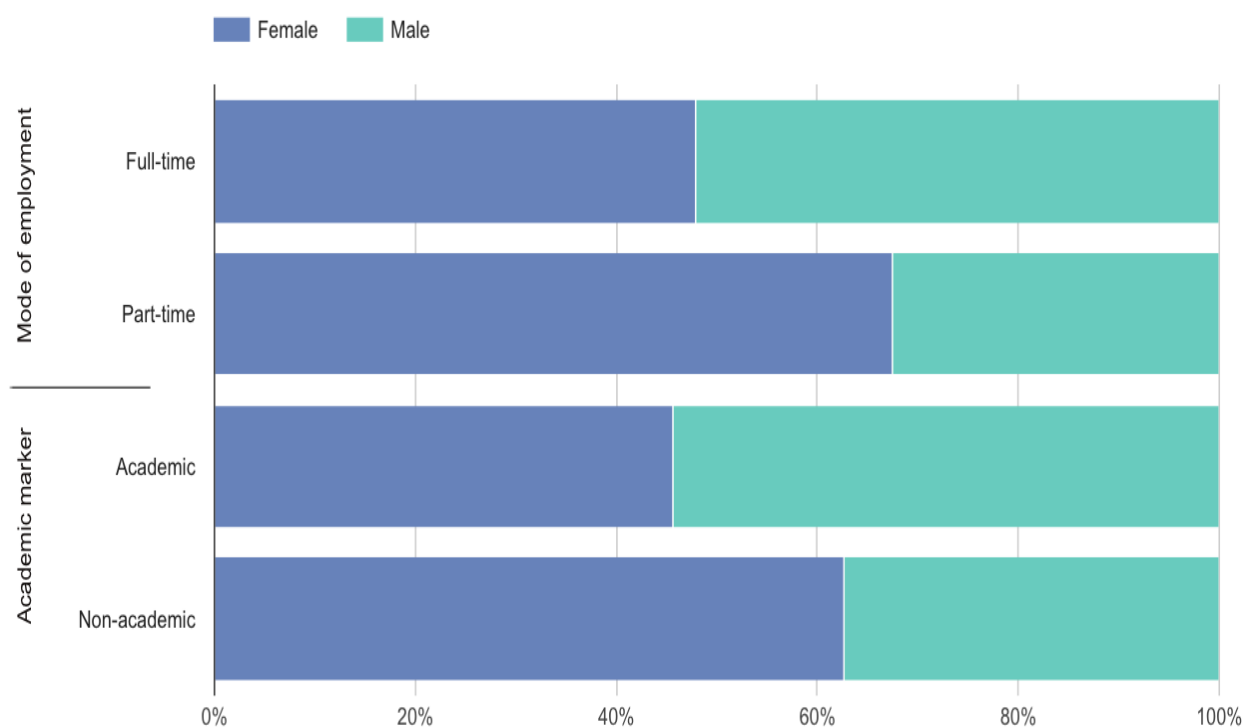
The teaching profession had become increasingly popularised for women in the last third of the 19th century. At this time, teacher training had moved from the pupil-teacher system to the college-trained system (Holcombe, 1973), as teaching was one of the main areas of work that respectable upper working-class and middle-class women participated in. Once schooling became compulsory, the demand for teachers increased dramatically and became an attractive career for women who made up 74.5% of the total teaching workforce (Holloway, 2005). Teaching proved to be a popular occupation because it reflected the dominant notion of

women's nurturing role in society as well as the appeal that working with children had for women; the possibility of having a relatively well-paid and secure career; and the pride to be felt in professional achievements. Although teaching was widely regarded as a woman's profession in 19th century Britain, women academics remained in the minority, accounting for only 20% of full-time staff, including staff on research only contracts (Bagihole, 1993). Furthermore, in the highest grades, only 3% of professors and 6% of senior lecturers were women (AUT, 1992). The proportion of women academics rose steadily over more recent years from 32% in 1995-96 to 39% in 2002-3 (AUT, 2004), yet women academics continued to be under-represented in senior positions.

The HE sector has undergone many changes since the time of the Platonic Academy and other early ancient Greek universities. Notably, since the end of World War II, the academic world has flourished and increased in size dramatically, both in terms of student numbers as well as many new universities and colleges being established in the UK, and the rest of the world. Despite such tremendous growth, women still make up a very small percentage of academics who hold senior academic positions in HE (Ledwith and Manfredi, 2000; HESA, 2018).

The focus of this study is on female academics contractually employed in the UK HE sector. The latest break down by HESA data on differences between sex in academic contracts reveals that there are relatively less female academics as full-time staff at 47%, and significantly more on part-time contracts at 67%, in 2016-2017 as shown in Figure 2.4:

Figure 2.4: Staff by mode of employment, academic marker and sex 2016/17



(Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018)

Figure 2.4 displays that in 2016/17, 48% of full-time staff and 68% of part-time staff were female. In the same year, there were more male academic staff (54%) than female academic staff (46%). More HE statistics, presented in table 2.1 below, show that 77% of academic staff (158,375) are financed by their HE provider, and the remainder have other monetary sources, such as research councils or multinational companies, etc. In 2016, 48% (100,165) of academic staff were employed on contracts, described as having a teaching and research function. The percentage of academic staff who were teaching was only 27%. The most shocking of these statistics however, was that there were 20,550 academic staff employed on a contract basis described as a professor in 2016/17, and of these staff, only 25% (5,050) were female compared to 75% (15,500) male professors [highlighted in yellow in table 2.1]. A further 6,050 academic staff were employed on other senior academic contracts, of which only 36% (2,175) were female (HESA, 2018).

Table 2.1: Academic staff by employment conditions 2016/2017

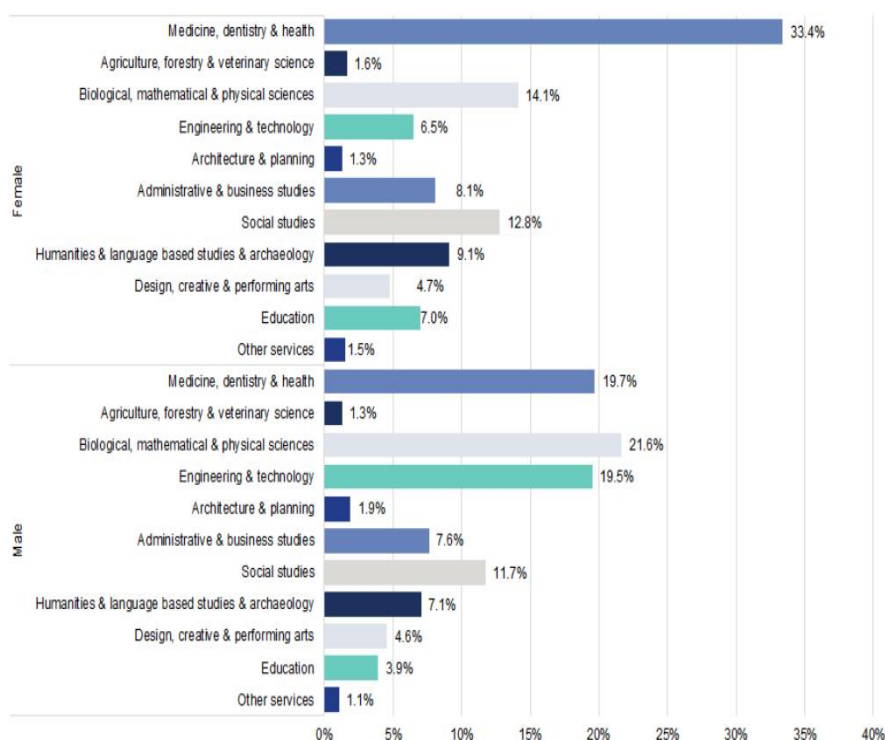
Mode of employment	Female	Male	Total
Source of basic salary			
Wholly general financed by the HE provider	71,830	86,545	158,375
Other sources of finance	22,645	25,850	48,495
Academic employment function			
Teaching only	29,425	26,705	56,130
Teaching and research	41,145	59,020	100,165
Research only	23,205	25,880	49,085
Neither teaching nor research	700	790	1,490
Contract level			
Professor	5,050	15,500	20,550
Other senior academic	2,175	3,875	6,050
Other contract level	87,250	93,020	180,270
Terms of employment			
Open-ended/permanent	60,355	76,670	137,025
Fixed-term contract	34,120	35,730	69,850
Total academic staff	94,475	112,395	206,870

(Source: HESA, 2018)

It is clear from this data that although females make up almost half of all academics in UK HE, and are widely represented in part-time contracts and on non-academic positions, as academic positions become more senior, the proportion of women declines significantly, with only 36% of senior academic positions occupied by females and just 25% of professors being females. On one hand, this is a significant improvement from the situation around 20 years ago, demonstrating that female representation included only 4% of professors and 11% of senior lecturers or readers (Cully, Oreilly and Dix, 1999; Booth, Burton and Mumford, 2000). Over the past 20 years, such statistics have improved for several reasons including: culturally changed perceptions of working women, women's increased participation in the workforce and numerous policies to support work-family balance. However, women are still under-represented in senior academic positions in UK universities.

In addition, there are also significant gender differences across the type of subject groups in universities. The male and female representation in those subject groups is displayed Figure 2.5:

Figure 2.5: **Distribution of female and male full-time academic staff by generic subject areas 2016/17**



(Source: HESA, 2018)

A majority of female full-time academic staff over a third (33.4%), were employed within medicine, dentistry and health cost centre subject groups, compared to just under a fifth (19.7%) of males. In contrast, over three times the proportion of males (19.5%) than females (6.5%) were employed in engineering & technology cost centre subject groups.

It is therefore evident that despite women making up half of the workforce on academic contracts, they continue to be under-represented in senior positions and they are even less represented in male-dominated subject areas (Wolf-Wendel and Ward, 2014). According to Savigny (2014), women in HE in the UK have a lesser chance of advancing their careers. Those who do succeed are often paid less than their male counterparts of the same position and rank. On the other hand, one may suggest that women in academic positions are privileged in comparison to women in other sectors because of the prestige, autonomy and flexibility that is associated with the profession. However, there is a clear career disparity between men and women within HE, where women are at a disadvantaged position (Baker, 2016; Liza Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018).

Over the last decade, the opportunities for women to get promoted have changed very little or not at all in some cases. In almost all the universities across the UK, women academics comprise a small minority across all strata of available positions (Forster, 2001). It is acknowledged that women are marginalised and are not treated like their male colleagues either in terms of salary or career progression (Thomas and Davies, 2002). This caters to why women are under-represented in senior positions within HE. The available evidence shows that women in academia still face barriers to advancement and there is still a considerable way to go before they achieve parity with their male colleagues (Forster, 2001; Baker, 2016, Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). A major factor for this issue, acknowledged in related literature, is women academics decision to have children and take time off for childbirth, and the struggle of work-family balance following that (Donovan *et al.*, 2005; Duxbury, L. and Higgins, 2005; Hoskins, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Huopalainen and Satama, 2018). Given that family planning is one of the biggest factors catering to barriers in advancement for women in academia, it is evident from these findings that children create a pause and/or delay in one's career progression, which may also cater to the marginalism against women as suggested by Thomas and Davies (2002). It then becomes more accessible for men to progress farther and quicker, being more represented in senior positions. The unequal ratio of this progression has been longstanding over the years, making norms such as marginalism and other forms of discrimination more ingrained. And owing to this, as other scholars (e.g. Forster, 2001, Baker, 2016, Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016) suggest, there is considerable time before such barriers are eliminated which challenge longstanding customs of this sector. The issue of women academic's under-representation in senior positions has also been explored through a discussion around gender inequality and intersectionality.

2.4.1.1 Gender Inequality and Intersectionality

Bagihole & White (2013) explored the differences in career trajectories between a senior group of women, who were late-career stage academics, and a younger group who were between early and mid-career stages, through a lens of feminism and class to research women's experiences. They carried out a narrative inquiry of the life-course of nine late-career academics in eight countries, and invited the younger members to comment on these stories and relate it to their own career experiences. The women explained that perceptions around them and their careers, as well as family/caring responsibilities, became generalised and prescribed by their co-workers as they progressed through the system (Bagihole & White, 2013). This highlights a co-worker perception issue, whereby if they perceive all women academics with familial responsibilities in the same way as less competent and committed, then this impacts on their progression

through the system. Bagihole & White (2013) further highlighted that women often experienced boundaries of sex and class, which negatively impacted on their ability to navigate a career trajectory and have rewarding careers, and that women from working-class backgrounds experienced a double jeopardy of gender and class bias.

Similar research by Blackmore (2014) argued that universities face an ageing academic workforce with implications of a shrinking pool from which to recruit managerial and research leaders. This is exacerbated by the mobility of early career researchers and lack of employment security which further impacts the pool of leadership talent. Blackmore also insisted that leadership for early career female academics may be a preferred, but not a possible option, due to structural difficulties in the overall HE system and academic career ladder (see section 2.4.3). Therefore, the pool of aspirant leaders and women will not expand as the sector expands.

As more women enter lower status jobs in the academic profession, one argument is that there is evidence of intergenerational change. However, Baker (2012a) argued that the clear gender gap in academia cannot be attributed solely to age cohort, or the fact that some women received doctorates in the past, but that gender, family backgrounds and institutional discrimination all help to preserve the gender gap. Despite the age at which women academics have children, a critical need for all mothers is a better integration between work-lives and non-work lives.

There are further claims that young mothers are not perceived as focused academics, nor is their work or career given as much attention, for the very fact that they took a career break to have children (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000). Those who are highly motivated individual women, who try to, and do manage as academics and as young mothers concurrently, often face their own set of challenges. As Gatrell (2013) put it in her title to a research paper: 'little has changed: the conflict between "public" and "private" mothering remains in place'. Extending this further, Savigny (2014, p. 797) wrote 'Women know your limits'; she explained how others in academia asked her during her research, "*why anyone would really be interested in listening to a load of middle class women whinging*", and her response was, "*why should female academics be subject to the levels of sexism that are apparent within the profession?*". Whilst these explanations are a portion of the reason for women's under-representation, there is a different argument that it is in fact women's choice [to be under-represented]. In which case, the system has not completely failed in delivering equal opportunities to both sexes overtime, but it has been a matter of choice – which has been treated as a culture as it remains to be a popular choice. Hence, why, women are consistently under-represented till date. HE as a sector

has recognised the issue of women's under-representation in senior positions and has introduced a programme to help support women in HE.

2.4.1.2 ATHENA SWAN Charter

In order to contribute to the evident issue of women academic's under-representation in senior positions in HE, particularly in STEMM subjects, Athena SWAN was established to recognise employment excellence for women in science based subjects. Athena SWAN is named after the ancient Greek goddess Athena- known in Greek mythology as the goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilisation, law and justice, just warfare, mathematics, strength, strategy, and the arts (Barry, 2013). In addition, the term 'SWAN' is an abbreviation for Scientific Women's Academic Network. The Athena SWAN Charter was founded in 2005 by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU). It works to develop and support equality and diversity for staff and students in HEIs across all four nations of the UK by providing a central resource of advice and guidance. The ECU uses research to identify and change practices that unfairly exclude, marginalised, or disadvantaged people. The evidence from their research is produced is used to support institutions to remove barriers to progression and promote success for all staff and students (ECU, 2016).

The ECU implemented Athena SWAN as a scheme that initially recognised commitment to advancing women's careers in: science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) employment and research in UK HE. But, since May 2015, the Charter has been expanded to recognise work undertaken in arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL), as well as in professional and support roles, and for transgender staff and students. Membership to the Charter is open to any university (or publicly funded research institute) that is committed to advancing women's careers. Members of the Athena SWAN Charter can apply for institution level and department level awards. This application is based on a detailed self-assessment reviewed by a panel from HE across the UK (ECU, 2015a).

Although there is significant amount of support for the Athena SWAN initiatives in UK HEIs, some critics oppose the Athena SWAN agenda. In a report titled '*Athena SWAN Initiative: An Assault on male scientists*' Barry (2013) argues that Athena SWAN is an "*innocent sounding initiative*" (pg.01), yet their principal funding comes from the state, largely funded in turn by British men who pay 72% of the income tax collected in the UK in 2012-13. He argues that British men are being disadvantaged by programmes like Athena SWAN, while British women- who pay a lot less tax (28%), are advantaged. Also, since most scientific departments (especially engineering and mathematics) in UK HE are male dominated, Barry

(2013, p.01) argues that “*These professional bodies are assaulting the interests of the majority of their members*”. With this in mind, Barry is failing to recognise the problems which arise for the minority, which in any setting are always under-represented, and is only focusing on what he can empathise with most – the male gender. Despite, such criticism much work is being undertaken under the Athena agenda, and researchers are continuing to investigate the impact of this agenda on gender equality in UK universities.

In 2013, the ECU commissioned a research team to examine the impact of the Athena SWAN Charter in HEIs in the UK. It carried out a wide survey of institutions with and without awards. They found considerable evidence that career satisfaction, opportunities for training and development, knowledge of promotion processes and fairness in the allocation of workload was considered better in the Silver award and other Athena SWAN category groups than in no award departments. There was an overall positive impact on gender issues and on satisfaction with women’s career progression (Munir et al., 2014). Fairness of workload allocation was also rated higher in academic staff in Silver award institutions, and women academic staff felt that Athena SWAN had improved their visibility, increased self-confidence, enhanced their leadership skills and helped them to think more positively about their career development (Munir *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, it appeared that changes to the institutional practice, identified through involvement with Athena SWAN, included efforts focused on promotion and supporting women returners. On a more negative note, it was reported that persistent barriers remained, which impacted on delivering institutional change.

One author, Cheung (2014) puts forward an interesting debate on whether rewards help institutions focus on gender inequality or whether the allure of funding shifts an institution’s focus onto getting an award rather than genuinely committing to gender equality. In her article, Cheung (2014, p.57) quotes an advocate of equality and diversity working in HE who wishes to stay anonymous: “...*the mentality is that you get an Athena SWAN award by saying X, Y and Z, but not necessarily doing it*”. Cheung (2014) goes on to argue that it is becoming more common for a department’s Human Resources (HR) team to handle the application process, rather than the academics themselves, which means there is less involvement. If the academic staff lose ownership of the process, then it is an institution’s failure at embracing the fundamental principles of the award. Having considered both sides of the argument, the Athena SWAN award in general, even with its limitations, encourages HEIs to discuss and promote increasing support on gender issues. Regardless, there is a body of consistent evidence, which proves that academic careers of women are impacted by motherhood in a major way.

2.4.2 The impact of motherhood on an academic career: theoretical perspectives

There is a significant problem with women academic's career progression. One of the dominant reasons, albeit not the sole reason, is their choice to have children (Donovan *et al.*, 2005; Duxbury, L. and Higgins, 2005; Hoskins, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Huopalainen and Satama, 2018). Extensive literature (Burke, R.J. and Mattis, 2005; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Marianne Coleman., 2011; Susan Vinnicombe, Ronald Burke, Stacey Blake-Beard, 2013; Peters, 2014; Liza Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018) discloses that women, particularly mothers, continue to face barriers in the workplace which hinder their full potential of possible professional achievements and progression. Key issues relevant to women's career progression in universities include: women's own roles in both the family and the workplace, the relationships of these with the structural and cultural aspects of gendered university life, and academic feminism and equality initiatives in HE (Ledwith and Manfredi, 2000). This section casts light on the relevant and theoretical discussions around women's, in particular academic issues, experiences and support needs in academia.

2.4.2.1 'Gendered institutions': Organisational structures discriminate against women and promote a male dominated culture

Classic organisational theory assumed that organisations were gender-neutral (Sallee, 2012); meaning that the gender of the employee did not have an impact on the organisation and likewise, that the organisation did not differentiate its practices towards an employee based on their gender. However, theories of gendered organisations emerged to interrogate the ways in which organisational structures discriminated against women and perpetuated a male-dominated culture. Acker (1990) explained why a systematic theory of gender and organisation was needed, highlighting five main reasons:

- 1. "The gender segregation of work, including divisions between paid and unpaid work, is partly created through organisational practices.*
- 2. Income and status inequality between women and men is also partly created in organisational processes, understanding these processes is necessary for understanding gender inequality.*
- 3. Organisations are one arena in which widely disseminated cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced.*
- 4. Aspects of individual gender identity, particularly masculinity, are also products of organisational processes and pressures*

5. *An important feminist project is to make large-scale organisations more democratic and more supportive of humane goals”*

She highlighted that some of the consistent gendered challenges, including work segregation and unequal pay, were a product of organisational practices. Therefore, it is important to have a gendered perspective of organisations, because it is through this that, an understanding of the deep embedded issues of gender inequality can be reached and can justify why organisations should be supportive of ‘humane goals’. Acker (1990) and Ely & Meyerson (2000) further discussed the depth to which organisations were gendered and ways in which organisational structures and cultures interacted to prevent men and women from challenging their prescribed gender roles (Sallee, 2012). Acker (1992) defined the concept of gendered institutions as a means of explaining how gender was present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, as well as distributions of power in the various sectors of social life (Acker, 1992).

She added that gender highlighted the differences and dominations between men and women and that it was an integral part of many societal processes. Keeping this in mind, she criticised existent theories by arguing that gender roles and women are not issues, which can simply be appended to an existing theory. Rather, any theory, which fails to account for gender within this context, remains ‘fundamentally flawed’. Similarly, Meyerson & Ely (2000) acknowledged that their understanding of gender in organisations began with the notion that organisations were inherently gendered because of having been created by and for men. This view agrees with Acker, in terms of contextualising, as it recognises the seemingly innate culture and nature of organisations being geared towards men. Therefore, the (organisation’s) structures and practices too fall in line with this gendered bias – creating many gender issues.

Acker (1992) agreed that the gendered process could be identified by the control and segregation of women through constructed hierarchies implemented to secure the position of males. Their gendered nature was sustained through social practices that organised and explained the structuring of daily life inside, as well as outside, the organisation. Specifically, in relation to the HE sector, (see Mihaila, 2018; Bailyn, 2003) it is noted that universities are gendered institutions because they are anchored in assumptions that have led to practices and norms constructed around the life experiences of men, and around a vision of masculinity as the normal, universal requirement of university life. This is also related to perceived gendered characteristics, since associated characteristics of the leader and the successful organisation are portrayed as “aggressive”, “goal oriented”, “competitive”, and “efficient”, but hardly ever as

“supportive”, “kind”, and “caring” (Ackers, 1992, p. 568). Acker (1992) concluded that due to this, gendered institution marginalised female employees through the construction of images, symbols, and ideologies in the workplace that legitimised hegemonic masculinity.

Women academics’ work allocation in universities is often overloaded with “service” or teaching responsibilities towards the students. This requires a more “supportive” and “caring” set of skills, whilst men are stronger in the ‘publishing game’ because they spend less time on ‘student-service’ responsibilities- freeing up more time for research which consequently has a positive correlation with promotion opportunities (Ramsay and Letherby, 2006; Van Den Besselaar and Sandstrom, 2016). One argument for this is that men are assumingly more ‘goal-oriented’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘competitive’. However, women academics are intelligent, high-achieving and highly educated individuals, and these characteristics undoubtedly relate to individuals who have (or at least have had in the past) the spirit of competition, goal-orientation and efficiency, thereby keeping women academics very much in the conversation.

Thus, it cannot merely be that because women have other qualities, such as caring and supportive skills, that they are not competent as leaders or as individuals capable of organisational success. Taking this further, Lester, Sallee and Hart (2017) proposed that when incorporating Acker (1990) into their research, scholar should question the inherent assumptions in gendered organisations. Therefore, scholars have a responsibility to “*move beyond current notions of gender to reflect the realities of complex fragmented and postmodern organisational life*” (p.18). Thus, the present study will revisit Acker’s (1990) theory, but it will move beyond that to find new methodologies to explore women academics experiences in a gendered organisation, such as scholars Ely and Meyerson (2000) who have set out approaches for gender equity and change.

2.4.2.2 The Ideal Worker’: Someone who gives total priority to work

Most organisations continue to work under the premise that employees are available and willing to work long hours in the office with no other demands on their time (Acker, 1990; Bailyn, 2003; Ely and Meyerson, 2000) and organisational structures seem to exclude participation from those with significant responsibilities in the home (Sallee, 2012). Bailyn (2003, p.139) argues that the juggling of multiple roles in an academic career and the increased psychological demands make up “*the ideal, the perfect academic someone who gives total priority to work and has no outside interests and responsibilities*”. Senior women academics based in a science department in Bailyn’s study believed this ideal-worker statement to be ‘absolutely true’ for

them. They expressed how they could not conceive of any other way to be a first-rate scientist, which Bailyn (2003) explained as the reason why most of these women academics were not married and had no children. She further adds that “[...] in some way that may be the greatest inequity of all: the profession is set up in such a way that men academics routinely have families, while women, given current rules, find it much more difficult” (p. 139). Bailyn (200, pg. 140) further argued that HE holds a gender-neutral concept, which assumes two things:

“That the workplace is separate from the rest of life and thus ignores the fact that people have lives outside of their work. This inadvertently ignores the different life experiences of men and women and makes the ‘male’ model of the ‘ideal academic’ normative”

“[And] That women can follow this model as easily as men, and if they do, [they] will be seen as successful and as central as their male colleagues and that neither of these assumptions are true”.

The main argument here is the importance of raising awareness of an academic’s life and taking account of their lives outside of the academic world. She recognised that this approach is applied by the government, with the introduction of practices such as parental leave, but she also highlighted that they were under-utilised. The general perception in HE continued to be an ideal worker who was one with no interests or responsibilities outside of work, which inadvertently disadvantages women.

This concurs with Acker (1992) who emphasised that all institutions, including the law, politics, religion, economy and the academy, were historically developed by men, currently dominated by men, and symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men in leading positions. Additionally, these institutions were defined in the absence of women and the only institution in which women had a central, defining although subordinate role, was the family. Notably, institutions dominated by men, such as business and industry, were the essential source of well-being and wealth, whilst the idealised domain of female responsibility- the family, was relatively invisible and devalued and only became the focus of criticism if it failed.

The ideal worker myth is deeply rooted in such historical workplace norms based on the ‘myth of separate worlds’, referring to employment settings that were enacted and designed as if workers did not have families competing for time and identities during working hours (Kanter, 1977). Acker (1990) argued that even just the concept of ‘a job’ was implicitly a gendered concept because it already contained the gender-based division of labour, and the separation between the public and the private sphere; it assumed a gendered organisation of

domestic life and social production. Acker (1992) asserted that 'reproduction' is cordoned off in a separate sphere, and institutional boundaries do not include childbirth, sexual activities, sleeping, eating and other daily activities. Hence, 'total institutions' are organised on the assumptions that reproduction takes place elsewhere and that responsibility for reproduction is also located elsewhere. In contradiction to the view that organisational structures exclude women from the workplace, Sallee (2012) suggested that the inverse is also true: organisational structures and culture prevent men from being involved in the home as well. In her study of faculty fathers, Sallee (2012) found that institutions and those within them penalise men who appear "*too committed*" to their families (pg.782).

Additionally, Sallee (2012) claimed that despite the fact that characteristics of the labour force have changed over the past several decades, this notion of the ideal worker persists. In line with Acker (1990), and Ely and Meyerson (2002), Sallee (2012, pg. 786) argued that organisations are gendered in that they are built on the notion of the ideal worker, who has unlimited time to give to work and no distractions in the home. She accepts that in other words "*the ideal worker is a male worker*". Similarly, Acker (1990) explained that the closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker, is when the male worker's life centres on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children. Ironically, those who are committed to paid employment are "naturally" more suited to responsibility and authority, and those who must divide their time and commitments are in the lower ranks. This low ranking is often justified on the basis on women's identification with childbearing and domestic life, which becomes devalued because women are presumably unable to conform to the demands of the 'abstract job'. Acker (1990, 151) defined this as "*The abstract, bodiless worker, who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate*".

This additional element exhilarates the underlying gender relations in the workplace because structural and organisational controls such as, sexual harassment, relegating childbearing women to lower-level mobility tracks, and penalising their emotion management further adds to the reinforced hierarchy of more women in lower-level jobs. Acker (1990, pg.155) also debated that in an ideal organisation:

"The rhythm and timing of work would be adapted to the rhythms of life outside of work, and caring work would be just as important and well rewarded as any other; having a baby or taking care of a sick mother would be as valued as making an automobile or designing computer software"

This argument is based on differences in perceptions of what is ‘important’ because often, paid work in the public sphere is perceived as a valuable contribution to society, whilst caring work within the private sphere is not. King (2008) added that perceptions of ideal workers can serve to perpetuate gender stereotyping that differentially affect men and women professionals, where female professionals are often perceived as less flexible and rated lower in performance than male colleagues who reported similar involvement in work and family roles. Moreover, it is suggested that the power structure and hierarchy that are foundational to the notion of the ideal worker are in fact more complicated for academic staff who have the ability to access forms of power, or the ability to ‘run things themselves’. Lester, Sallee and Hart (2017) argue that the lack of an immediate threat to job security and the agency to create the systems of evaluation, initially appear to stand in contrast to the ideal worker, where strict structural hierarchy and false notions of choice creates a discriminatory environment for women. Subsequently, Wilton and Ross (2017) established an association with female academics’ experiences of challenges in balancing family with an academic career. They established that women tend to sacrifice more and experience more stress and pressure stemming from both the university and academic culture, as well as socially imposed norms around motherhood. The discussion around the ideal worker norms constitutes evidence that academic mothers’ experiences of academic work are hindered and restrained. This study will seek to explore these experiences and perceptions of such conventions.

2.4.2.3 ‘The Motherhood Penalty’: Women’s careers are penalised just for becoming mothers

The motherhood-penalty research shows that careers of mothers tend to lag behind those of childless women and fathers, and that employed mothers are typically viewed by employers and co-workers as less committed and ambitious than fathers or child-free women (Abendroth, Huffman and Treas, 2014). This can also lead to a wage penalty between mothers and non-mothers in the workplace (Yu and Kuo, 2017). More crucially, Baker (2012b, p.19) explained that:

“The careers of mothers tend to progress at a slower pace because having and raising children sometimes requires them to take time off work or reduce their employment hours, especially if they live in families where care and household management are seen as women’s work”

Baker (2012b) does not deny that sometimes, women themselves choose to give priority to their children before they start schooling and wish to return to work full-time once their

children have started school. As maternity and parenthood provide real productivity shocks through sleep deprivation and an increased propensity for illness in the household; this may reduce the time and mental space required for concentration; and mothers may invest differently in household production, resulting in, for example, career interruptions (Brooks, Fenton & Walker, 2014). However, she points out that “*Taking leave or reducing working hours is often consequential, especially for professional careers such as university teaching and research*” (Baker, 2012b, p. 19).

The motherhood penalty may therefore, result from women having less bargaining power exacerbated by stronger geographic ties due to the expense of moving children. Researchers have also found that women with high skills and high wages experience the highest total penalties (England *et al.*, 2016). The motherhood wage penalty has shown to increase with the level of education (Todd, 2001), and the gender wage gap among parents increases with occupational prestige (Magnusson, 2010) and job qualification level. Thus, female academics are at a greater risk due to their position. In contrast to ‘motherhood penalties’ are ‘fatherhood premiums’ (Bygren, Erlandsson and Gahler, 2017). The typical man continues to work full-time, or may even increase his hours after he has a child. Parenthood is known to have positive effects on men’s wages and careers (Hodges and Budig, 2010; Simonsen and Skipper, 2012; Petersen, Penner and Hogsnes, 2014), which proves to be in stark contrast to the negative effects it has on women in the home and career-wise.

Moreover, it is reported that the status of motherhood in the workplace can lead to a variety of perceptions. Miner *et al.*, (2014) found that mothering mitigated negative outcomes associated with being the target of incivility in the workplace. In addition, women also tend to lose perceived competence and gain perceived warmth when they become mothers, looking significantly less competent than warm (Cuddy *et al.*, 2004). Due to this perception, working mothers’ risk being reduced to one of two subtypes: homemakers - who are viewed as warm but incompetent, or women professionals without children who are viewed as competent but emotionless (Cuddy *et al.*, 2004). Some employers hold a perception that women will have children and as a result become an ‘organisational liability’ (Miller, 2006), which could mean putting the organisation at a disadvantage for having to cater to maintenance of maternity needs. Moreover, professional women becoming mothers is viewed as a striking dichotomy. Three women scholars wrote a paper named ‘When professionals become mothers, warmth doesn’t cut it’ (Cuddy *et al.*, 2004), to explore perceptions of and behaviours of people towards women who occupied both mother and professional roles. By showing people a worker’s profile that varied only in gender, and whether the professional had a child, their results showed a unique

disadvantage suffered by females as compared to male professionals who happened to be parents (Cuddy et al, 2004). Thus, the motherhood penalty is attributable to discrimination based on the assumption that mothers are less competent and committed than other types of workers. Due to deeply embedded gendered institution perceptions, there is clear gender inequality, especially in regards to senior academic positions in UK universities.

2.4.2.4 Approaches to Gender Equity and Change

Ely & Meyerson (2000) classified different approaches to gender and the ‘gender problem’ in organisations. Their approach involves a deeper, more thorough critique of how gender operates in organisations. Their critique rests on the conception of gender as an “*abstract organising principle of organisational life, an axis of power that manifests in knowledge systems and concrete organisational policies, practices, and everyday interactions that appear to be gender neutral*” (Ely and Meyerson, 2000. P. 599). Therefore, they contest the notion of gender neutrality by exposing the often subdued ways in which organisational interactions, policies and practices, create gendered divisions between and among men and women- such divisions serve to give grounds to the material conditions of their working lives. Their typology identifies four approaches; these are rooted in the distinctions that they view among different conceptions of the actions that organisations have taken to address the problem of gender inequity. Their conceptualised approach is outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Approaches to Gender Equity and Change

	<i>Definition of Gender</i>	<i>Problem Definition</i>	<i>Vision of Gender Equity</i>	<i>Approach to Change</i>	<i>Benefits`</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Frame 1 <i>Fix the Women</i>	Socialised sex differences	Women lack skills, know-how to 'play the game'	No differences between men and women; women are just like men	Develop women's skills through training, mentoring, etc.	Helps individual women succeed; creates role models when they succeed	Leaves system and male standards intact; blames women as source of problem
Frame 2 <i>Value the Feminine Frame</i>	Socialized sex differences; separate spheres of activity	Women's skills not valued or recognized	Differences recognized, valued, preserved	Diversity training; reward and celebrate differences, 'women's ways'	Legitimate differences; 'feminine' approach valued; tied to broader diversity initiatives	Reinforces stereotypes; leaves processes in place that produce differences
Frame 3 <i>Create Equal Opportunities</i>	Sex differences in treatment, access, opportunity	Differential structures of power and opportunity yield less access, lesser resources for women	Create level playing field by reducing structural barriers, biases	Policies to compensate for structural barriers, e.g. affirmative action, work family benefits	Helps with recruiting, retaining, advancing women; eases work-family stress	Has minimal impact on organisational culture backlash; work-family remains 'woman's problem'
Frame 4 <i>Assess and Revise Work Culture</i>	Definition of Gender System of oppressive relations reproduced in and by social practices	Social practices designed by and for white, heterosexual, class-privileged men appear neutral but uphold gender as fixed	Process of identifying and revising oppressive social practices; gender no longer an axis of power	Emergent, localized process of incremental change involving critique, narrative revision, experimentation	Exposes apparent neutrality of practices as oppressive; more likely to change organization culture; continuous process of learning	Resistance to deep change; difficult to sustain

(Source: Ely & Meyerson, 2000, pg. 107)

Frame 1 posits that women are in fact just like men, and the reason why they do not succeed in similar numbers as their male counterparts is their 'lack of skills' or 'know-how' to play the 'game'. The main issue with this frame however, is its assumption that men and women are indifferent, and while it proposes to develop women's skills through training and mentoring, it blames women as the problem. Thus, it is fundamentally flawed. In contradiction, *Frame 2* acknowledges the differences between the two genders but reinforces stereotypes that exuberate differences. To minimise such differences, *Frame 3* envisages creating equal opportunities by introducing policies to reduce structural biases. This approach is more promising and holds ground to elicit real change by reducing structural biases, imposing positive action, and implementing enhanced family-friendly policies and practices. However, its criticism points to

the unchanged organisational cultures and the culturally embedded psyche that fabricates work-family as a 'woman's problem'.

Consequently, *Frame 4* is the most optimistic and reassuring in its approach. It postulates that the working culture should be assessed and revised through various experimentations, or 'trial and error' of different practices. Nevertheless, the resistance and difficulty for change to occur continues. This relates with Acker's (1990) mechanism of maintaining or creating a gendered institution involving the processes of interaction or 'doing gender', and the construction of 'gendered personas', based on the creation of gender differences within the institutional setting (Acker,1992). It proposes that institutional settings can create gender differences and may inadvertently disadvantage one group more than the other. In this case, institutions need to actively, and consciously, work towards decreasing gender differences by providing quality support to those who may suffer due to gendered circumstances, such as motherhood.

This should not hold universities back from change because if gendered practices are learnt, then perhaps there should be effort to 'unlearn' them. While, the resistance to change, as it stands is a limitation to revising working culture, but in spite of that, it is imperative for universities to invariably be in consistent pursuit to assess, revise and improve its practices, in order to support women academics in their work and career- to undergo real change in gender inequalities. In addition, consistent with this debate is the notion of the 'The Motherhood Penalty'. The next section explains how women who become mothers face increased disadvantages in the organisation.

Expanding this argument further, Meyerson & Ely (2000) also produced various gendered themes, related to the 'ideal worker', that inevitably lead to gendered outcomes and henceforth some unintended organisational consequences, as displayed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Gendered themes, Social Practices, and outcomes

Gendered Theme	Examples of Social Practices	Gendered Outcomes	Unintended Organisational consequences
Theme 1: Public-Private Dichotomy	Narratives of ideal worker as one able to put work first; crisis- oriented work patterns; norms intended to maintain illusion of workplace as asexual	Women, who carry disproportionate responsibility for dependent care, perceived as less committed; obfuscates sexuality as dimension of heterosexual male power	Perpetuates inefficient use of time; encourages crises; little time for planning and reflection; rewards behaviour that may not be associated with competence or task
Theme 2: Individualism–Collectivism Dichotomy	Narratives, images that portray competence as heroic individualism; rewards for producing immediate, visible results; lack of recognition and rewards for collaborative, developmental (i.e. ‘relational’) work	Heroic individualism associated with men/ masculinity; ‘relational’ activities associated with women/femininity; differential rewards for men and women performing heroic and ‘relational’ activities	Allows heroes to create roles for themselves that may be unnecessary or irrelevant to business demands; discourages developing others, planning, building systems and infrastructure
Theme 3: Male Identity–Female Identity Dichotomy	Narratives that portray men and women as fixed, stereotyped opposites; evaluations, perceptions that invoke sex stereotypes, penalize people when they fail to uphold them	Women do not fit masculine image, so do not fit model of success; women ignored or devalued when behave stereotypically feminine; denigrated when behave stereotypically masculine	Relies on narrow set of criteria for model of success and who fits it; suppresses broader range of styles and approaches that could inform and enhance work; increases dissatisfaction and turnover among those who do not ‘fit

(Source: Meyerson & Ely, 2000, p. 119)

Theme 1 highlights the ‘private-public sphere’ dichotomy, where employees with disproportionate caring-responsibilities (mainly women) are perceived as less competent. *Theme 2* demonstrates perceived competence of a heroic individual who produces immediate and visible results, which favours masculine traits, instead of differential gender-based rewards. Finally, *Theme 3* unravels the dichotomy of differential gender identities and attached stereotypes that hinder a broader range of styles and approaches. Meyerson & Ely (2000) proposed their main concern, that such social practices which reflect gendered themes in the form of masculine-feminine dichotomies have become deeply embedded in organisations - so deeply embedded as to appear to be ‘gender-neutral’, as the norm. These social practices are rooted in men’s lives and experiences, and these social practices tend, in often-subtle ways, to privilege men and disadvantage women frequently- compromising their ability to be maximally effective at work.

The concept of the ideal worker resembles the academic work-life closely, since academics have a high workload, coupled with the pressure to publish, the ability to secure funding, provide extra service hours to students (often emailing out of hours), have a short turnaround time for marking, and take on a heavy load of administrative tasks. This requires not only full-time, but over-time of commitment to their academic job role (Barrett and Barrett, 2011). Interestingly, previous studies have highlighted the challenges this causes for academic mothers (Blackmore, 2014; Hoskins, 2015; Craft *et al.*, 2017; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Huopainen and Satama, 2018). There are policies in place to help with this difficulty but there is lack of research that questions on a deeper practical level, the support universities provide for returning academic mothers to manage the tension between the ideal worker and the often-disproportionate childcare responsibilities, which are balanced with their academic workloads. An alternative theory proposes that devoting oneself to family, instead of balancing this with aspirations for career progression, is a ‘choice’ women make.

2.4.2.5 ‘Preference Theory’: Women choose to be home centred instead of work centred

Catherine Hakim (1995) presented her alternative view, which she termed the ‘preference theory’. This considered that some women simply preferred not to make their career the main focus of their lives and suggested that most women chose to be ‘adaptive’, combining employment and family work, or be ‘home-cantered’ rather than ‘work-centred’. Hakim (2004) went on to explain that work-cantered women were, and would continue to be, in a minority with prioritisation of work by only about 20% of women opposed to 50% of men. Critics of Hakim’s work, have focused on the perceived failure of preference theory to take structural conditions into account (Walters, 2005; James, 2008). Broadbridge (2010) and Kumra and Vinnicombe (2010) questioned the applicability of Hakim’s ‘preference theory’, questioning the idea that women have a completely ‘free’ choice in respect of career life or home life. They asserted that it is more complicated than that, and it is influenced by factors including: marital status, financial status, number of children and more.

In defiance of the criticism received, the positive outcome of Hakim’s work was that it focused attention on the domestic sphere, since most employment surveys stopped at the office door at that time. Later, Hakim stated that although debates on social policy have moved on to some extent from entrenched sexism and racism that pervaded all labour markets for decades. She contested that “*whatever the current concern, full-time homemakers and mothers tend to be left out of the picture by policy-makers and academics alike*”. She added that this is because

“homebodies are not an exciting group; they do not provide dramatic news stories” (Hakim, 2015, p. 177). Nonetheless, critics of Hakim’s theory insisted that women were unable to make real choices because they were constrained by childcare difficulties, social forces and institutional factors (Ginn, 1996; Broadbridge, 2010; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010). In response to this criticism, Hakim retorted that they were reiterating once again the feminist view of women as universal victims, denying that women were agents in their own lives, just as men were. However, there is evidence in the literature that women in the workplace are restricted by structural barriers for career progression (Forster, 2001; Aiston, 2011; Shelley, Morabito and Tobin-Gurley, 2011; Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Ashencaen and Shiel, 2018). Therefore, while it may be an organic and real choice for some women, but for others the choice may be an illusion restrained by organisational and cultural factors.

In contradiction to this, Simpson et al (2010) highlighted in their study that women presented their career trajectories as a matter of personal choice, in that careers were seen by women to be ‘in their own hands’. This was despite observations and experiences of gender injustice in their organisations, as well as the slow career progress observed among female colleagues and peers. Thus, Simpson et al., (2010) concluded that if women are presented as having a choice, and if unequal outcomes can be presented as the result of choices they have made, then the impact (in the eyes of women in their study) of discrimination can be denied. However, in later research Lewis and Simpson (2015) took these ideas further by considering some of the ‘cultural conditions’ that make ‘choice’ appear so persuasive in accounts of career experiences. In particular, they connected the emergence of choice around careers by connecting it to the cultural discourse of post-feminism. This places emphasis on individualisation, and the role of an individual in placing her own biography detached from organisational and cultural structures, such as gender and class. They argue that it is the influence of post-feminism in Hakim's account of preference theory that makes ‘choice’ appear desirable and voluntary in accounts of careers more generally.

Lewis and Simpson (2017) stand in agreement that the sense of personal empowerment, engendered within preference theory is based on notions of self-belief that encourage perceptions of endless potential- helping to frame how women are included in the world of work. For example, no longer passive ‘helpers of men’ but as active ‘self-made’ women. Therefore, the new ‘choice’ in feminine subjectivity, articulated in preference theory and embedded in post-feminism, has shaped the way women are incorporated into organisations. Thus, even in cases where it is a ‘free-choice’, it can be influenced by, and embedded in, post-

feminism ideals of individualism and the illusion of autonomous and personal responsibility in decision making.

The next section looks at the more practical and structural barriers that female academics, and mothers in particular face in their work experience. It doing so, it highlights the importance of organisational support for academic mothers.

2.4.3 The impact of motherhood on an academic career: Structural issues

It is noted that career progression for women in HE is a complex equality issue and multiple systemic barriers have slowed down women's progress (Pyke, 2013). Practice of academic workload allocation may have been a significant factor, both in the problem and in its resolution, whereby academic promotion broadly followed individual achievements that was an outcome of the work done. It is argued that the main barriers slowing down the career progression of women in HE and also the barrier to the pay scale differences between men women was due to the cultural and social norms regarding women's role in society (Barrett & Barrett, 2011). These societal "norms" needed to be overcome, in order for women to breakthrough these barriers (Forster, 2001). Hammond (1997) also supported this idea as he found that women in universities had not been able to overcome the obstacles that existed in long-established, very traditional environments. That is now two decades ago, yet more recent literature still supports this claim (Baker, 2016; Huopainen and Satama, 2018).

Women are expected to make a 'choice' between their young family or producing research papers and publications (Forster, 2001). It is argued that women's career growth is hampered by childcare and compounded by their general marginalisation as well as sexualisation in HE (Savigny, 2014). In addition, generally in the UK, men are more than twice as likely to be in the top salary bracket (Barrett & Barrett, 2011), and the HE sector is no exception. There is statistical evidence of differences between male and female academics in the pay scale. Staff pay scales are negotiated nationally for university staff under the a delegated committee for Higher Education staff (HEFCE, 2009). However, a persistent gender pay gap within UK universities is widely reported.

The issue of lack of senior leadership positions for women in the workplace is explained in the literature through the concept of the '*Glass Ceiling*'. This in turn refers to a subtle and almost invisible barrier(s) preventing women from moving up to senior roles. Thus implying that women are discriminated against and that their traditional role in the family is an

impediment to career success (Burke and Mattis, 2005; Pardhan, 2018). Eagly and Carli (2007) rejected the concept of the glass ceiling in favour for a more appropriate metaphor of a 'labyrinth', a view that barriers to women's advancement are all the more prominent and more permeable than rigidly including a prejudice, negative view on women's leadership, family responsibilities and less access to mentors. More recent research further affirmed the persistence of the labyrinth in academia (Patel *et al.*, 2018). Another metaphor labelled 'firewall' by Bendl and Schmidt (2010) involved an image of discrimination as 'virtual flexible spaces' that cannot be touched; these boundaries are considered to be made up intentionally based on personal and organisational interests managed through structural characteristics.

In addition, Coleman (2011) claimed that women find it harder to get ahead in their careers when compared to their male counterparts due to a higher need to take time off if they have children. Negotiating the labyrinth of career challenges is often regarded as a problem for women to solve by themselves, though it is argued that this is also a problem that should be addressed by the organisations that present impediments that specifically hinder women's progress as opposed to men's (Acker, 1990). A lack of policies supporting equal opportunities and the nature of the academic working environment are held responsible for this "leaky pipeline", where women do not progress to senior roles. This is a multi-dimensional issue and there are some sensible organisational innovations that foster progressive change (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, reforming gender-biased performance evaluations is essential. Also, given the very long hours often expected in managerial roles (Brett and Stoth, 2003; Hewlett and Luce, 2006), allowing some flexibility in the timing and mode of meeting workplace requirements should be possible.

Furthermore, Blackmore (2014) carried out a study to rethink the 'problematic' lack of leadership aspirants in entrepreneurial globalised universities from a feminist critical sociology perspective. The purpose of this was to understand the multiple factors that impacted on career choices of male and female academics, and what attracted retention of employees in research and managerial leadership. Blackmore (2014) pointed out that as time goes on there are also less leadership opportunities for women simply because there are also reduced academic positions. This however, is not a strong enough argument to explain why, despite women academics making up half of academics in UK HE, they are so underrepresented in senior positions. One explanation for this is the increased amount of workload pressure on academics and the difficulty for women with care-giving responsibilities to manage this.

All of the studies discussed serve to highlight the discrepancy between the careers of women in academia and the careers of their male counterparts. It is interesting to note that studies conducted as recently as 2018 are re-emphasising and restating findings and conclusions that emerged from studies conducted almost in some cases, thirty years ago. The passage of time has done little to dilute issues such as gender discrimination in the workplace, inequalities of pay and the challenges faced by women in general in both the corporate and academic world. This serves to highlight the pressing need to address an issue, which has pervaded into the 21st Century workplace.

2.4.3.1 Workload Allocation

There has been debate on the relationship between being a successful researcher and a successful teacher and whether teaching and research departments should develop separately within the UK (Euwals and Ward, 2005; Lillis and Curry, 2018). The British Higher Education system has been subject to a system of peer review since the year 1989, under the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This measures how much research each university produces and through an assessment of publications evaluates the quality of research published. Reay (2000, p. 15) argued that;

“[...] Because of the emphasis placed on research outputs, the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise has consolidated research as the most important academic activity in British higher education with more status and gravitas than teaching”

So research and teaching are often pitted against each other with research coming out on top. It is also presumed that experienced researchers hold the best credentials for successful teaching (Euwals and Ward, 2005). However, while universities seek to gain financially as well as reputationally from a good outcome from the Research Excellence Framework (REF), there was no similar arrangement for the assessment of excellent teaching. Therefore, in 2016 a new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was introduced, which linked funding of teaching in HE to quality rather than quantity, as it did for research (Office for Students, 2018). There have been some initial analyses on the metrics used in the TEF in UK HE (Gillard, 2018), however, there is limited evidence of its impact as of yet. In their quest to investigate ‘what matters most: teaching or research’ Euwals & Ward (2005) found that there is a positive relationship between the two; there is some evidence showing that productive researchers are also successful teachers. However, research requires over-time and excessive working outside of ‘work hours’ which is significantly difficult for mothers with caring responsibilities (Deiana, 2013).

Additionally, Williams (2000) pointed out that jobs that required excessive overtime were typically off-limits to those with caretaking responsibilities. As such, universities continue to wrangle with the research-teaching dynamic which has incidentally placed mounting pressure on academics who are faced with increasing levels of administrative duties and pressure to publish. This in turn is likely to be even more problematic for working mothers who are tasked with the responsibility of teaching and publishing, whilst tending to the needs of their children simultaneously. Salle (2012) agreed with this by stating that individuals often established a regular childcare schedule. So, jobs that required additional labour at short notice were simply not possible for many parents. In contrast, there were many positive aspects to an academic's career, and the freedom to research what one loves. Bailyn (2003) outlined more positive sides of academic work stating; how academics had more freedom and autonomy than most high-level endeavours and that it allowed them to work on things they cared about. Other unique characteristics of academic work compared to other jobs included its extensive qualifications, its relatively high degree of job control, its international marketplace and its reliance on entrepreneurial skills for research productivity and promotion (Baker, 2012). However, Bailyn (2003, pg. 138) highlighted:

“At the same time, there are some characteristics that make it particularly demanding. An academic must fulfil multiple roles- teaching, research, service both to the university and to the profession- and that increases the level of demand, indeed it is a profession with great deal of overload.”

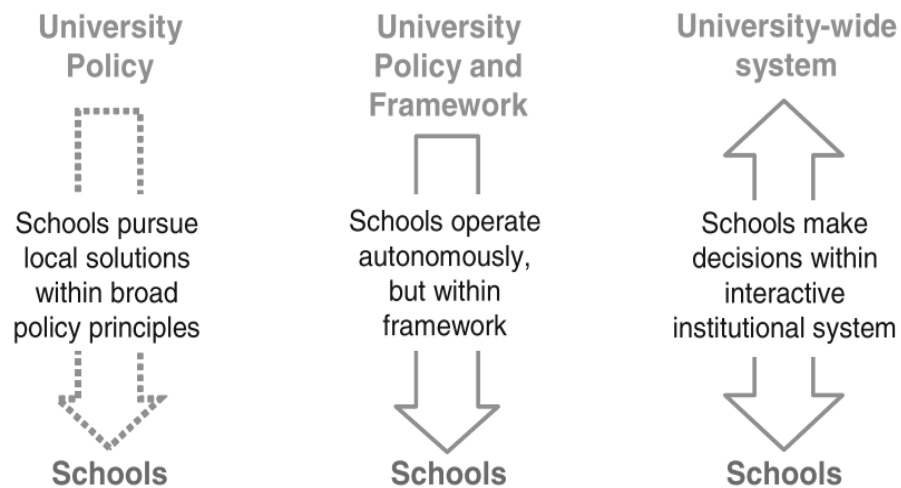
Moreover, Aiston and Jung (2015) found a significant statistical difference in time spent on research of men and women; women were spending far less time on research than men, with the majority of their time being devoted to administration and teaching, in comparison to male colleagues. This suggests that there may be workload allocation issues within universities that require further attention, in particular for mother's balancing work and family. Moreover, Bailyn (2003) emphasised the increase of psychological demands which an academic career entailed, specifically for senior staff members. He explained that this was because a professor was supposed to be an expert in her field, one who had the answers to all questions. There was pressure, therefore to always appear knowledgeable, never to ask for help. He called this a “special burden”, in comparison to management roles, or junior members of staff who can have allocated mentors, which was not considered necessary for staff with senior status.

Furthermore, Barrett & Barrett (2011) emphasised three main interactive factors of workload management that disadvantaged women. Firstly, staff with interruptions in

employment continuity and fractional contracts were excluded or faced hindrance in their research activity, an otherwise pivotal area for progression in an academic career. Secondly, most work models used for allocating work did not include time for research activity; this fed off expectations that research work was conducted “after hours at home”, a feature that women with caring responsibilities found more difficult. These trends led to 42% of academic staff working during evenings and at weekends as a regular and normal practice (Barrett & Barrett, 2011). The authors pointed out that a system that relied on allocation of work that could not be completed within work hours, might tend to promote inequalities of career progression, with certain groupings, such as women and carers, being more vulnerable in the face of such an approach.

Given the perceived importance of research to career progression, time allocated to it should be an important element of the issue of career progression for women. Thirdly, they pointed out that there was a “lack of transparency”, which allowed areas of, often unwitting, discrimination to go undetected through the skewed allocation of types of work that were not strongly associated with promotion. This implies that service and administrative tasks that take up a lot of work time are not activities that are taken into account when being considered for promotion. Different universities have different approaches to the management of academic workloads, as indicated in Figure 2.6.

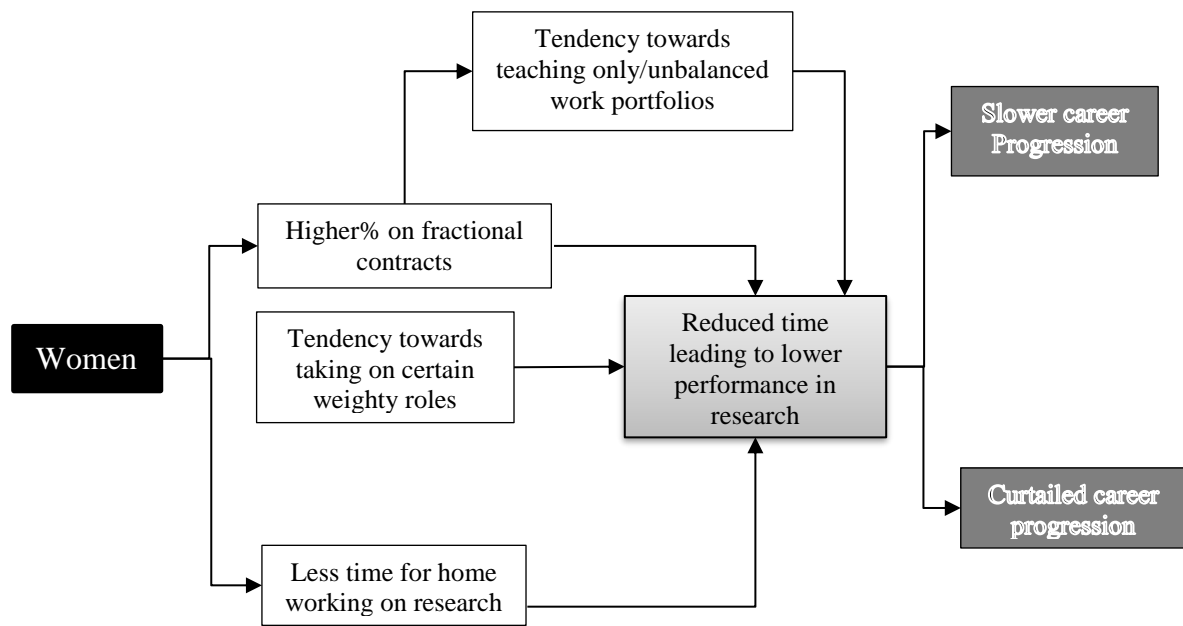
Figure 2.6: **Range of institutional approaches to the management of academic workloads**



(Source: Barrett & Barrett, 2011, pg. 146)

Figure 2.6 shows that some universities have broader policy guidelines and allow the school to have more authority over workload allocation decisions; other universities whilst still giving individual school discretion for workload allocation, also give university-wide guidelines on how to measure units, for example. Some universities have an integrated university-wide system. This shows that universities adopt a diverse range of approaches in workload allocation; it varies from mainly university guidelines, or an integration of university and school or one of the other. They also argued that analysis of workload allocation on an organisational level shows trends of ‘unwitting discrimination’; they highlight some of these discriminations in Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.7: **Academic workloads and potential cumulative impacts on women and their career progression**



(Source: Barrett & Barrett, 2011, pg. 151)

Figure 2.7 shows that due to institutional reasons such as contract type, roles and responsibilities and expectations to work outside of home, there is reduced time and lower performance in research. This in turn provides insight into women academic’s slower or curtailed career progression. As such, Barrett & Barrett (2011) recommend the ‘unwitting’ discrimination caused by workload allocation can be improved with more equity, equality, and transparency; which they believe should be supported by HR departments by monitoring equitable processes and outcomes. This type of action has the potential to change the institutional context by making decisions and outcomes more generally visible. Additionally, the transparency of both the decision-making process and the outcomes can help improve the fairness in allocations and opportunities for women’s career progression. This does not mean that Barrett & Barrett (2011) do not acknowledge that it is inevitable for some women to have slower career progression in HE because of their own choices, as supported by Hakims preference theory (2004).

Furthermore, Blackmore (2014) raised an interesting point about the increased use of technology in the academic profession, as with almost all other professions in recent years. She claimed that learning technologies have a positive side because they enable greater flexibility regarding time and location of academic work that benefits women largely responsible for childcare and working students. Blackmore (2014) offers a balanced evaluation as the author

also cites the negative sides of learning technologies, mainly the fact that they erode the boundaries that separate work and home life while raising student expectations regarding immediate response times. Moreover, online working requires continuous learning and adapting to fast changing technological changes which means continuous up-skilling producing academic empowerment or dis-empowerment.

In addition, academics are also expected to align their teaching and research with corporate objectives, yet demonstrate innovative forward thinking in their fields (Blackmore, 2014). Academics are judged as individuals for ‘delivery’ in student evaluations and research output metrics. There is discussion on whether gender relates to research evaluation via panel assessments and journal rating lists. However, a study used data from UK business schools and found no evidence that the proportion of women in a submission for panel assessment affected the score received by submitting institutions. However, they found that women on average received lower scores according to some journal ratings lists (Brooks, Fenton and Walker, 2014). They also found that women who could publish in higher-rated journals, although the same is not true for men; women who were subject to “individual staff circumstances”, for instance, maternity leave or part-time working, had lower scores according to journal ratings. Gender differences in research productivity can also be explained partly by women’s ability to network and/or their individual circumstances (Brooks, Fenton, & Walker, 2014). This research raises questions about gender bias and discrimination in the process of peer-review (Morley, 2014)

In the UK, the research assessment exercise is the main way of assessing an academic’s publishing presence and this is often a determining factor for career progress (Barrett & Barrett, 2011). Bailyn (2003, pg. 145) highlighted how “*most of these rules are gendered in the sense that they favour men’s experiences and favour characteristics associated with masculine behaviour, and thus they contribute to the iniquities we find in academia*”. Therefore, the main argument for workload allocation is the lack of time allocated for research, yet the pressure to publish, and promotion criteria mainly based on academics publishing presence. As a result, there is increased difficulty for academic mothers to manage workload with time to research for publishing for potential promotions, and this working practice further perpetuates the ideal worker norm. Bailyn’s findings also highlight that as these norms continue to exist in the sector, they are heavily biased towards the experience of men i.e. men have more time as they are not tied down by the same experiences as women, both at home and work. Therefore, men have a clearer and more accessible path to promotion as their (considerable) research time is heavily

taken into account for promotion. This raises the question of how women academics who are experiencing maternity in their universities manage or are supported in dealing with such inequities, in particular when dealing with intense workload and child caring responsibilities.

2.4.3.2 Work Life Balance

The issue of balancing motherhood and a career is a major challenge for women and one which has been documented widely (Heijstra, Steinhorsdottir and Einarsdottir, 2017; Hardy *et al.*, 2018). There has been coverage of work-family balance and the choice of a small minority of men to take active part in childcare (Gentleman, 2009); as well as on-going debate about whether mothers harm their children by returning to work when they are very young (McVeigh and Asthana, 2010).

As previously discussed in section 2.3.3- Mothers carry out the majority of the household work (Fetterolf and Rudman, 2014) . In a study of 94 couples, Gerstel & Gallagher (2001) found that men regularly engaged in less care work and work around the house than their wives. Similarly, Elliott (2003) and Elliott (2008) found that women reported doing more housework, engaging in more eldercare, and being responsible for childcare arrangements. Mason and Goulden (2004) studied faculty members and found that while men and women reported spending nearly equal amounts of time on housework, women spent nearly twice as many hours per week engaged in childcare as men. Women in the UK still tend to do the bulk of childcare and unpaid domestic work. Research from the University of Oxford showed that whilst men have taken up an increasing amount of responsibility for domestic labour over the past 50 years, women still undertake two-thirds (65.5 per cent) of unpaid work in the home (Fawcett, 2014). This means that women are still putting in the ‘double-shift’ and inequality of work at home transcends to inequality at work.

Government and organisations recognise the difficulty of working mothers in balancing work and life (Coleman, 2011); this is reflected in the introduction of policies including enhanced maternity leave, paid paternity leave and parental leave (Fagan, 2009; Atkinson, 2017)) followed by the launch of a work-life balance campaign with employers and Trade Unions (Fagan, 2002). However, despite increased availability of work-life balance policies, measures and flexibilities are not widely accessible to new mothers who need them the most, especially as primary carers for their young children (O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Moreover, it is argued that work environments that do not disadvantage women wanting to lead integrated lives have a competitive edge in retaining their most talented employees (O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005).

Organisations can support work-life balance by legitimising various career paths and options and by providing a climate of acceptance and support for the many responsibilities women have and the many choices they face (Sutherland, 2017). In view of the fact that, conflict between the two has a negative impact on women's decision to return to work after taking maternity leave (Carlson *et al.*, 2011; Paludi, 2014). It was proposed that work-life balance policies enhance organisational attachment “[...] *even amongst workers with no current dependent care responsibilities because the employer is perceived as caring for its workers*” (Lewis, 1997, p. 17). Contrarily, Young (1999) recommended that work-life balance initiatives raised fundamental questions about the issue of fairness. Lewis (1997) contended that poor co-worker support is often linked to belief that such policies are inequitable, benefiting one group of workers (generally parents) at expense of their childless colleagues who resent having to work longer hours and cover workloads of colleagues who have children (Hegtvedt et al 2002; McDonald et al, 2005).

Interestingly, Baker's (2012) book '*Academic Careers and the Gender gap*' drew heavily on the impact of domestic divisions of labour on paid work in the competitive environment of HE, and the societal norm of women accepting more day-to-day responsibilities of childrearing and housework than men. This inevitably gives them less time to pursue full-time careers and or to gain promotion. Moreover, Atkinson (2010) examined sex discrimination cases of women employees who were refused part-time work after having children. They found that Employment Tribunals could view applicants who were well paid as not being subjected to a detriment treatment by a refusal of a request to work part-time because they could afford childcare. One way the Government and the organisation aims to deal with the work-family balance issue for mothers (or any employees with any type of caring responsibilities) is by implementing flexible working arrangements and offering the opportunity to flexibly.

2.4.3.3 Flexible working arrangements

The fact that the mother is the main person responsible for child-caring responsibilities in most UK households means that, they require flexible working arrangements. More specifically, ideal working arrangements would be those which organise baby-sitting facilities whilst at work, though this is not always possible, and lack of flexibility in working hours is known to hinder return to work after maternity leave (Coronel, Moreno, and Carrasco, 2010; Davey, Murrells, and Robinson, 2005; Lewis, and Humbert, 2010). The long hours required, put those who need to work flexibly or part-time at a disadvantage, making it difficult for female academics to take career breaks to have children (Cheung, 2014; Kinman, 2016)

Nevertheless, flexible working arrangements have expanded in organisations with the introduction and take up of part-time working, job sharing, term-time working, reduced hours, shared parental leave and the introduction of legislation (ACAS, 2010) allowing the right to request flexible working (Kersley, 2006). These policies may be available to a growing number of workers and appear more equitable, however, this does not mean that requests are being met (Gregory and Milner, 2009). Critics argue that organisational culture of ‘time’ and ‘conceptions’ of ideal working arrangements weakens employees’ sense of entitlement to flexibility. Often the social and psychological environment of an organisation expresses implicit expectations that working traditionally for a set-time of hours is conceived as an ‘ideal working arrangement’ (Acker, 1990; Bailyn, 2003), effectively leading an employee to feel unprofessional and lacking in commitment when requesting flexible hours (Kossek, Lewis and Hammer, 2010). This takes the flexible working discourse beyond the introduction of policies and advocates the significance of a change in organisational culture, practices and interactions. It is through this deep change that flexible working can stretch beyond print, and integrate into employees working lives, in particular returning mothers from maternity leave who make it its highest up-take.

In an opposing view it is contested that barriers to flexible working are personal, specifically for academics because they are high achievers and competitive and passionate about their work by nature. However, Sang *et al.*, (2015) investigated this further and found that while individual factors, such as desire to excel and blurred boundaries between work and leisure contribute to the long hours working culture, these factors are in fact shaped by cultural norms and pressures to cultivate a perception of the ‘ideal academic’ within an increasingly target-driven environment. In particular, employee perceptions of their employer’s attitudes towards flexibility which amounts to favouring hard working employees in place of those who prefer non-traditional or flexible hours (Lewis and Cooper, 2005; Watts, 2009). This in particular carries negative implications for women who are often dissuaded from requesting the leave to which they are entitled due to fears that they will be overlooked for promotion and career progression (Fagan, 2009; Tomlinson, and Durbin, 2010).

Surprisingly, even in the public sector and female dominated professions such as nursing and teaching, flexible working is considered a barrier to reaching management levels (Coronel, Moreno, and Carrasco, 2010; Davey, Murrells, and Robinson, 2005). A major factor is managerial discretion; despite an emphasis on the role of managers in implementing flexible working, many continue to believe it is up to individual employees to balance their childcare

and employment responsibilities (Dex and Scheibl, 2001). An argument put forward by some employers is that there is an adverse effect on full-time employees and difficulty in measuring performance output against employees who work flexibly (Crompton, Dennett, Wigfield, 2003). Scholars (see McDonald et al, 2005; Smithson, 2005) insist that employees' utilisation of flexible working policies has a knock-off effect for colleagues. This is exacerbated in the current climate of work intensification, whereby team working and performance based management further add to the difficulty of new mothers, who require flexible working arrangements to facilitate childcare responsibilities. As previously discussed, women have higher rates of representation junior, more administrative and receptionist based roles in HE compared to the academic roles (HESA, 2018). This comes as a surprise when considering that academic roles are thought of as having more flexibility than the typical '9am-5pm' administration roles (Sang *et al.*, 2015).

Scholars O'Dell (2012) and Spiteri & Xuereb (2012) have identified the need to improve local policy with regards to family-friendly measures and the importance of an increase in local maternity leave duration. In accordance with this, over the past two decades, universities have implemented a variety of policies and programs aimed at helping faculty and staff to balance their home and work responsibilities. Specifically, in HE, this is evident from arrangements allowing timetabling constraints requests to reducing teaching duties following the birth of a child; such policies are focused on the needs of women, specifically mothers, given the fact that they hold a disproportionate responsibility of childrearing responsibilities (Sallee, 2012). Brooks, Fenton, & Walker (2014) however, insisted on considering some broader implications for research policy. They claimed that one important dimension is the legal one for the HE sector; given that legislation requires the public sector to take proactive steps to promote equality rather than simply prevent discrimination, they should be used with caution by institutions as a way to rationalise decisions on hiring, pay and promotion.

However, despite the introduction of such initiatives, negative experiences of women returning to work after childbirth are increasingly reported in the news (Bulman, 2018; Collings, Freeney and Werff, 2018). Thus, there is a call for research to improve organisational efforts in supporting women and encouraging their development in the workplace (Equal Opportunities Review, 2014; Hardy *et al.*, 2018). One way returning mothers achieve this is by requesting to work part-time instead.

2.4.3.4 Part time work

Part time work is another organisational issue which is based on the premise that trading down hours should not mean trading down status (Equal Opportunities Review, 2014). Though a shift from full-time to part-time hours is deemed ideal by most women after maternity leave, employers' failure to offer this, acts as barrier for women's return (Nowak, Naude, & Thomas, 2013; Schott, 2012). Many women return to work in part-time roles after having children. While in theory this should provide a solution for women who would like to combine caring with paid work, in practice this often translates into reduced opportunities for career progression and it can also force women to take up less senior and lower paid roles, despite maintaining the ambition to progress in their career (Fawcett, 2014). Research has found that almost half of women professionals who take up part-time employment upon having children move into low skilled jobs and a significant proportion of women are living on low incomes because they are not earning their true market value within their available hours of work.

Scholars Connolly and Gregory (2005) found that almost 25 % of women moving from full-time to part-time work experienced 'occupational downgrading', in other words, moving from an occupation with a higher to a lower average pay. Consistently, a study by the Resolution Foundation (Resolution Foundation, 2012) found that 44 % of respondents felt they had taken a lower skilled job when working part-time compared with working full-time. Debatably Atkinson & Ummary, (2013) questioned what about those women who would like to work part-time at the same job previously done on a full-time basis, but are unable to because the employer has not agreed to such a change? Evidence proposes that there remains a widely held perception that certain jobs simply cannot be done on a part-time basis and that women in this position are forced to take a less senior position with the same employer or seek alternative employment elsewhere which would involve loss of employment protection rights (Atkinson & Ummary, 2013). Commitment to full-time work whilst having primary responsibility of caring for a young child causes overwhelming difficulty for women returners; however, such practical difficulties can be remedied through increased HRM intervention in facilitating part-time work arrangements for women returning to work after childbirth (Schott, 2012).

In the HE sector, for the majority of mothers who choose to work part-time or are working on fractional contracts, are presented with the ever present risk of losing their posts (Eagan Jr, Jaeger and Grantham, 2015). Barrett & Barrett (2011) explained that their work had become concentrated on teaching roles and activities, which often excluded management or leadership roles and research activity. Thus, for the majority of women on part-time contracts,

although flexibility is increased, opportunities for promotion are reduced. This is mainly because of the difficulty in being submersible to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which as widely understood is a dominant factor for promotion. Blackmore (2014) insisted that there is scope for universities to re-think research expectations realistically, reduce time-consuming managerialism, take seriously issues of workload and work-life conflict, revalue the pedagogical and research practices of the social sciences and humanities and shift the reward systems (Leonard and Malina, 2017). One major issue for mother academics with flexibility and part-time working is the difficulty to attend conferences; this in turn further impedes their capacity to research and publish.

2.4.3.5 Travel and Conferences / Mobility

The academic conference is a key site for academic socialisation and the passing on of norms and values (Lipton, 2018). There is recognition in existing literature that the fixed times, and places, of childcare, schooling, school terms, and the like jar uneasily with demands for mobility and time away from home (Crang, 2007; Bagihole & White, 2013). Besides, networking is a key component of conference attendance, and it is important for academics whether it is for social or business purposes. Such networks have also been acknowledged to be a key part of a successful career and, therefore, attendance at conferences may offer a chance to build one's contacts and subsequently benefit one's career (Mair, Lockstone-Binney and Whitelaw, 2018). One major challenge is what Calisi (2018) termed the 'Childcare-conference conundrum'. She asserts that parent-academics face a conundrum as they struggle to attend key conferences and further their careers while finding care for the children. Therefore, conferences also face a conundrum as they assess how to better accommodate mothers and families. This is a serious problem because it creates a culture of inequity for parents, but more so for mothers because they are more disadvantaged than fathers because of biological. Prejudicial, and often socially driven childcare demands (Park et al, 2013; Fetterolf and Rudman, 2014). With solutions seemingly elusive, many mother academics have to forgo conference attendance because of lack of childcare support, and therefore suffer the career consequences (Calisi, 2018).

Scholars Jago and Deery (2005) argued that there are barriers related to travelling for conferences which disproportionately affect women, for instance, family responsibilities are more likely to impede or prevent women from attending conferences than their male academic counterparts. Furthermore, Ramirez, Laing and Mair (2013) argued that the conference arena is a gender-neutral space, where the specific needs of women as consumers are not well

recognised; specifically for mothers, academic conferences raise worrying concerns because women attending conferences remain heavily involved with childcare. Therefore, more needs to be done to address the specific needs of women, given that there are an increasing number female conference attendees (Nicolson, 2017).

The mobility of academic staff such as being able to travel to conferences and stay away from home is also one explanation for the gender difference in publishing and women's lack in developing research networks, particularly outside their base institution (Nicolson, 2017). There is recognised difficulty for mother academics aspiring to balance work-family and maintain a publishing presence (Sallee, 2012). Adding to this, Brook, Fenton & Walker (2014) suggested that in order to build such networks, academic positions may require individuals to move frequently for advancement, this operates on the assumption that the employee has no children or has a spouse at home in charge of domestic responsibilities.

Another issue returning mothers face upon return and require a working style adjustment is with breastfeeding, more of which is discussed in the subsequent section.

2.4.3.6 Breastfeeding

There is extensive evidence of short-term and long-term health benefits of breastfeeding for infants and mothers (Britton et al, 2007). It is reported however, that the issue of breastfeeding is significant in women's desire to prioritise the maternal bodywork of nurturing new infants. In accordance with health imperatives and the workplace rhetoric that does not support it (Bartlett, 2006) A study on breastfeeding practices among Malaysian female academics suggested that a positive environment that encourages breastfeeding can contribute to improved statistics of breastfeeding (Daud *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, Gatrell (2013) questioned how being pregnant and/or newly maternal at work was experienced, perceived and managed by professionally and/or managerially employed women in the UK. She found that, some referred to breastfeeding as 'satisfying' and important for 'bonding' with infants. However, at odds with health narratives, which present breastfeeding as a natural element of mothering, over two thirds of mothers described breastfeeding as variously 'difficult', 'painful' and 'exhausting', with some women rapidly switching to infant formula. However, six mothers reported self-regulating their maternal bodies so that their breasts produced milk supplies only in the late evening before babies' last feed. The maternal body work of prioritising breastfeeding while concurrently keeping this 'leaky' project well away from the workplaces, is under-reported within the wealth of literature on breastfeeding. It is further contested by Hausman (2004, p. 275) that:

“Breastfeeding forces us to reconsider equality frameworks that limit the biological aspects of reproduction to childbearing—nursing is about recognising women as cultural mammals whose choices, decisions, and experiences as mothers are circumscribed both biologically and socially”

The issue of breastfeeding allows for a discussion to investigate and understand the significance of women as mothers and mothers as women. Breastfeeding provides a focus that encourages a view of women’s bodies at the centre of the dilemmas of modern societies, as women are increasingly called to labour in ways that disturb or make impossible the biosocial practices of maternity. The feminist politics of breastfeeding must be produced, however, as they are not self-evident in the current global conversations about lactation, which often position women as the problematic intermediary between a child and its nourishment. Only in the context of such a politics will the tensions between being maternal and being a feminist become productive debates over women’s rights, women’s responsibilities, and the roles of mothers in the world (Hausman, 2004).

Another study by Kosmala-Anderson and Wallace (2006) investigated the role of employers in supporting women who wished to breastfeed across four organisations in England, found that almost 90 % of respondents stated that employers should do more to support breastfeeding. This should include providing breastfeeding staff with information about breastfeeding support, access to express and storage of breast milk and enabling them to work flexible hours, as well as taking breaks during work hours. Furthermore, Schimed et al., (2011) looked into women’s perceptions and experiences of breastfeeding. Their study emphasised the importance of person-centered communication skills and of relationships in supporting a woman to breastfeed. It argued that organisational systems and services that facilitated continuity of caregiver, were more likely to facilitate an authentic presence, involving supportive care and a trusting relationship with professionals. What type of experiences academic women have of breastfeeding and whether this type of support is available to them is lesser known. However, a recent study has proclaimed that access to appropriate lactation space is critical for all breastfeeding mothers to maintain adequate milk supply (Hunter *et al.*, 2018) . Therefore, universities have the legal and ethical responsibility to provide critical, structural supports that mothers need to reach their desired breastfeeding outcomes (Hunter et al., 2018)

2.4.3.7 Identified Gap: what organisational support is afforded to mother academics?

Most data gathered on this issue of gender inequality in HE points out that academia historically was created for men by men and this notion has persisted into modern day academia. The slow progression which is offering some hope of gender neutrality in HE is offered by the fact that

education can be acquired at any stage of one's life. Though this pattern of educational and career breaks for caring responsibilities is acknowledged, universities are still not fully embracing this idea. Given women's patterns of career breaks and continuing responsibility for the informal care of family members, this is too early a cut-off point for them.

Despite women representing half of all academic staff in UK universities, the number of women who have reached higher echelons of academia remain disproportionate to say the least. The representation of women in the workplace continues to be investigated and it begins to emerge that the barriers that face women can no longer simply be conceptualised by the 'glass ceiling' metaphor. Rather, women in the workplace are increasingly faced by what can only now be described as a 'labyrinth' of challenges. This is further substantiated within the context of the current study whereby women hold less than 20% of professional posts in academia. Ashencaen-Crabtree and Shiel's (2018) recently asserted that the gender gap in senior positions within academia continues due to the gender constructs and their negative impact on interpersonal and institutional strategies that continue to perpetuate the schism that emerge within academia.

In this respect, motherhood consistently emerges as a challenge to representation of women in academia as it is acknowledged that childbirth and child rearing continue to impede career development. Indeed, issues such as the presence of a widespread gendered culture, which has led to males being favoured through policy and practice as well as the greater burden of care responsibilities placed on mothers, all continue to present barriers to female progression. Furthermore, contributors within academia that shape and determine career progression such as publications following intensive hours of research, networking and meetings outside of working hours, are off-limits to working mothers. The inability to devote the necessary time due to childcare responsibilities erect additional barriers towards career progression.

Whilst the difficulties faced by returning mothers have been firmly established, as the discussion in this section has shown, the current examination of these organisational challenges is situated in reflective analyses of the research participants' experiences. This reflection takes place once women have re-established their careers and thus there is a disconnect between the events that transpired at the time and their memories of said events having found an equilibrium in the workplace. This alludes to opacity in the progression of women's careers once they return to the workplace following maternity leave, which is only partially illuminated through the respondents' collective memories. This lack of transparency hides the level of support or

lack thereof received by women at the various stages of their maternity and therefore fails to provide a thorough appraisal and critique of organisational support. Post-maternity, the focus of the literature, is but one facet of the journey to motherhood and thus a study which takes a holistic appraisal of this process can provide new understanding and insight.

The meso-level discussion around theories related to women's participation in the workforce, in particular women academics that become mother's, has shed light on the root causality of the issue of mother's career progression and also on the structural issues that are apparent in organisations. However, there is a gap in our understanding of women's lack of representation in senior academic roles, in that, on one hand we see the macro-level governmental policies in place to support working mothers, and on the other hand we see the micro-level personal struggles some women experience. Furthermore, at the meso-level we see that there are structural/ organisational barriers that hinder women's career progression. There is a lack of attention on the kind of organisational support these women experience during their crucial maternity process which can have a major impact on their overall career progression. There are some key organisational actors that are influential for women's and mother's experiences within organisations. These are discussed in the next section, and they will be the focus of this study.

2.4.4 Influential organisational factors for mother academics: Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory

With the backdrop of the discussed theoretical underpinnings, and structural issues that explain women's, in particular women academic's lack of representation in senior academic positions. This section outlines the key influential organisational actors that impact the experiences of working mother academic's, which inevitably impacts their career progression. In doing so, this section explains the theoretical lens this research will adopt to explore mother academic's maternity experiences in UK universities and the rationale for it.

2.4.4.1 Perceived Organisational Support (POS) Theory: The employee-organisation relationship from the employee's viewpoint

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory posits that employees develop a general perception concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis, Eisenberger and Ford, 2015). Thus,

POS theory views the employee-organisation relationship from the employee's viewpoint. Eisenberger et al (2001) defined organisational support as:

“an experience-based attribution concerning the benevolent or malevolent intent of the organisational policies, norms, procedures and actions as they affect employees”

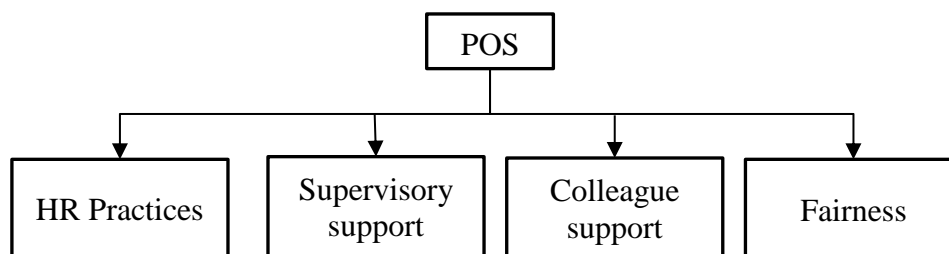
Additionally, Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) carried out a meta-analytic review of seventy studies that used POS theory, and they found that POS was related to the major hypothesised antecedents (e.g. predecessors or precursors); fairness, human resource (HR) practices, and supervisor support. This implies that employees perceive the organisation's evaluations of them and treatment of them as consistently favourable or unfavourable to a high or low degree (Eisenberger et al, 1986) and POS is influenced by the organisation's policies and procedures (Shore and Tetrick, 1991). POS is also related to *psychological contracts*, which necessitate that employees and employers have a mutual expectation of inputs and outputs. Therefore, if the employee believes that their loyalty and effort towards the organisation is higher than the organisations, then this could lead to a negative perception of the organisation causing dissatisfaction and/or lower level of performance (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003). In the context of this study, it can be argued that female academic's lack of perceived organisational support throughout the management of their maternity can lead to dissatisfaction/ and or lower level of performance.

Additionally, POS theory also relates to the *social exchange theory*, which implies that employees feel obligated to help the organisation with its goals and objectives and expect that increased efforts on the organisation's behalf will lead to greater rewards. Through an application of Social exchange theory, employment is viewed as the trade of effort and loyalty by the employee for tangible benefits and social resources from the organisation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This implies that employees with high Perceived support should engage in greater job-related efforts, resulting in enhanced in-role job performance and improved performance helpful to the organisation, thus felt obligation resulting from POS theory has been found to be positively related to affective organisational commitment (Eisenberger et al, 2001). POS theory also posits that just as the employers are concerned with committed employees, so are the employees concerned with the commitment of the organisation towards them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Furthermore, it fulfils socio-emotional needs such as; approval, esteem, affiliation, and emotional support, resulting in greater identification and commitment to the organisation, an increased desire to help the organisation succeed, and greater psychological well-being which are all self-enhancement processes. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) suggested that POS theory is considered as an assurance that the organisation will provide financial and emotional support to employees when needed to face the challenges presented by their job. Furthermore, perceived support is developed when employees often personified the organisation and its agent's actions towards them (Levinson, 1965, cited in Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002). This research therefore, explores mother academic's perceptions of their organisation's support towards them during the delicate period of their transition from maternity.

There are several antecedents of POS, including “(1) perceptions of the organisation, such as justice and politics, (2) job conditions, (3) supervisor support, (4) personality, and (5) human resource (HR) practices” (Allen, Shore, Griffeth, 2003). However, Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analytic review indicated that POS is related to the major hypothesised antecedents of POS; fairness, human resource (HR) practices, and supervisory support.

Figure 2.8: POS Theory antecedents adapted from Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002)



(Sources adapted from: Eisenberger et al, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002)

❖ Human Resource Management (HRM) Practice

Various authors have defined HRM over the years and there is a diverse range of author opinions on the function of HRM. In general, it is an organisational function concerning the overall management of people within an organisation. One popular definition is by (Guest, 1987) he defines HRM as a management strategy based on theoretical work in the field of organisational behaviour as well as rooted in the theories of commitment and motivation. Boxall and Purcell (2000) maintained that HRM covers all workforce groups and involves the

management of all employment relations within an organisation. They insist that HRM should strategically align its ethos with the organisations overall goals. While, Storey (1995; 2001) contended that HRM aims to gain competitive advantage through strategic and efficient management of committed employees. This can be achieved by employing cultural, structural and personnel techniques. Additionally, HRM was earlier defined as a means for an organisation to attain strategic business objectives and satisfaction of individual needs (Stone, 1998), and later as an understanding and effective management of individuals in the workplace (Schaper, 2004). It is responsible for complying with legislation and ensuring that employees are not treated unfairly (Employment law guide, 2010). Its purposes are often adopted by HRM professionals to replace old personnel management functions which were mainly administration based, to identify the most appropriate organisational culture for their workplace (Chandler, 1962; Fombru.; Tichy, Devanna, 1984; Gailbrith, 1964; Guest, 1987). It also emphasised that HR professionals work to replace older, mainly administration based personnel management functions to identify the most appropriate culture for their workplace (Bratton and Gold, 2017). Thus, HRM can be understood as an umbrella term involving all aspects of employee relations and management.

In particular, Beardwell and Clark (2007, p. 5) proposed two opposing approaches of HRM; “*Soft HRM*’- approaches aimed at enhancing the commitment, quality and flexibility of employees, and ‘*Hard HRM*’ - emphasis on strategy where human resources are deployed to achieve business goals in the same way as any other resource”. Moreover, they further expanded that “*as the HRM debate has progressed further terms have also been introduced; for example ‘high-commitment management (HCM)’ instead of soft HRM and ‘strategic HRM’ instead of hard HRM*”. Generally, the adoption of such approaches is not obsolete, but a combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ HRM in contemporary organisations. It is argued that a work culture that focuses on the soft HRM strategy that centres on human development focuses on strategic long-term workforce planning and suitable performance-related rewards. On the other hand, work cultures that focus on the hard HRM strategies that centre around utilitarianism and numerical value, tend to be better suited to a strategy that emphasises cost control and competition based mainly on price (Muller-Camen *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, HRM has to balance the pursuit of soft and hard HRM wisely, because there is a mutual psychological contract relationship between employers and employees, and for the well-being of the employee and organisational efficiency overall it is imperative that HRM reflects, evaluates and adapts accordingly. It is also crucial that HRM continuously pursues issues relating to employee

commitment and flexibility that reflects today's digital world of work, and overall quality of work.

There are also different theoretical perspectives on how HRM contributes to organisational practice and overall performance. The universalistic perspective imposes that various different 'best practices' of high performance should be utilised, independent of an organisation's overall strategy (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez and Sanchez-Gardey, 2005). However, the contingency perspective argues that it is more important for the business strategy to be closely linked to HRM strategy, rather than merely adhering to various best practices. The contingency and configurational perspectives argue that HRM practices have to uniquely tailor to the organisational needs and the same 'bundle' of best practices cannot be applied to all organisations (Martin-Alcazar et al., 2005).

This section argues that HRM professionals play an important role in shaping culture by designing and implementing HRM policies and practices, or HRM systems that promote appropriate employee and employer behaviour (Gailbrith, 1964; Guest, 1987). In the context of this study, HR practices, work role characteristics, and working conditions can be enhanced by the organisation to make the context and nature of work more pleasant. In POS theory, this perception reflects the substantial control that many organisations have over such practices, such that perceptions of their being favourable should be strongly related to perceived support. These include: job security, flexible work practices, family supportive work practices, and developmental opportunities. Allen et al. (2003, p. 102) argued that supportive organisational practices signalled investment in employees and contributed to their development, therefore it played an important role in individual POS. Additionally, results from the Allen et al. (2003) study indicated that when HR practices were perceived as supportive by employees, there was increased POS. This is because employees perceived that the organisation supported and cared for them. The HR practices suggested by Allen et al. (2003) included participation in decision-making, fairness of rewards and growth opportunities. In this research, one way to gauge academic mothers' perceptions of organisational support is to explore their perceptions of HR practices and role in their transition back to work after maternity; this will also highlight whether policies set out by their universities HR department were implemented in practice.

Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) however, suggests that the main factors contributing to perceived support are favourable discretionary treatment, effectively communicated upper management support, supervisor support and monitored procedural justice. Within the context

of this research, it is imperative to find out women's experiences of HR's role within their maternity process because HR can potentially be the bridge between the macro-level legal governmental policies and the meso-level implementation of those policies and more supportive mechanisms in practice. Similarly, the role of supervisors/ managers is an integral part in the maternity process.

❖ **Supervisory support**

This antecedent of POS theory posits that employees connect favourable or unfavourable treatment by supervisors, the representatives of the organisation, as an indication that the organisation as a whole either favours or disfavors them. As supervisor's act as organisational agents, their favourable treatment of employees contributes to perceived support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Moreover, informal supervisory support for family is deemed a critical determinant as to whether or not workers have access to formal work-life policies (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, Hansen, 2009). Cultural support also includes culture change initiatives that support the legitimacy of 'good employees' being dually involved in care-giving and other non-work roles while sustaining employment and pursuing a career. Kossek, Lewis & Hammer (2010) highlighted that support could include enabling one to slow down a career for non-work needs, such as reducing hours, taking a job leave, or allowing for opportunities to re-enter the workforce without a career penalty. This would include formal supervisory training to increase family supportive supervisory behaviours that resulted in increased perceptions of cultural support for worker control over scheduling (Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner, Simmerman, 2009).

It is claimed that management support could take a variety of forms, such as encouragement of employees, providing a wider selection of user-friendly software and offering various educational programmes (Igarria et al, 1997). In emphasising the importance of supervisory support, Hartman & Slapnicar (2009) stated that the support of top managers ensures richer resources, better communication between different departments, and superior decision making. This view is supported by research that has shown that the support a woman receives from her supervisor and peers can impact significantly on her experience of maternity leave and her decision to return to work (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Houston & Marks, 2003; Lyness et al, 1999). Similarly, this research is concerned with the perceptions of academic mothers of their organisations' support in their transition from maternity leave and that a major contributor to the quality of their transition is affected by the role of their supervisors (line managers) in managing their maternity.

❖ **Managers in Universities**

Traditionally, universities in the UK were considered institutes run by scholars and professors with the primary aim of providing education to others and researching, all in the pursuit of knowledge. The academic institutes were not considered as a business enterprise and the discussion of 'value for money' were not given the same attention as is the case currently. Due to the rise in the number of students and the up-scaling of institutional size, there has been a paradigm shift in HE, one where efficiency has gained a new found importance. Now the HE leaders, namely the senior lecturers and professors who occupy important decision making roles , are now expected to think in terms of the logic of 'cost and benefit' (Kolsaker, 2008).

Prior to this, in pursuit of knowledge, the HE institutes were considered as "oracles of wisdom" whereas now they are more of a "merchants' vessels" carrying profit shipments akin to a business enterprise (Ledwith and Manfredi, 2000, pg. 11). Due to the relentless competition between various universities in a dynamic economic market, the scholarly leaders now think more like a hedge fund manager, weighing their decisions based on 'investment and return' principles. So often women employees, from the perspectives of the line managers in HE, are viewed as a liability in academia, if they decide to become a mother. This is considered as delaying or halting returns on investment made by the institutes in an individual. International Studies (Deem, 2003) refer to this particular development as a form of 'New Managerialism' where public funds spent by an institute need to be justified as good 'value for money.' The big push for full transparency and clarity regarding the use of public funds have led to government and funding groups to constantly work towards 'efficiency gains'. Consequently, in HE, this has led to reduction in unit of resource per student and staff involved in HE and overall limiting of resources (Deem 2003)

Following this, there has been a shift towards meritocracy of managerialism and centralisation in the university sector, in order to standardise transparency in the interests of uniform procedures and monitoring across institutions. This was considered as opening up opportunities for women and be beneficial to those with equality agendas (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000). It was argued that the shift towards managerialism led to women in lower posts in HE because they were shying away from approaching their line managers to request the flexibility that they required as an academic and as a young mother. Thus, they would be more inclined to take a break, or worse, to consider resignation instead of negotiating a flexible work contract. This was particularly the case if the line manager was someone who was a 'non-parent' or single,

because then they were like to be non-friendly, even more so if they also happened to be a male manager. This led to lack of communication and transparency.

Work is underway to find distinctions between gender-related practices and values by 'new managerialism'. As it stands, these new reforms are developed by men for male managers. They also need to be applicable to women managers and women in HE. So, the objective should be to achieve efficiency gains without marginalising or disadvantaging women. New managerialism is a way of implementing managerial style normally used in medium to large sized business enterprises; now it is considered applicable to a public sector HE (Deem, 2003). This clearly leads to conflict between managers and anything that is considered an unnecessary expense. Unfortunately, young mothers employed in HE can be viewed as an unnecessary expense by their line managers, whilst they are on their maternity leave / break from their careers.

Deem (2003) further questioned whether the 'new managerialism' was a gender-specific set of practices influenced by dominant masculinities and created and implemented by male managers. They conducted interviews and found that male managers preferred their own professional identity and self-regulation over their institutional or HR policies (Winter, 2009). For these male managers, their personal managerial decisions were based on their disciplines and overarching biases which were often above the commitments of their organisation to equality of opportunity. This unregulated lack of standard operating procedures for the UK Universities, allows senior managers and decision makers in HE to base decisions on their personal attitudes towards gender equality. Particularly in the modern era which is committed to equality, it is disconcerting that the traditional academic values are in conflict with the corporate responsibilities of the institute (Winter, 2009).

It is argued that for the managed academics, the institution is a place they disengage with because they express more commitment to their disciplines and less commitment to their organisation management and business direction. So, there is a clash between traditional academic cultures and the modernising corporate cultures of higher education (Winter, 2009). One study found that respondents in the three countries (UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands) agreed that in the last three to five years they had observed an increased emphasis on performance measurement and more assessment of quality in research as well as teaching in universities. (Teelken, 2012). In the United Kingdom and elsewhere, universities continued to

react to the demands of increasingly performance based systems of accountability (Floyd, 2016).

Within the UK context, a large ESRC-funded study examining the extent to which New Managerialism had permeated the management of UK Universities, Deem (2000) found that only one third of academics who became middle managers had received any formal training in leadership and management, and some felt they had received enough feedback on their management role (Floyd, 2016). This reflects on the organisational culture of a specific department, which is mainly aided by the type of managerialism implemented. Organisational culture can be seen as a way for senior managers to control workers through socialisation processes that ensure that employees confirm their espousal of organisational values and behaviours. Viewing organisational culture through this lens has implications for organisational staff induction and subsequent training and development programmes (Floyd, 2016).

Consequently, it is claimed that any support and training for department heads should be devised from the bottom up, with the starting point being the individual academic and department concerned (Kolsaker, 2008). One study found that academics appeared, on the whole, to accept managerialism not only as an external technology of control, but as a facilitator of enhanced performance, professionalism and status (Kolsaker, 2008). This leads us to question however: whether returning academic mothers would view strong managerialism as a positive force? This question has a particular urgency, since in that fragile transitioning time of returning from maternity women need increased flexibility and autonomy over managing their work and life. This is particularly true, because negotiating with department heads can be a difficult process for women who are not in senior academic positions and may be reluctant to push too hard because the decision making is so decentralised.

More recent times have seen a rise in females in managerial positions. Research showed that women's accounts of why they were managers were not particularly about power or status or about making people do things that were perceived as unacceptable to those being managed. This constitutes 'soft' approaches to management concentrating on reaching consensus and collaboration (Deem, 2003). Therefore, there is also a vast difference in the 'managerial' mind-sets of male and female managers. This will lead to an interesting exploration in this study, in terms of returning academic experiences to a male or female manager.

Likewise, central to the issues of women's progression and productivity in academic careers are debates around the impact of taking time off for maternity or adoption leave on

women's productivity, promotion and progression in the academy. Cuddy et al (2004) did a study on people's perceptions of professional women with and without children found that working mothers who did not take maternity leave after having a child were generally judged more harshly than working mothers who did take leave, which is mediated by people's perceptions that the no-leave mothers are less committed to their children.

Scholars have placed emphasis on the necessity of planning before leaving for maternity leave for a smooth transition back into the workplace. Houston and Marks (2003) found planning to be a central influencing factor as far as return to work was concerned. As such, it came to light that those women who made plans during their pregnancy, were more likely to act on these plans following the birth of their child(ren). Planning had a greater impact on return to work, more so than income itself. Millward (2006) also argued that organisations need to actively manage the transition of women to maternity leave and back into the workplace. Millward (2006, p. 329) suggested that if this is not done then she "*may end up feeling like a disposable resource a long time before formal leave commences, contributing to feelings of alienation during the leave period, followed by difficulties with work reintegration*". Buzzanell & Liu (2007) described maternity leave as a 'conflict management process', made up of complex interactions and tensions. Millward (2006) also argued that the decision to return to work following maternity leave can be affected by feelings of guilt and self-doubt on the part of women about whether they can be both a good mother and a good employee. It is therefore necessary that the organisation supports pregnant academics leaving for maternity, in terms of negotiating their time off, how they would/ or would not like to be contacted during their maternity, when they wish to return, and at what pace they would like to start working again.

Lynes et al (1999) found that women who were guaranteed the same or similar jobs to the one they were leaving tended to continue working later into their pregnancies. In addition, these guarantees also positively impacted the speed at which they returned to work when compared with their counterparts who were offered no such guarantees. This is a critical issue for women who have consciously developed a career path and who expect to have continued access to promotion and training (Barron & West, 2005). This implies that academics leaving for maternity can have deep concerns about the amount of time to take, due to other's perceptions of her and possibly due to insecurity of job role on return. It should, therefore, be part of the organisation's agenda in negotiating maternity to reassure the pregnant academic leaving for maternity for peace of mind and smooth and secure transition back.

Also, after return from maternity, rapid changes in technology and constant advancement in systems used for professional use, means that when a woman worker returns after considerable time-off for childbirth, she may require refresher training or courses to become up to date at work. Thus, the inability of the employer to offer tailored refresher training becomes a challenge for women returners who does not feel confident and competent with changes that have taken place in their absence (Nowak et al., 2012). Moreover, change in role and responsibility upon return is a negative consequence or ‘price’ women often pay for taking time off for child-birth (Manning and Petrongolo, 2008). So, support from the organisation is necessary at all stages of pregnancy; before, during and after maternity leave.

A lack of flexibility with accommodating maternity leave dates is reported in cases of unplanned biological emergencies in the past. For instance, Wilson (1999) interviewed an assistant professor from a University in the USA who had managed to time the ideal academic baby to be born at the end of May. Things however did not go to plan as waters broke a month earlier precisely on the day that Ms. McCain was finishing her marking for the academic year. Ms. McCain explained how she was refused to hand in her marking some days later so, whilst leaking fluid, she sat in her home office and finished off her marking before going to the hospital to deliver. Not only was she required to work during her maternity ‘leave’, she also had a fixed imposed deadline, which even her water breaking could not change. This poses the question of whether this is reflective of most experiences of women on maternity leave in HE. Additionally, Sutherland (1985) found a small group in her sample of women academics who went further and felt that married women with family responsibilities who put additional burdens on their colleagues should be discriminated against. Maternity leave was seen as positive discrimination. They felt that women with children should stay at home to look after them, and that to appoint a young woman was taking the risk that she might become pregnant.

Other research has also found a mother’s access to sites of influence and decision-making processes within their workplaces was diminished and that the tasks to which they were assigned during pregnancy and after maternity leave involved increased operational duties, with less strategic content (Gatrell, 2013). Furthermore, it is argued that pregnancies and maternity leaves are seen as abnormal events rather than ordinary, natural occurrences that might involve temporary accommodations (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004). Therefore, it is important to find out how important this antecedent is for mothers and the different levels of intricacies within it. As well as supervisory support, colleague support is an influential factor for POS which is discussed in the following section

❖ Colleague Support

Eisenberger (1986) suggested that favourable treatment by the organisation enhanced the employee's view that the organisation is positively oriented towards them. This is because they ascribed human-like characteristics to the organisation and viewed organisational members as agents of the organisation. The colleague support antecedent of POS theory, therefore implies that employees will tend to attribute role-related actions taken by members of the organisation to the organisation itself. Specifically, in relation to this research, the management of maternity leave, involving managers, colleagues and the women themselves has been found to have a direct influence on an employee's decision to return to work (Houston & Marks, 2003; Millward, 2006).

Moreover, a positive correlation is observed between the amount of pre-maternity leave preparation and the successful transition back to the workplace. Khalil & Davies (2000) insisted that, during this pre maternity preparation, it was important to include colleagues in unit level discussions to outline options and negotiate flexible work patterns because this would avoid perceptions that the working mothers were receiving preferential treatment. Durand & Randhawa (2002) further cautioned that the relationship between existing full-time staff and returning mothers needed to be managed to avoid creating a 'two-tier system', and that 'family-friendliness' and flexibility were being applied equally to all employees. Therefore, the culture and perceptions of colleagues is an important organisational influence on the experience of return from maternity for academic mothers; this study will explore this aspect of perceived support throughout maternity.

Existing literature acknowledges that the socialisation of successful academics involves reliance on colleagues to maintain their observation of the literature, for technical help, for friendship, informal communications, collaborative work, and co-authorship (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001). Therefore, it is argued that success is not achieved by publishing more, or even doing better research, but through personal contacts, friendships, and co-operative work with key players in the field (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001). Moreover, the increased lack of formal procedures and accountability within university establishments gives relative autonomy to departments and individual academics. Therefore, the informal culture is very pervasive and powerful, and it appears to act against women (Bagihole, 1993).

McAleer and McHugh (1994) argued that the organisational culture of a university is customised at the department level. Trowler (2008) extended this further by arguing that the organisational culture of a university is also generated and sustained at the level of working groups within departments. Therefore, Knight and Trowler (2001, p. 69) emphasised that any specific department within the *university* “*is the central locus of cultural enactment and, importantly, construction in universities which are, inevitably, extremely culturally complex organisations*”. Thus, conceptually, organisational culture moves from being seen as a controlling mechanism owned by senior managers to something that is initiated and influenced more from academics on the ground (Floyd, 2016).

Even women’s research in universities can be wrongly labelled by men in academia as “*middle class women whinging*” as in the case of Savigny. Savigny raises the argument, as to why the women are reluctant to voice their issues, to avoid being seen as professionals using an academic platform to ‘whinge’ (Savigny, 2014). She further argued that:

“women are positioned as invisible, or marginalised which serves to contribute to a broader ‘chilly climate’ which culturally serves to disempower women in two primary ways: first in the sense that women may internalise this marginalisation and ‘chilly climate’, so then women don’t put themselves forward for promotions and or senior positions. This can then become a downward spiral of loss of confidence producing a self-fulfilling prophecy; and second, in the sense that this kind of ‘chilly climate’ becomes, or exists as, a cultural ‘norm’- whereby women are not expected to progress, or even play a full part in academic life.”

(Savigny, 2014, p. 802).

It is a known discourse that the male model of being an academic predominates, because they are in the majority and they were here first (Bagihole, 1993). By contrast, women need encouraging and supporting in a male dominated hostile academic climate. In Bagihole’s research, she found that over half (25) of the women in her study felt they had a neutral relationship with their male colleagues, but only one reported a positive, supportive relationship. However, a considerable number (17) reported negative perceptions of their relationship with male colleagues. They felt that these colleagues had unfavourable perceptions of them because they were women. Later research also showed similar findings, that many women in non-traditional, male-dominated occupations reported difficulties with relationships with male colleagues, and some left their positions because of negative relationships. They felt like ‘outsiders’, and that they did not really belong. They were ‘double deviants’ in that they

worked in a male environment but also expected equitable rewards (Bagihole and Goode, 2001).

In more recent research, Savigny (2014) explained that academic women's experiences highlighted ways in which their colleagues' performativity of their gender rendered sexualisation an 'ordinary', normalised experience; rather than something exceptional, extraordinary, something that when observed should generate comment and pause for thought. Haynes & Fearfull (2008) explained that through their desire and the need to care for their young children, they themselves may have potentially limited their academic opportunities because they have had gendered roles imposed on them by the perceptions of colleagues and managers and by the organisational practices and hierarchies of their departments. This type of environment is likely to have an adverse impact on returning mothers from maternity; this research looks into that phenomenon in detail.

However, there are also opposing departments that are mainly female dominated which, in theory, should be more supportive. However, because HE in general is a male run environment, it is argued that the problem with being in very small minorities functioning in a male environment is that women become 'honorary men' and as such are in no position to support other women (Bagihole, 2002). There is an understandable fear of being identified as a member of the other sex, and being pushed into an outsider role. There has been a considerable amount written about successful women and their failure to support other women. These have been called 'token women' who have to become male to succeed using male criteria. Staines, Travis and Jatrente (1974) called such women 'Queen Bees', these women are seen as strongly individualistic and tend to deny the existence of discrimination against women. More recently in theorising the female same-sex conflict and its problematisation in organisations Sheppard and Aquino, (2017) critiqued the queen bee syndrome, and proposed that female same-sex conflict is more problematised by third parties than male same-sex conflict, which produces the exaggerated perception that women have more dysfunctional same-sex workplace relationships than men.

In contrast, men gain support from an established patriarchal system in which they do not have to consciously search for this support. This further emphasised the cultural hegemony of individualism which was especially dominant in the academic arena. Women, on the other hand, are not admitted to this support system, and if they are seen as needing or wanting to set up their own system, this is viewed as a weakness (Bagihole and Goode, 2001). It appears therefore that it is crucial for women to be strategic in embedding their feminist ways through

connecting and collaborating with other women, thus creating a support system. It is argued, however, that despite persistent discourse that women's preferred ways of working is inspired by cooperative and collaborative ideologies, it is not traditionally evident in academia and academic women's careers. It is argued however, that unless women set up their own 'sisterhood', women's success would be dependent on the men in power who are largely working to maintain their and other men's positions. Bagilhole & Goode (2001) claimed that the reality for a woman in a man's world is that at some time or another, often at a crucial time, she will realise that her male colleagues never really considered her 'one of them'. Therefore, women must promote each other and themselves strategically. It is also important however, that they experience and perceive fairness in the procedures used throughout their maternity.

❖ *Fairness in the procedures*

According to POS theory, three forms of perceived favourable treatment received from the organisation should increase POS. The highest contributor should be *fairness*. Fair procedures make a major contribution to POS because they are generally seen as under the organisation's discretionary control (Moorman, Blakely, and Brian, 1998). The theory of 'justice' by Rawls, (1999) and Cropanzano et al (2011) is used to understand the perceptions of 'fairness' of academic mother's experience of return, specifically through; distributive, procedural and interactional justice.

Distributive justice is the perceived fairness of decision outcomes, such as continuing the same job role and responsibilities after childbirth as before. Distributive justice is promoted by following appropriate norms (e.g., equity, equality, or need) for allocating resources (Adams, 1965; Colquitt & Greenberg, 2003). *Procedural justice* is the perceived fairness of the procedures used to make decisions. So, the procedures used to cater to requests such as part-time work, flexible working and breastfeeding facilities. Procedural justice is fostered by the use of certain procedural rules such as granting a voice in the decision-making processes (i.e., *process control*) and making decisions in a manner that is consistent, accurate, and correctable and that suppresses bias (Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). *Interactional justice* is the perceived fairness of how decisions are enacted by authority figures. This plays an integral part in finding out how female academics perceive their employer's treatment during the returning process. Interactional justice has an interpersonal component, which is fostered by dignified and respectful treatment, and an informational component, which is fostered by adequate and honest explanations (Bies, Moag, 1986 & Bies, 2001)

Even before taking maternity leave, women can experience unfair treatment at work for being pregnant. This may cause a drift between her and her employer and she may be fired before she returns or she may not feel welcomed back due to unfair treatment during pregnancy at work (Dixit and Kleiner, 2005). The *introduction of fees* (£1,200) to take pregnancy related claims to Employment Tribunals in the UK has added to the challenge of battling pregnancy discrimination (Gov.uk, 2013). According to a nationwide study by the Equality Human Rights Commission report (EHRC), almost fifty thousand women who take maternity leave each year are unable to return to the jobs they left behind, due to the inefficiency of employers in supporting their needs during this transition (*House of Commons*, 2013; EHRC, 2013).

The House of Commons library analysed figures and found that as many as 340,000 women who took maternity leave in UK each year found that their positions were under threat when they tried to return to work (House of Commons, 2013). Over 9,000 pregnancy discrimination claims have been brought against UK employers since 2007 (Maternity Action, 2013) and the last full study of Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found that being pregnant cost families nearly £12 million a year in lost maternity pay as women were dismissed before they were entitled to claim (EHRC, 2013). In the UK Pregnant women and mothers are said to report more discrimination and poor treatment at work now than they did a decade ago (Byron and Roscigno, 2014; Kristen, 2018), and it is argued that the situation is likely to decline further unless it is tackled effectively now (House of Commons, 2016). All the available evidence suggests that pregnancy and maternity discrimination is now more common than ever with as many as 60,000 women pushed out of work each year. Additionally, since the introduction of fees for employment tribunals in 2013, there has been an 80% reduction in the number of women pursuing sex discrimination claims (ACAS, 2016; Atkinson, 2010; EHRC, 2010, 2013; Jackson & Zmuda, 2014).

There is a lack of detail about the Government's objectives, how and when it expects to achieve them, and how the effectiveness of its approach will be assessed. Government is urged to show concrete action to increase compliance by employers and to improve women's lives. In HE specifically, it is found that a maternal-bias is typically triggered when a woman gets pregnant or seeks maternity leave (Kristen, 2018). Then at each point, maternity may trigger negative competence assumptions and a distinctive 'maternal-wall catch-22' (Williams, 2004). A 2003 study by economist Saranna Thornton found that over one third of the eighty-one institutions of higher education whose policies she reviewed, had policies in violation of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (Thornton, 2003). With regard to this limited progress, Gatrell's

(2013) research found how, among a sample of 27 mothers (all professionally and managerially employed in the UK), 22 felt marginalised and undervalued at work, experiencing the borders between maternity and the organisation as unmalleable. Most women found that their organisational positions were to some extent unfavorably ‘revised’ during pregnancy and maternity leave (Gatrell, 2013, p. 16). Ledwith & Manfredi (2000, pg. 12) highlight this deep-rooted issue:

“Problems of gender discrimination are rendered into ‘problems’ with women, leading to liberal-style proposals for equal opportunities policies and practices being put into place, voluntarily, to help women comply with existing institutional requirements rather than the academy examining how it might fit itself better to the complexities of women’s lives”(Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000, pg. 12)

This is not to say that all women experience that they are discriminated against; many do not, even though they may understand that women are underrepresented in positions of leadership and that this is due to a mixture of power, patronage and prejudice which results in the promotion of white academic men (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000). In addition to this, it is argued that a lack of formal procedures and lack of training allow prejudice and discrimination to remain (Bagilhole, 1993 pg. 272). Shapiro (2018) went so far as questioning if pregnancy should in fact be considered a (temporary) disability?, due to the physical as well as social impediments that substantially interfere with one’s day-to-day work and life. Perhaps, such designation will satisfy those in positions of influence to take it seriously.

It is vastly reported that women are often faced with negative attitudes, discrimination and even dismissal in the workplace because of their roles, actual or potential, as mothers and carers (Fawcett, 2014). All the available evidence suggests that pregnancy and maternity discrimination is now more common than ever with as many as 60,000 women pushed out of work each year (Fawcett, 2014). The main factor where women find that they take a hit is their pay and position in the labour market upon having children. This ‘motherhood penalty’ is clearly illustrated when pay gap statistics are disaggregated by age bands (Fawcett, 2014).

Also, taking a career break is likely to lead to a reduction in status that may never be fully repaired (White, 2000). Gatrell (2006) argued that it brings about discrimination based on employers making *“a negative link between a woman’s reproductive status and her employment orientation”* therefore employers are inadvertently discriminatory against pregnant women by not supporting their inevitable needs during this time and undermining their potential post

maternity leave. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2010) conducted a formal investigation into pregnancy discrimination and found that the main areas of unfair treatment were denial of a pay increase, refusal of promotion, having to take lower-paid work, being excluded from training, time-off for ante-natal care, unfair selection for redundancy and dismissal or denial for promotion opportunities (EHRC, 2010).

The discussed antecedents of POS theory are considered crucial for understanding women academics experiences of organisational support throughout their maternity. Previous studies incorporating POS theory (Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010; Little, Hinosa and Lynch, 2017; Casademunt *et al.*, 2018; Meintjes and Hofmeyr, 2018) have utilised quantitative methods to investigate perceived support. This study will adopt qualitative methods (discussed in the next chapter). As such, a deeper understanding of this will make a significant contribution in the field of knowledge around women academics and the impact of motherhood on an academic career. It will also provide better guidance on how UK universities can support mother academics more effectively, so that eventually we can start to see more women academics in senior positions. The next section explains the overall theoretical framework used as an analytical tool in this study.

2.4.4.2 Theoretical Framework: lens of perceived organisational support

The Literature review undertaken has considered many relevant theories related to women academic's participation in the workforce. Engagement with theory and structural issues in related literature were set out in a multi-level framework; macro, micro, and meso-level analysis. The various theories discussed inter-linked and led the researcher to adopt the POS theory, in particular as a lens to analyse the data. This section provides a summary of influential theories on this study.

1. 'Gendered Institutions' (Ackers, 1992): This theory stemmed in the belief that in order to understand gender inequality it is important to understand organisational practices. Gender segregation is partly created through organisational practices. An important feminist project is to make large-scale organisations more democratic and more supportive, and that theories that are silent about gender are fundamentally flawed.

In the context of this research, the researcher understood that in order to understand women's lack of representation in senior academic positions, it is important to understand the organisational practices that take place during an academic's maternity process and post return.

In addition, organisational practices play a large role to provide support (or the lack of it) for women to progress in their careers. Moreover, that it is important for organisational theories to not be 'silent' about gender, which stands as a criticism for POS theory. In order to support more equal gender parity in senior academic position it is important to alert universities to be more democratic and supportive of women academics, in particular mother academics. This theory provided the researcher with the base foundation that in order to get a deeper understanding of the issue under consideration, it is imperative to look at organisational practices in detail.

2. 'Approaches to gender equity and change' (Ely & Meyerson, 2000): This theory sets out different frames of approaches that organisations could adopt in order to reach gender equity and change. Two particularly interesting frames were; *Frame 3- Organisations should create equal opportunities*, because there is difference in treatment for the two genders and differences in their access to opportunity. Therefore, organisations should create a level playing field by reducing structural barriers, and implement policies to compensate for structural barriers, such as affirmative action and work family benefits. However, while this helps with recruiting, retaining and advancing women and it aids to reduce work-family stress. It has minimal impact on organisational culture backlash because 'work-family' remains a 'woman's problem'. In addition, *Frame 4- Organisations should assess and revise work culture*; this is rooted in the belief that gender is a system of oppressive relations reproduced in and by social practices. Social practices appear neutral but continue to hold gender as fixed. Therefore, there needs to be emergent localised process of incremental change involving critique, narrative revision and experimentation within organisations. However, a limitation of this is that there continues to be resistance to deep change and it is difficult to sustain this.

This theory sheds light on the importance of organisational change in regards to approaches to gender inequality. Whilst there is no explicit, balanced solution, it is clear that organisations and their key actors should be reflecting, adapting and experimenting with different strategies of support to aid gender equality. This further brought to light the importance of researching 'what' organisational support universities are providing for women academics, before reaching informed conclusions and recommendations on what the issues are and where the organisation should be headed as far as gender equality is concerned. It is understood that women are penalised for becoming mothers.

3. 'The Motherhood Penalty' (Brooks, Fenton & Walker, 2014): This theory posits that careers of mothers tend to lag behind those of childless women and fathers. Additionally,

employed mothers are typically viewed by employers and co-workers as less committed and ambitious than fathers or child-free women. This also leads to a wage penalty between mothers and non-mothers in the workplace, as well as women and men. This theory highlights the importance of how mothers are 'viewed' in the organisation because that has a direct impact on not only mother's experience in the workplace, but also on their career trajectory. Therefore, this research aims to explore women's perceptions of support from organisational actors that surround them e.g. employers.

4. 'Preference Theory' (Hakim, 1995): This preference theory puts forward an alternative view that in fact, women do not progress in their careers because they choose not to. They choose to prioritise family life and being a mother. However, it was the criticism against this theory that interested the researcher which argued that perhaps for some women it is a choice, and that should be respected. However, for a lot of mothers it is not so much a choice, as it is an outcome of their circumstances. Implying that because organisations are unable to support women with balancing work and family, women do not have a choice but to stagnate at a mid-level. The researcher believes that if a fertile environment is provided by the organisation than mothers who wish to thrive can do so. However, it is imperative to look at the intricacies of organisational practices which can cause structural restriction to career progression.

5. 'The Ideal Worker' (Acker, 1990): This theory explains that organisations want a worker who is available and willing to work all the times with no other demands on their time. Organisational structures systematically exclude participation from those with significant responsibilities in the home. This is in direct clash with motherhood, which is also all consuming of a woman's time and energy, and because of her caring responsibilities she cannot be an 'ideal worker'. Acker argued that the rhythm and the timing of work should be adapted to the rhythms outside of work, she wishes that caring work would be seen as just as important.

This theory links with reasonable organisational adjustments such as flexible and part-time working that the organisation should be providing to support a mother who has significantly more outside of work 'work' than someone without a dependent child. Furthermore, it hints towards organisational perceptions, and that somebody who is not able to devote the entirety of their life to the workplace cannot be considered 'ideal'. The researcher is interested in finding out what type of organisational support is experienced by mother

academics, to gain an insight into supportive organisational practices and their impact on overall workplace experience and career.

6. ‘Gendered themes, social practices and outcomes’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000): This theory is closely related to the ‘ideal worker’ theory, it puts forward a public-private dichotomy by explaining various social practices that lead to certain gendered outcomes and how that leads to unintended organisational consequences. The most relevant one in particular posits that, there is a social practice which demands that the ideal worker will put work as their first priority. These norms are intended to maintain the illusion of the workplace as ‘asexual’. The gendered outcome of this is that women are perceived as less competent. The unintended organisational consequences are that; it perpetuates inefficient use of time, and there is little attention on planning and reflecting on organisational practices. Moreover, it rewards behaviour that may not be associated with competence or the task.

This again enlightens the researcher to research into the embedded organisational practices that can significantly enhance or hinder mother academic’s workplace experience and career progression post children.

7. ‘Perceived Organisational Support (POS) Theory’ (Eisenberger et al, 1986)

Consideration of all the theories discussed, leads the researcher to a clear understanding that in order to understand women’s lack of representation in senior academic positions it is important to do two main things. 1) it is important to look at the maternity process in detail because that is the fragile stage which can cause women to lag behind their counterparts, and 2) in order to understand why mothers may lag behind in academia it is important to explore organisational practices throughout the maternity process that can either hinder or enhance their progress. Therefore, against this backdrop of the discussed theories, which shape the researcher is thinking and form the foundation of this research; the researcher is interested in looking at the maternity process for academics by focusing on direct organisational actors and practices that influence their experiences. In order to do this the researcher has decided to adopt the POS theory as an analytical tool for data analysis. The rationale for selecting this theory is rooted in the fact that gender related issues, much like race and power tend to be deeply rooted in structures, practices and internal processes, within the context of organisations. Often, such issues tend to be implicit and invisible though they can also feature explicitly in decisions and processes relating to matters such as control and segregation. Ultimately, the theory allows a greater insight to develop as far as institutional functioning is concerned and thus allows for the

provision of a more holistic picture to emerge, as opposed to viewing issues such as gender in isolation (Ackers, 1992, pg.567).

In this respect, the POS theory remains the underlying framework as far as the present research is concerned and will be relied upon to explore organisational practices used in supporting academic mothers in their maternity processes. Through the collection of primary data researcher will endeavour to explore perceptions of academic mothers on support provided throughout their maternity.

Ackers (1992, pg.568) advocates the examination of covert/implicit factors that tend to be a part of any institution; the author emphasises, it is only by doing so, that we are able to uncover and identify areas within an institution that are influenced, shaped and impacted through gender. The author also implies that often the exclusion and subordination of women tends to be woven into the fabric of an institution and it is only through an examination of these individual threads, that it becomes possible to unravel such injustices.

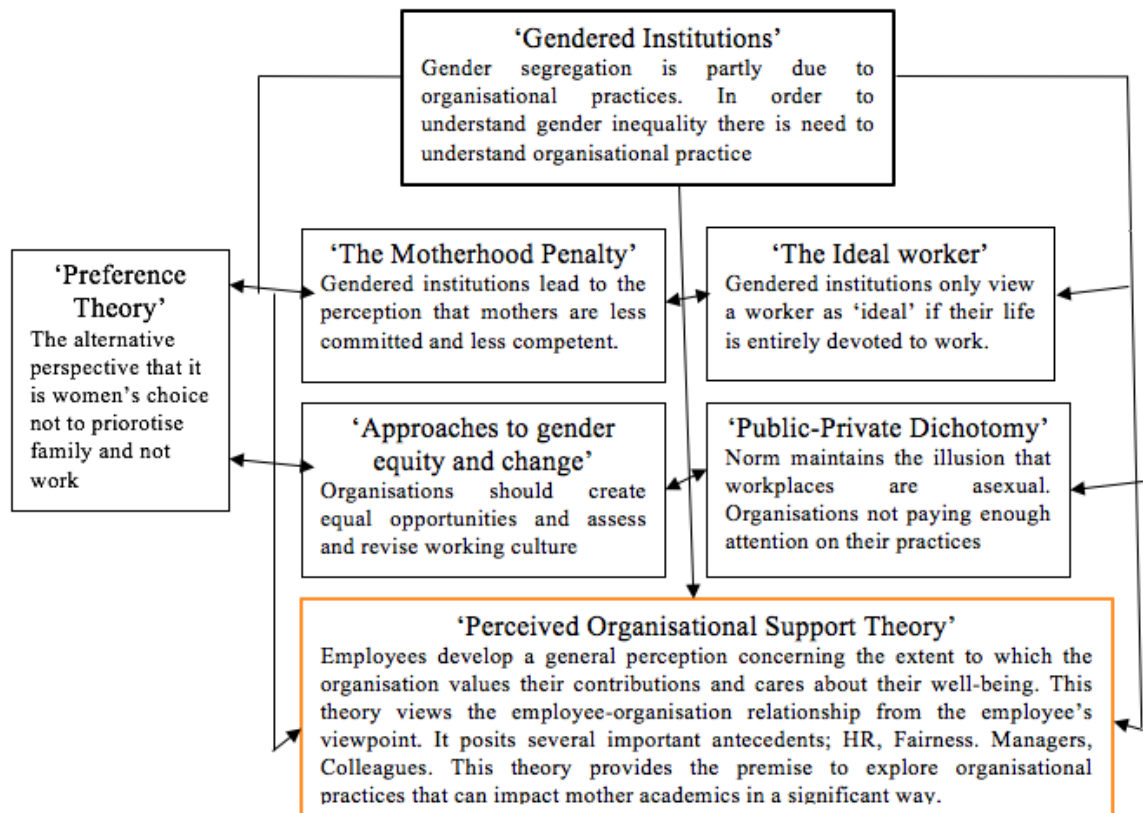
Building upon these assertions, the POS theory looks at influential antecedents of organisational support, and it is a suitable tool to understand the organisational structure and character which may be excluding women, through women's own perspective. As discussed, whilst there is much research on challenges academic mothers face on return to work after maternity leave and through their career progression, little attention is paid to the extent that overall organisational structures exclude women, specifically mothers in the HE sector during the maternity process. This research sets out to address this particular gap through an exploration of the organisational support (or the lack of it) academic mothers are offered throughout their maternity. Moreover, it is insisted that institutional structures and culture play a critical role in shaping faculty identity, both on and off-campus (Sallee, 2012). Similarly, scholars (Ely, Meyerson and Kossek, 2000; Lewis, & Humbert, 2010) insist that there are two types of work/life supports that organisations can provide: structural support and cultural support.

Structural support changes human resource policies and practices or provides additional family-friendly resources to facilitate a healthy work/life balance for employees. For instance, job redesign can help to enable flexible work schedules, teleworking and virtual arrangements can be carried out from home. Furthermore, reduced workloads or other non-traditional arrangements can be made, formal policies on absenteeism and enhanced childcare benefits can be altered to reflect new flexibilities. In contrast, cultural support is more informal and takes

the form of social and relational support, which is typically measured through norms and values that define the organisation and the types of support received from colleagues and supervisors. Unless cultural support exists, structural supports will be inadequate in terms of transforming the organisational culture (Sallee, 2012). Kossek, Lewis & Hammer (2010) claimed that cultural support operated at two interactive levels: the work group level, where an employee received relational support from managers or co-workers; and the organisational level where resources and overarching cultural values and norms were engendered.

This research explores both these types of support from the perspectives of mothers academic's who have experienced this. As such, this is because the integration of these systems within an organisation is critical in moving work-life supports into the mainstream of organisational functioning. Cultural supports also include culture change initiatives that support the legitimacy of 'good employees' being dually involved in care-giving and other non-work roles while sustaining employment and pursuing a career. Support can also include enabling one to slow down a career for non-work needs, such as reducing hours, taking a job leave or allowing opportunities to re-enter the workforce without a career. For effective management of return, integration of both structural and cultural organisational efforts are essential. This argument is supported by Kossek, Lewis & Hammer (2010) and Kmec (2011) who utilised nationally representative data from full-time employed adults to conclude that reducing workplace gender inequality would require organisational changes that paid explicit attention to worker's care giving responsibilities. This research is expected to contribute recommendations of the kind of organisational changes Universities in the UK should implement to improve organisational support for returning mother academics. Thus, the overall theoretical framework is displayed in Figure 2.9.

Figure 2.9: Overall Theoretical Framework



(Source adapted from: Acker, 1990; Bailyn 2003; Baker, 2012; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Hakim, 1995,2004, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2015)

The theories discussed and presented in the theoretical framework are all interlinked and interconnected. They are built on the premise that organisations are 'gendered' places; therefore, all underlying practices must be assessed. The POS theory puts forward various antecedents that increase perceived organisational support. This is thus considered a useful lens to explore academic women's maternity experiences.

2.5 Conclusion

An analysis of the current literature provides a discernible gap in knowledge with regard to organisational support, or more precisely lack thereof, for female academics returning to work following maternity. Whilst UK legislation currently requires paid leave during a female academic's absence as a result of pregnancy, there is little in the way of both legislation regarding support given to female academics prior to going on leave and upon their return. This lack of policy is mirrored by the lack of research in the area as determined through the literature

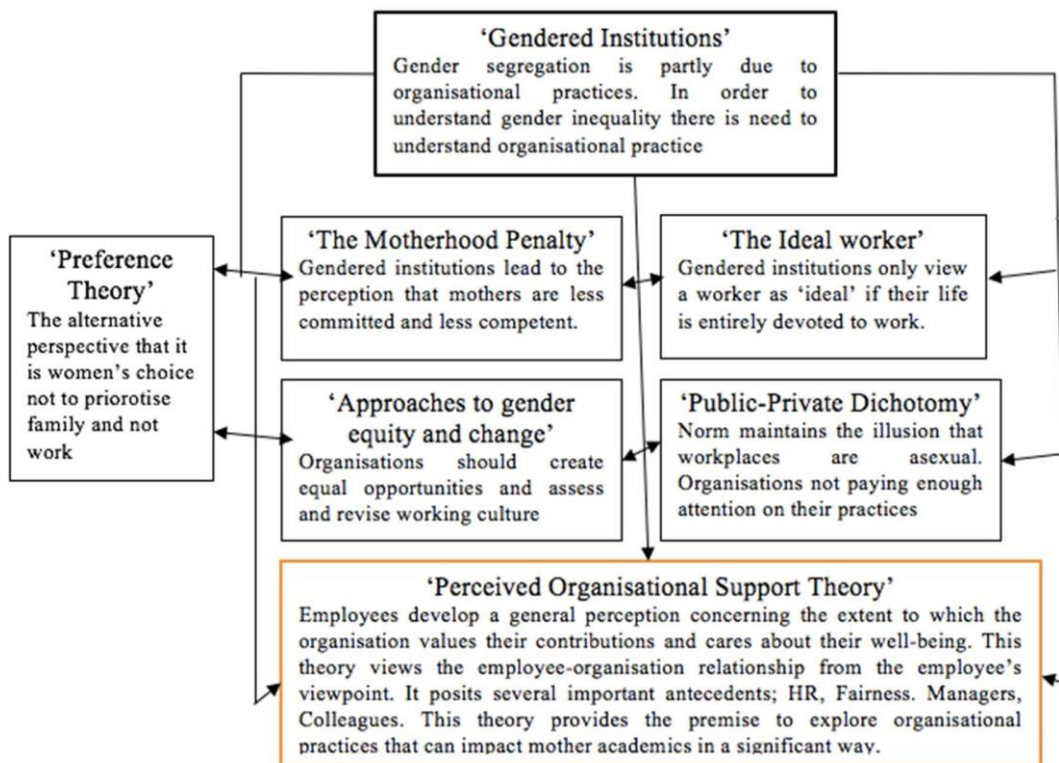
and in particular the works of Duxbury and Higgins, (2005) and Hoskins, (2013). This requires addressing given the significance of this period in the lives of female academics in particular.

Existing scholarship fails to view maternity on a continuum thus little evidence regarding organisational support *during* a female academic's pregnancy is offered (Baker, 2016; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Hardy et al., 2018; Huopalainen and Satama, 2018; Ladge, Humberd and Eddleston, 2018). The present study seeks to examine just how these gaps in knowledge continue to disadvantage women in the workplace, if at all. Within academia it emerges that publications and research remain crucial; whilst women may receive maternity cover and support as their pregnancy comes to an end and their child is born, there is little evidence to illuminate just how new mothers are supported to cope with the demands of academia. In addition to coping with workloads, there is no evidence regarding the organisational support received by new mothers to help them back on to the career ladder. Curiously, there is mounting evidence within the literature to suggest that pregnancy and motherhood remain the antithesis of career advancement and in short lead to career stagnation (Huopalainen and Satama, 2018; Ladge, Humberd and Eddleston, 2018).

The maternity penalty aside, the limited research has primarily fixated on the latter stages of maternity and motherhood, this continues to contribute to the gap in the literature relating to the initial stages of maternity and how these impact upon a new mother's decision to return and if so, her subsequent career prospects. As a means of narrowing the gap in the literature therefore, the present study looks to also examine the nature and extent of organisational support offered to female academics during the four stages of their maternity journey; pregnancy, maternity leave, returning to work and gradual career progression. The gap identified by Millward (2006) will further be narrowed as the author argued that the transition from maternity leave back into the workplace rests on the support offered by their employers prior to the leave commencing. Millward's (2006) assertions will be explored further, particularly those which argue that a lack of organisational support during the maternity stages is integral as failure in this is likely to leave a returning mother feeling unsupported and discouraged. Additional issues highlighted that will be explored within the research include feelings of alienation upon return as well as work reintegration and the extent to which this is addressed by employers during the stages of pregnancy. The literature further brings to light that the decision to return to work tends to be tinged with feelings of both guilt and self-doubt as women struggle with the ultimatum- a good mother or a good employee.

The very presence of this dilemma suggests that the workplace is far from asexual and without gender as the issues that continue to face women are those which have little relevance to their male counterparts. This naturally raises questions as to whether the workplace consciously ignores the needs of mothers and thus institutionally entrenched with bias against women who become mothers during their working academic lives. Savigny’s (2014) assertions will be investigated further as the author posits that the gap in our understanding in relation to this particular research area continues to widen in part due to the negative connotations associated with speaking up. Women have long been reluctant to divulge their needs during the stages of their maternity due to the fear of being perceived as whingers (Savigny, 2014), therefore this study will look to provide a platform upon which they can freely air their experiences and concerns, in a bid to ultimately develop insights into just how organisations are able to enhance current policy to encompass support at all levels of the maternity journey. Moreover, the gap is further emphasised by the extant research into the lack of representation of female academics in senior positions. This was highlighted through the review of various influential theories presented in Figure 2.10;

Figure 2.10: Overall Theoretical Framework



(Source adapted from: Acker, 1990; Bailyn 2003; Baker, 2012; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Hakim, 1995,2004, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2015).

The framework therefore represents a synthesis of the key theories and literature that will be used as a basis of the present study. These theories are yet to be galvanised in a way so as to study the impact organisational support has on female academic during the various stages of her maternity. It thus far appears that Hakim's (1995) controversial assertion that women consciously make the 'choice' to place motherhood above their career continues to implicitly govern policy and approaches to maternity support within the modern organisation. Acker (1990) too, touches upon this, arguing that organisations are created for men, by men, so their work practices always favour men's working lifestyle from the off-set. As a result of this, women are, from the offset, faced with challenges when it comes to achieving career success as institutions are inherently gendered.

Within such inherently gendered institutions the literature exposed the phenomenon that is the 'motherhood penalty', whereby women face a systematic disadvantage in the workplace once they reach motherhood. Coupled with the ideal worker theory which prevent women, and in particular mothers in the workplace, from reaching their career heights into senior positions. The theory makes little in the way of room for life beyond work and fails to consider the role family and children play in one's life. Existing research does little in the way of examining just how this particular theory stands to impact women who enter motherhood whilst working despite research to suggest that women continue to be underrepresented within academia, particularly at senior levels (Bagihole and White, 2013; Aiston and Jung, 2015). Moreover, in wake of all the family- friendly advancements (discussed in section 2.2.2) 'Approaches to gender equity and change' and the 'Public-Private dichotomy', Ely & Meyerson (2000) take this discussion one step further and emphasise the importance of proactive and consciously driven change in organisations in regards to gender inequality. They argued that while there is no explicit, balanced solution, organisations and their key actors should reflect, adapt and experiment with different strategies to support gender equality.

Keeping this in mind, the researcher understood that there are some key organisational actors that are instrumental where women's and mother's experiences within organisations are concerned. Therefore, incorporating antecedents of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory such as; colleague, supervisory and HR support are deemed essential for understanding women academics experiences and perceptions of organisational support throughout their maternity journey in a bid to address existing gaps in the research. A detailed understanding of mother academics areas of support (or lack thereof) from key organisational actors throughout their maternity journey will aid in narrowing the identified gaps, and better our understanding in supporting the maternity journeys of mother academics more adeptly in the future. The above

framework thus encapsulates the key theories which will be used as a foundation for the forthcoming research and analysis.

2.6 Summary

The literature review adopted a multi-level framework analysis to undertake a macro, micro, and meso-level analysis of the issue under consideration. In doing so, this chapter has achieved Objective 1 by establishing existing elements that shape female academics experiences of motherhood. At the macro-level, a brief history of women's workforce participation is provided, and the various national and legal advancements to support working parents, are discussed in line with their persistent problems. Furthermore, in the micro level section a brief outline of personal barriers that may hinder mother's working lives and career progression are discussed, including; lack of self-confidence, reluctance to put self-forward, unequal share of household work and the working mother's guilt. The third section of this chapter and the focus of this research reviewed influential theories that provide an analytical tool for this study and the debates around existing structural barriers that mother academics experience in their work and careers. The review of existing literature on structural barriers faced by women, in particular mother academics brought to light issues including; workload allocation, lack of promotional opportunities for part-time workers, difficulty of breastfeeding at work and conference attendance. While, some of the analysed influential theoretical perspectives included the concept of gendered institution, ideal worker, and the Perceived Organisational Support theory. The latter will be an influential lens in data analysis for this study.

Many of the organisational level issues for returning mothers appear to be reflective of broader professional community expectations and constraints. The aim of this study is to focus on the organisational support experienced and perceived by women academics throughout the maternity journey. Coupled with this, the study also aims to identify organisational factors which women academics consider as being the most likely to impact their career progress following maternity leave. Understanding the specific perceived organisational support issues in transitioning from maternity back to work will guide recommendations to enable improved support for returning academic mothers. This study uses POS theory as a framework to explore perceptions of organisational support.

The next chapter discusses the methodology adopted to collect returning academic mothers' experiences and perceptions of organisational support.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Trustworthy and credible conclusions concerning the support for female academics throughout the maternity journey must be formulated through a robust and rigorous research process. This is to not only to allow for a clear line of exposition between the data and the conclusions but also to ensure that the research is able to withstand academic scrutiny. To provide the necessary structure and rigour to the research process a number of research frameworks and guidelines have been proposed (Myers, 2013a; Saunders, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015), which serve as a scaffold for the novice researcher to structure their research approach. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to provide the reader with a clear account of the research methodology, which underpins this study.

The chapter will firstly discuss why the research is built upon the philosophical foundations of critical realism and interpretivism, which has in turn channelled the research towards a qualitative investigation. According to Denzin and Lincoln, (2005, p. 3): “*Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*”- which aligns to the overall aims of this study and its intention to investigate working practices in selected organisations. The chapter goes on to discuss the influence of the literature review upon the research methodology, and more specifically, how the Perceived Organisational Support Theory (POS) provides the theoretical basis for the investigation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data collection process and why a qualitative narrative approach was used to collect in-depth, rich, insightful, and personal data, before going to link the methodology as a whole to the data analysis, which follows in the subsequent chapter.

In order to contextualise the insights that emerged from the narrative interviews with twenty-six female academics within the parameters of the POS theory, the findings were then presented to a small group of 5 Human Resource (HR) Management professionals and 3 Line Managers (LMs) working in a UK university. Both groups had experience in managing maternity for female academics. Given their own background and experience, it was felt that these groups would allow for the development of different perspectives, thus allowing for a more balanced and holistic view of the context under investigation. As far as the interviews with the latter two groups were concerned, these followed a different approach. The decision

to adopt an alternative approach was dictated by the fact that the participants were not being asked for narratives or stories of their own ‘journey’. Rather the purpose of this set of interviews was to explore opinions on the specific findings obtained from the academics that were interviewed in the first phase of the investigation.

With this in mind, the following chapter seeks to guide the reader through the methodological process undertaken in this study and the accompanying rationale and justifications for the decisions made by the researcher herself. In keeping with academic convention, the chapter will specifically detail the nature of the study, the philosophical paradigm adopted, the rationale for using narrative research, and the data collection and analysis methods employed for both sets of interviews. The latter part of the chapter will also give considerations to key issues such as ethics, reflexivity, recruitment, and sampling. As a means of refreshing the reader’s memory, the overall aim of the research is outlined below:

To investigate the perceived support afforded to female academics throughout their maternity journey in selected UK universities

The methodology chapter in particular specifically contributes to the fulfilment of the second objective of the research, mainly: it allows examination of female academics accounts of support before, during and after maternity in selected universities in the UK. The collection of such in-depth information is therefore imperative to the study as a whole. This chapter explains the processes by which the researcher achieved this objective.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The use of the term research ‘paradigm’ tends to differ depending on the source and author consulted. As a result of this, the present research will adhere to the definition provided by Holloway (1997, p. 114):

“A Paradigm is a philosophical model or framework originating in a world view and belief system based on a particular ontology and epistemology and shared by a community”

The research paradigm underpins the researcher’s belief system based on their philosophical positioning. Anderson (2013, p. 52) states that “*Philosophy is concerned with the fundamental nature of knowledge*”; it therefore addresses how we, as thinking human beings, understand the world around us. The following sections explain the researcher’s critical realist

ontological stance on what she believes to be the nature of reality (Merriam, 2009, p. 8), and her interpretivist epistemological stance in terms of what she believes constitutes valid knowledge in this study and the methods used to obtain this (Crotty, 1998b; Stake, 2000; Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2007; Babbie, 2013).

❖ **Rationale for adopting Critical Realist Ontology and Interpretivist Epistemology:**

Realism is often used as a blanket term to describe a spectrum of positions extending from the political realism of Machiavelli, to the scientific and moral realism of Locke and Kant, respectively (Bernstein, 1983). The position itself has long been at the receiving end of criticisms and scorn from both interpretivists and positivists alike. In particular, the latter two paradigms have been locked in an on-going philosophical war, though realism has served to provide brief unity and respite from this proverbial war.

In this respect, from an ontological position, realism is not that distinct from positivism given the belief in an object reality. Nonetheless, a major divergence occurs between the two positions as realist's object to the idea that all social phenomena can be directly observed. This is tantamount to heresy for positivists given that observation and objectivity tend to not only be considered as universally applicable, rather these tend to be religiously defended (Bernstein, 1983). Realism thus finds a middle ground between the two opposing paradigms as it refutes the premise of universal 'observability'. In doing so, realism finds itself drawn closer to interpretivism (Oates, 2006). Realists acknowledge that there is indeed a 'real world' however they go further much to the dismay of positivists, by questioning the extent to which this observable reality is indeed 'real' and not a façade (Bernstein, 1983). Realism therefore tends to be favoured by those who are looking to understand and to some extent destabilise existing hegemonic power structures, given that the position does not readily accept observable reality as being fact (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012).

At face value at least, this particular lens lends itself well to the present study, which is founded on the premise that universities and their management of organisational support are 'real', and an interpretivist epistemology can be used to access this realness through female academics' perceptions of organisational support during their maternity journey.

3.2.1 Critical Realist Ontology

Whilst realism's contention of the observable real world does indeed draw it closer to an interpretivist standpoint, a gulf continues to exist between these two positions due to latter's

belief that value-free judgment is just not possible (Craiutu, 2018). Interpretivism upholds that it is not possible to objectively view/observe reality given that it is socially constructed; for realists however this remains untrue given the underlying premise that an independent reality does exist, free from our own conceptualisations (Bernstein, 1983). That said however, rather than severing ties with interpretivism, the domain has seen closer ties emerge since the birth of critical realism (Bernstein, 1983).

Realism is further defined by Schwandt (1997, p. 133) as:

“the view that theories refer to ‘real’ features of the world. ‘Reality’ here refers to whatever it is in the universe (i.e., forces, structures, and so on) that causes the phenomena we perceive with our senses”

And by Lakoff (1987, p. 265) as:

“[...] [It] claims that there is only one fully correct way in which reality can be divided up into objects, properties, and relations [...] on the other hand, [it] assumes that “the world is the what it is”, while acknowledging that there can be more than one correct way of understanding reality in terms of conceptual schemes with different objects and categories of objects”

These statements show that realists believe there is more than one way to access and understand reality. Maxwell (2010) contends realism has been an important, and arguably the most dominant, approach to research for over 30 years. He argued that there are numerous forms of realism including ‘*experiential*’, ‘*constructive*’, ‘*subtle*’, ‘*emergent*’, ‘*natural*’, ‘*innocent*’, and ‘*agential realism*’. The most prominent manifestation of realism, however, is the “*critical realist*” tradition usually associated with the work of Harre (1970); Harre and Secord (1972); Harre, Madden (1975) and Bhaskar, (1978). A distinctive feature of all these forms of realism is that they deny we can have any “objective” or certain knowledge of the world, and thus accept the possibility of alternative yet authentic accounts of any phenomenon.

In this respect, critical realism is just that, inasmuch that it does not necessarily accept reality at face value and thus seeks to critique, underlying and unobservable structures that shape and facilitate outcomes. These very outcomes are in turn viewed as ‘reality’; from a realist standpoint, this reality cannot be the object truth given that intangible forces mould it such as power. Marsh and Stoker (1995) point to Marxism as representing the archetypal realist stance whereby it argues that the world as we know it is driven by two distinct sets of interests. The first of these reflect the material reality of the world whilst the second- ‘perceived’ interests

are those, which can be manipulated by those who yield greater power within a society (Marsh and Stoker 1995, p.194). This is echoed in descriptions of critical realism offered by Lawson (1997, p. 8) in which the author recognises the fact that the world is not composed merely of events and objects and our impressions of these. Rather, Lawson also acknowledges the existence of powers, mechanisms and structures, which would otherwise go unnoticed in an object reality, positivist world.

Critical realism has thus garnered significant interest in domains such as politics as it has come to challenge the hegemony that has so long been enjoyed by positivism. Marsh and Stoker (1995) elaborate that its recognition of hidden structures has meant that critical realism has long seen utility in combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Craiutu (2018) suggests that there is significant merit to doing so, particularly in disciplines, which are preoccupied with human behaviour, action and decision-making. The example of politics is thus offered by Marsh and Stoker (1995, p.195) who argue that it is irrefutable that power exists in speech and rhetoric, which often contain metaphor, analogies and implied meaning. Paradigms such as positivism fall short in this respect given that it offers little access to the investigation of such issues, thus lending weight to Adorno (1969) claim which positions positivism as being a 'prohibition' on thinking.

At this particular stage, critical realism resonates with the researcher given that it allows for the exploration of hidden or uncovered issues. In this respect, the selection of a suitable philosophical paradigm is further influenced by the nature of the topic itself; the focus is thus very much on experiences and interactions within the context of organisations (universities). This pursuit in itself is likely to be regarded as one, which is entirely subjective, and the researcher recognises this. As a result of this, it is felt that positivism is unlikely to yield the necessary insights that remain so crucial to this study. This decision has also heavily been influenced by the works of Lee (1991) and Mingers (2001), both of whom state that *relevance* is key to the promotion of one research paradigm over another.

Even though realists believe in an objective reality, they acknowledge that this reality is not directly observable; therefore, we need to consider the 'actual events that we experience' to provide us with an underlying understanding of reality. The present research therefore requested that women academics relate a narrative event- their experience of the maternity journey, as a means of better understanding the underlying reality of organisational support afforded to them in selected UK universities.

Returning to the distinctions between critical realism and positivism, these differ primarily in two ways; first, critical realism is rooted in a constructivist epistemology and, secondly, it rejects the notion of causality. One way it resembles positivism is that it is theory-driven, but unlike positivism it does not make a clear distinction between theory and observation because “*for realists all data are theory dependent*” (Farquhar, 2012, p. 21). In a business context, the critical realist believes that the world is socially constructed but not wholly so because theory also has a role to play (Farquhar, 2012). Thus, for a critical realist, not everything has to be amenable to observation which means that theory can be used to provide explanations (Bryman, 2001). Most realists hold that people’s mental states and attributes are part of the real world. Schwandt (2007, p. 256), for instance, stated that “*we regard society, institutions, feelings, intelligence, poverty, disability, and so on as being just as real as the toes on our feet and the sun in the sky*”. This implies that, for realists, mental and physical entities are equally real but may be conceptualised through different frameworks of understanding (Putnam, 1999).

Critical realism also differs from constructionism in that it rejects the idea of “*multiple realities*”, the belief that there are many independent and socially constructed worlds. Instead, it is compatible with the idea that there are different yet valid perspectives on reality, for instance, female academics perceptions of organisational support throughout their experience of the maternity journey. Critical realism holds that these concepts and perspectives, held by the people we study as well as by ourselves, are part of the world that we wish to understand and that our understanding of these perspectives can be equally credible (Maxwell, 2010). Furthermore, advocates of critical realism believe there is a reality independent of our thinking that researchers can study, but importantly they acknowledge that any form of observation is fallible. The critical realist agrees that our knowledge of reality is a result of social conditioning, and thus cannot be understood independently of the social actors involved in the knowledge-derivation process (Dobsdon, 2002).

Having established the ontological stance of the research, it is now important to explain the researcher’s epistemological stance in terms of what constitutes valid knowledge and how this was obtained.

3.2.2 Interpretive Epistemology

Epistemology is a central and foundational theoretical component of qualitative research. Hook (2015) claimed that an epistemology lacking in theoretical framing fails to employ its potential

to access alternative meanings and may result in simplistic and mechanistic qualitative research. Epistemology thus concerns what the researcher believes constitutes valid knowledge. Manyard (1994, p. 10), for instance, explained that the various types of knowledge that are possible are inherently dictated by epistemology and the philosophical grounding that epistemology grants us. This way, said types of knowledge can be granted legitimacy.

A strong epistemology responds to questions relating to ‘why’, for instance: Why ask these research questions to these participants? (Hook, 2015). Each epistemological stance attempts to explain “*how we know what we know*” (Crotty, 1998a), so it is important to establish what is meant by valuable knowledge when addressing the research questions specific to this study. The researcher was therefore interested in addressing organisational elements that shape female academics experiences of maternity, with a particular focus on their perceptions of support that allow us a ‘window’ into reality.

As far as the present research is concerned, an *interpretive epistemology* is adopted because the research questions are directed at ‘understanding’ women’s experiences of organisational support they received throughout their maternity journey. Returning to the insights offered by Mingers (2001), a degree of relevance thus emerges when considering this particular paradigm. This is mainly due to the fact that an interpretive paradigm assumes that reality is ‘socially’ and ‘specifically’ constructed (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). Crotty (1998a) stated that understanding can only be gained from an actor’s views of actions, objects, and society by understanding the symbols, signifiers, and language they use to communicate those ideas. In this study the researcher therefore moved beyond the factual surface to the underlying meaning, to understand what was happening for these women (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe, 2002). The interpretive epistemology therefore provided a deep insight into the complexities of the human experience (Schwandt, 1998, p. 118), and thus into the organisational support provided in selected UK universities through female academics’ lived experiences of their maternity journey.

Furthermore, the interpretive framework acknowledges that an individual’s behaviour can only be understood by sharing their frame of reference (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interpretive paradigm therefore aligned with the researcher’s main aims. Merriam (2009, p.23), for instance, explained that researchers who conduct interpretative studies are interested in:

1. *How people interpret their experiences*
2. *How they construct their worlds*

3. *What meaning they attribute to their experiences*

This is important because the view is taken that human beings are neither predictable nor are their actions always rational from an outside perspective. As a result, interpretivists vehemently defend their claim that human subjects are far too complex to be simply observed. Rather, the onus is placed on understanding, this according to interpretivists can only happen once we delve in to the human psyche through questions, discussions and conversation (Guba, & Lincoln, 2005). Hence, unlike scientific positivism which searches for consistencies, regularities, and universal laws, we are concerned with the ‘individual’ (Crotty, 1998a), thus strengthening the applicability of the interpretivist epistemology to this present study given that human affairs are central to the intended inquiry. Interpretive epistemology is far removed from the positivistic stance of ‘objective’ reality, but does not assume total ‘subjective’ knowledge, believing instead that meaningful reality is ‘constructed’ by human interactions and through discourse and dialogue (Lather, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Furthermore, the interpretivist approach “*looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world*” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67), in which many perspectives unfold (Lather, 1992). With this in mind, narrative inquiry was adopted as the primary methodological approach. This aligns with realist ontology because its underlying assumption is that there is an objective ‘reality’ of procedures and practices implemented by organisations, and it aligns with an interpretive epistemology because it assumes that only through related persons can we gain a window into this organisational reality. In line with this approach, scholars such as (Frazer and Lacey, 1993, p. 182) have conceded the following.

“Even if one is a realist at the ontological level, one could be an epistemological interpretivist [...] our knowledge of the real world is inevitably interpretative and provisional rather than straightforwardly representational”

Sayer (2000) also argued that critical realism places considerable importance upon meaning and it is seldom content on observation that is not accompanied by meaning. As such, this position maintains that meaning has to be understood, and is simply not content with observation without meaning. All human action is viewed as meaningful and driven by underlying drivers, which cannot be quantified in any way; any social phenomenon can thus be understood or interpreted.

The fusion of positivist and interpretivist thinking builds flexibility into the research approach (Farquhar, 2012). It involves a conscious compromise between extreme positions through a recognition of social conditions as having consequences whether they are labelled or observed, whilst also recognising that concepts are human constructions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, 2008). Similarly, Campbell (1988) argued that all scientists are epistemological constructivists. The integration of ontological realism and epistemological interpretivism has also been given an explicit philosophical defence in the social sciences (Keller, 1992; Barad, 2007).

Critical realists thus retain an ontological realism that there is a real world that exists. At the same time, they accept a form of epistemological constructivism, in that our understanding of this world is seen as inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint; therefore, we can only understand the type of support provided by universities through the perceptions of people experiencing it. This is because all forms of realism agree there is no possibility of attaining a single ‘correct’ understanding of the world; there is no ‘God’s eye view’ that is independent of any particular viewpoint but there are multiple perceptions that come together to make sense of the phenomena under investigation (Maxwell, 2010).

Given the epistemological position of the research, and to suitably fulfil the research aim and objectives, it was evident that a qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this research. The following section provides the rationale behind this decision in more detail.

3.3 Qualitative Research

“Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)

There are two overarching reasons why researchers might choose to adopt a qualitative approach. First, this approach may be relied upon when the area being researched is not well defined, and is accompanied by a limited body of knowledge. Secondly, sometimes well-researched areas need to be looked at afresh to reveal new insights and solutions. A more explanatory approach is therefore undertaken because this research starts with a problem and it endeavours to explain it (Roy, 2009). It was for the latter reason that this research adopted a qualitative approach.

The literature review brought to light the range of challenges faced by mother academics, thus bringing to light that this was indeed an area that has been subject to extensive research. That said the previous chapter also identified a gap in knowledge regarding the practical support provided at an organisational level. This issue is current and topical because there is a lack of female academics in senior academic roles (HESA,2018), and there has been a continual emergence of new campaigns and initiatives to help remove workplace barriers for such women, of which the ATHENA SWAN agenda is but one example (Tuncer and Kocaturk, 2005; Barry, 2013; Brearley, 2015).

The characteristics of a qualitative approach therefore align with the characteristics of this study. Roy (2009) claimed that qualitative research often focuses on and displays six key characteristics. These will in turn be utilised to explain the approach of this research in detail as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of Qualitative Research matched with those of the current research

Characteristic of Qualitative approach	Characteristic of this research
1. <i>“It is exploratory in nature”</i>	The aim of this research has been to explore mother academics perceived organisational support throughout their maternity journey
2. <i>“It uses natural, existing, settings and contexts”</i>	Universities- the organisation provided the natural, existing setting and context for this study
3. <i>“It is interested in meanings, perceptions, understandings”</i>	The main purpose of this study was to explore female academics’ meaning, perceptions and understandings of organisational support afforded to them throughout their maternity journey
4. <i>“The research focus is often on processes, not outputs”</i>	By utilising the Perceived Organisational Support theory (POS), this study focuses on organisational processes such as: Supervisory support, Colleague Perceptions, Human Resources practices, and more.
5. <i>“It uses induction for the analysis of data as this produces specific rather than generalised data”</i>	This research is both inductive and deductive, but it is mainly inductive in nature because, through the anchor of POS, data collected on mother academics perceptions of organisational support contribute to theory-development on the strengths and weaknesses of organisational support in the HE sector for mother academics.
6. <i>“Research findings are specific to the context”</i>	The findings at the end of this study are specific to the overall context of the participants who took part. Therefore, the findings are not generalised across the sector but used as an exemplar to inform our understanding of the issue under consideration. The study makes situational claims based on the specific sample of mother academics and uses these as exemplars to make recommendations.

(Source: Roy, 2009, p.124)

On the basis of this, it is felt that a qualitative approach is better suited to the research given that it affords researchers with greater scope to seek ‘meaning’ of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Cresswell, 2013). This is starkly contrasted by quantitative approaches which eschew interpretation and thus focus on the measurement of quantity or amounts (Kumar, 2008). Moreover, qualitative research helps in the understanding of issues within their organisational context, in this case enables the researcher to develop a ‘rich-picture’ of the organisational processes as perceived by women academics in their maternity journey. Finally,

it also helps with developing an understanding of the issue under consideration from the multiple perspectives of those involved (Anderson, 2013).

3.4 Inductive/ Deductive research

Roy (2009) implores researchers, novice or otherwise to ensure that they carefully consider the approaches that will be used when designing and developing research methods. In keeping with this, the present study evaluates the two predominant forms available to the researcher before settling on one most suitable to the study. In this respect, two widely used approaches are that of inductive and deductive research. The deductive approach works from the general to the specific, often known as ‘top-down’ reasoning. Within the context of academic research, this often begins with pinpointing necessary theory, from which hypotheses are drawn before going on to confirm or refute these hypotheses. Conversely, in an inductive approach generalisations do not follow such as linear and structured process. Rather, inductive approaches tend to be referred to as being ‘bottom up’ inasmuch that a phenomenon is observed first, before being theorised and tested against general/accepted theory.

Thus far, the present study has mirrored the inductive approach given that it was built on the tentative theoretical framework outlined in the literature review, most notably the POS theory. However, there were also some deductive aspects to this research. For instance, numerous organisational barriers hindering mothers academics career progression have been established in previous research (see section 2.4), and this study began with that premise in a deductive manner to explore how universities provide support throughout a female academic’s maternity journey. As such, this study aims to understand the benefits or deficiencies of perceived organisational support with the intention of overcoming these orders to overcome these barriers. However, the subsequent process of qualitative data collection and analysis is inductive in that the researcher builds upon related theory. Furthermore, the findings are presented to a group of HR professionals and line managers to gain a different perspective on the matter under consideration. The collection and analysis of data obtained from these two small groups of stakeholders allows the researcher to inductively analyse the data and build on existing theory.

It is unrealistic to think that every researcher will develop a ‘new’ theory, as most qualitative research in the business context works at the ‘margins’ of theory. Nonetheless, it was important to be clear about the theoretical ‘anchor’ or starting point for this study so that

new ideas could be added, expanding its power and helping to explain what was happening while highlighting areas of weakness within this theory (Anderson, 2013).

Up until now, the research has sought to explore the broader theoretical implications embedded in concepts such as the *Ideal worker* (Acker, 1990; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Bailyn, 2003; Sallee, 2012), *Gendered Institutions* (Acker, 1990), the *Motherhood penalty* (Baker, 2012b), *Preference theory* (Hakim, 2004), and, in particular, *Perceived Organisational Support Theory* (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This has been facilitated through an investigation of how mother academic's experiences of maternity reflect the theoretical implications; however, the study did not attempt to 'test' theories. Rather the focus has been on adding new ideas to develop and extend current understanding on the subject area. More specifically, the first phase of the research used significant factors stated in POS theory to focus on the impediments and problems faced by mother academics when resuming their professional careers following a period of planned maternity (and/or adoption) leave (Eisenberger et al., 2002). The findings therefore contribute to theory-development in relation to the type of organisational support afforded to mother returners in this study. The next section explains the approach to participant sampling and recruitment for the purpose of this investigation.

3.5 Purposive Sampling

Anderson (2013) stated that purposive sampling involves the selection of subjects whose experiences and perspectives align with those that a study intends to explore. The author continues by offering three ways in which purposive sampling can be executed. The first of which involves the identification of what the author terms as 'key informants', these are typically those who have expertise and experience, on and relating to, the issue under investigation. Sliced sampling is also recommended by Anderson (2013) who describes this as involved the selection of participants based on their profession/position within an organisation. Lastly, snowball sampling is offered as an additional technique and involves searching for new participants based on the recommendations of those who have already agreed to partake in a study. Snowballing is thus dependent on the fulfilment of at least one of these prior stages outlined.

This study intends on using all three of the above-proposed purposive sampling techniques. Its *key informants* are identified as academics who are also mothers, and HR professionals and Line Managers (LMs) who have experience of being involved in maternity management of academics in a UK university. *Sliced sampling* will be used by interviewing

mothers in different academic positions across various departments and universities. This sampling is intended to be both *vertical* and *horizontal*; vertical sampling is pursued because the researcher has secured participation from upper levels of organisational hierarchy including top (academic mother professors), as well as middle (senior lecturers and lecturers) and bottom (post-docs) of the academic hierarchy. As far as *horizontal* sampling is concerned, this is also called upon as the study has secured access to participants from a range of different subject departments. Finally, a *snowballing sampling* technique will be used to identify new academic mothers from within the sample being interviewed, and to find HRs and LMs. In using purposive sampling, the researcher feels confident that the data gathered will reflect perspectives that are pertinent to the issues being investigated (Anderson, 2013).

Esterberg (2002) noted that research participants should be chosen for the special qualities they bring to the study. Participants can also come from different employers to ensure maximum variation in the data collected (Merriam, 2002). Participants in a narrative inquiry can be employed in different ways. Chase (2011) proposed that such research could be conducted with a very small number of participants (one, two or three), selected because they are judged typical of a much larger culture-sharing population. This small group may be viewed as critical or extreme cases within the context of the research. However, (Saunders, 2015, p. 198) asserted that narrative inquiry can also be used with slightly larger samples, for instance where interviews are conducted with participants from across an organisation. This enables the researcher to analyse how narratives are constructed around an event or series of events and facilitates a comparison of how accounts differ, such as between departments, occupational groups, genders and/ or grades.

When it came to the actual recruitment, the latter approach to sampling was adopted as a larger sample of twenty-six women academics was secured. Although smaller in comparison to the much larger sample size that would typically be utilised in quantitative research, this was sufficient to provide rich, detailed and extensive data.

Additionally, the researcher also spoke to a small group comprising 5 HR professionals and 3 LMs. Their views provided additional support data to add a different perspective to the findings from the key informants of this study- namely female academics. To find these participants, purposive and snowballing sampling was once again employed. For instance, a friend of the researcher introduced her to an HR professional in a university, and then through snowballing the researcher talked to 5 HR representatives. Similarly, the researcher had become

good friends with some of the women academics interviewed in this study and they helped her to find line managers.

The next section explains how the researcher located relevant participants for this study. It also provides an overall profile of all the participants in this study.

3.5.1 Recruitment and profile of female academics

The key participants (female academics) were recruited by posting advertisements in different universities (see Appendix C), through existing contacts, and by raising awareness of the research through word of mouth and the snowballing effect. There were only two criteria that the prospective participants had to fulfil, mainly:

- Be employed in an academic position in a UK University
- Have experienced the process of pregnancy, maternity leave, and return to work.

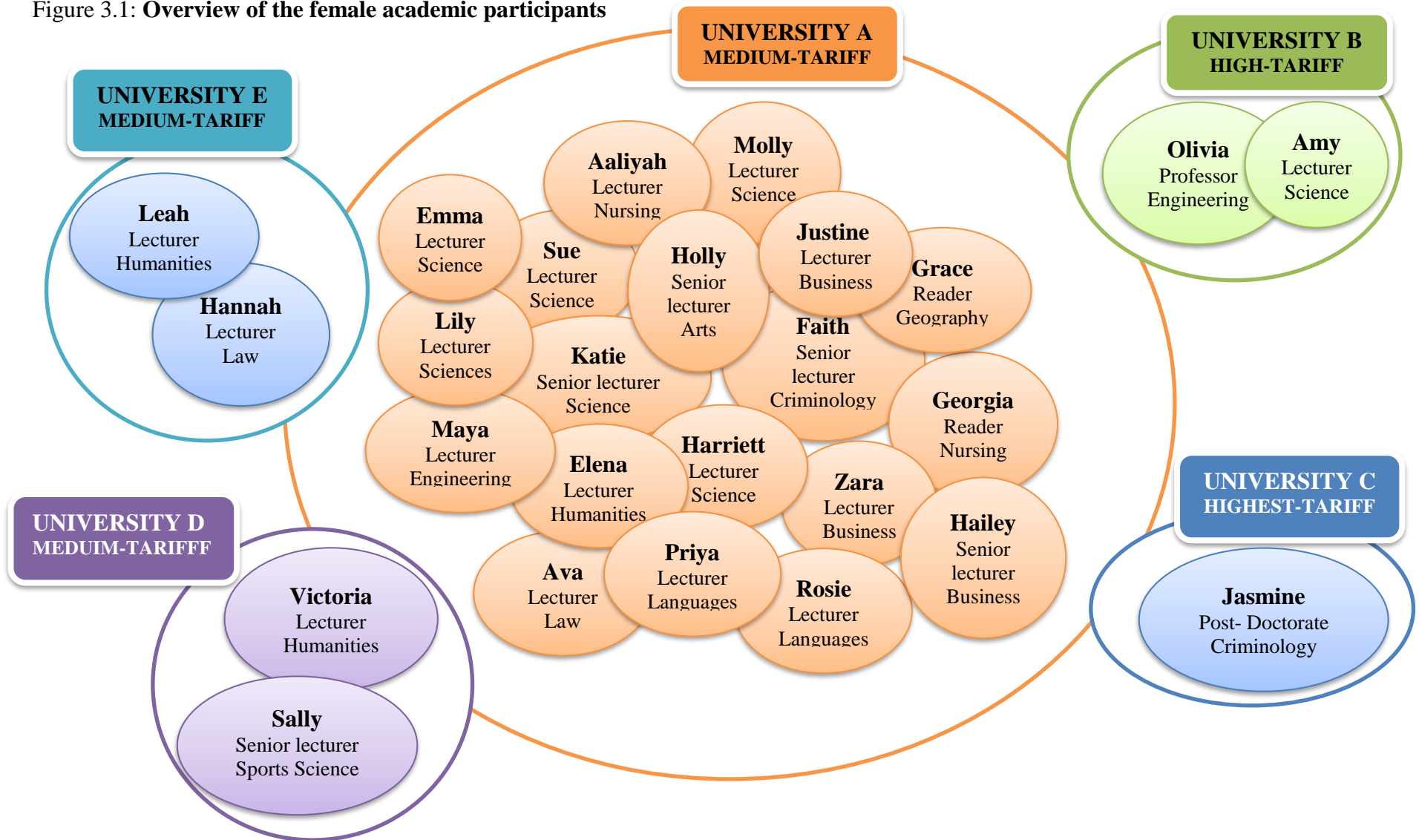
A significant amount of interest was shown in this research by one university (University A), due to researcher's personal contacts; this also allowed for more participants to emerge from University A. As a result, it was possible to witness the effects of 'snowballing' as a number of participants came forward following recommendations from the existing sample group. Whilst an additional four universities did take part in the study, the majority of women academics were from one university, and the researcher had to be satisfied with who volunteered.

Nevertheless, the researcher received an overwhelming number of emails from female academics expressing both an interest to take part and an interest in the research area in general. The response was far beyond what the researcher had anticipated. The researcher emailed interested participants with a message thanking them for their interest, asked them for dates and times when they would be available for interview, and sent an attached informed consent form and research information pack (see Appendix A). Women then responded by sending their signed consent form (some signed it in person at the interview) and confirmed available dates/times for the interview. After interviewing twenty-six female academics, the researcher had accumulated extensive, in-depth, and rich data. To do justice to the analysis and ensure that each woman's narrative voice was represented in the research, because each was a valuable experience that shed light on the central issue, the researcher had to turn down several interested

volunteers. However, it was clear that this topic had ‘struck a chord’ with female academics. Figure 3.1 presents an overview of those who took part.

The study has relied on pseudonyms for all the research participants. The real identities and names of the participants have been protected and deliberately obscured.

Figure 3.1: Overview of the female academic participants

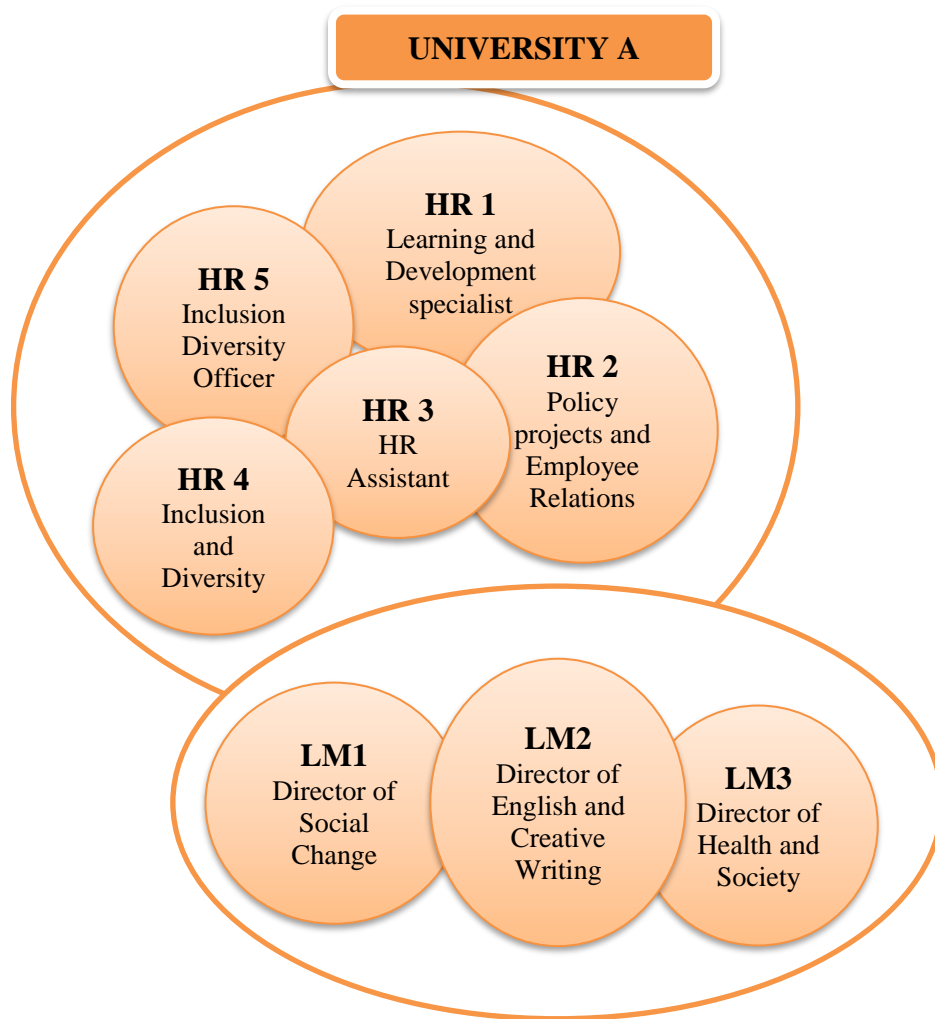


3.5.2 Recruitment and profile of HR professionals and Line Managers

Once the data from female academics was collected and analysed, the findings were presented to a small group of 5 HR professionals and 3 Line Managers (LMs), also from University A. Both groups had experience managing an academics maternity process. As explained earlier, these participants were recruited through purposive and snowballing sampling.

It is important to note that, in contrast to female academics, finding HRs and LMs was significantly harder. LMs were especially difficult to find as they were hesitant to volunteer for the study because they did not have direct experience managing an academic's maternity process. They were informed this did not matter and that the researcher was simply interested in their views on the findings from women academics; however, they still declined to participate. Similarly, all the twenty-six academics who were interviewed were requested to ask their LMs if they wished to take part, or to send the researcher their LM's contact details. However, this also proved to be difficult. From this, it is inferred that either the LMs were just 'too busy' and did not have the time (although it was summer time when the university staff workload is lowest) or tells of a deeper implication regarding their 'interest' in this topic which is in sharp contrast to the interest shown by women academics. Figure 3.2 provides an overview of participant profiles for HRs and LMs.

Figure 3.2: Overview of HR and LMs participants



The next section explains the research strategy in detail.

3.6 Rationale for Selected Research Strategy

The choice of research strategy was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study. Saunders et al., (2015) argued that the coherence with which these link to the research philosophy, research approach, and purpose should all be viewed as being mutually exclusive. The research strategy for this study was therefore to first conduct in-depth narrative interviews with female academics, analyse the data, and then present the findings to a group of HR professionals and LMs to validate those findings. This section provides the theoretical rationale for adopting first narrative and then traditional semi-structured interviews.

3.6.1 Rationale for adopting a Narrative Inquiry approach with female academics

Narrative research traces its origins back to 1970s Germany where it emerged in response to the then prevailing paradigm- positivism. Having grown tired of the dominion enjoyed by the scientific method, younger researchers sought to challenge the then status quo arguing for an approach which went beyond the study of cause and effect. The likes of Fritz Schulze (an assistant Sociology Professor) was one such voice who ardently objected to the use of scientific, positivist methods in the study of social phenomenon. Schulze was especially critical of the accompanying data collection techniques, which for him fell short of offering any insight and understanding into social research (Schulze, 1977). For Schulze (1977), the positivist tradition stood at odds with sociology and the social sciences in general, the author argued that the paradigm ignored and excluded the very aspects of human behaviour and society that were of interest to sociologists. Similarly, Adorno (1969) had argued that within the context of sociology, culture and human behaviour, Positivism was nothing short of a prohibition on thinking. The main gripe for opponents of positivists at the time related to the burden this particular paradigm placed on ‘proof’ thus, if a phenomenon cannot be proven, it ceased to exist under a positivist lens (Crotty, 1998a; Probert, 2004).

Returning to Schulze, the prominent sociologist disputed the claim that there was an ambiguous relationship between what people said and the reality of their actions, which had made it difficult to turn verbal data into theory. His main criticism was targeted at standardised interviews, which he argued are experienced as something strange by the interviewees that did not have anything to do with their everyday communication, and thus forced them into a passive role (Schulze, 1977). Since then, other scholars have written in support of Schulze’s claims, proposing that narrative research favours a non-interventionist approach as pre-planned questions have the potential to interfere with the spontaneous telling of a participant’s story (Reissman, 2001; Wengraf, 2001; Fairbairn, 2002). In this study, when narrative interviews were conducted with women academics, direct or closed questions were not asked, instead the researcher had an outline of four open ended questions to guide the narrative around women’s maternity journey. For instance, ‘Tell me/ talk me through your experiences of organisational support... before, during, and after maternity’.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1996) defines narrative as a “[...] *Discourse, or an example of it, designed to represent a connected succession of happenings*” (p. 1503). It derives from the Latin *narrare*, meaning to make known, or to convey information (Berger, 1997;

Lacey, 2000). When a participant provides their narrative, it is a story of connected happenings within their experiences. Bruner (1996) defined a story as both a sequence of events and an implied evaluation of the events recounted: the recounted events take their meaning from the story but the story as a whole is constructed from its parts. Therefore, narrative research is grounded in the stance that people are storytellers by nature and their personal narratives provide coherence and continuity to their experiences and plays a central role in their communication with others.

Lieblich (1998, p. 7) goes as far as to equate personal narratives with individual identities. The author offers rationale for this assertion by stating that we as humans tend to engage in self-discovery and revelation through stories and story-telling. For Lieblich, storytelling acts as a conduit for the expression of self, without which we would struggle to present our inner realities to those on the 'outside'. It would therefore be erroneous to reduce stories and storytelling to mere forms of semantic expression given that these are an innate aspect of existence; one that involves the deconstruction and reconstruction of the proverbial human experience, in keeping with the evolution of our tenure on this planet. Without stories and storytelling, Lieblich (1998) is of the belief that we would cease to reveal ourselves to others and enter the process of self-discovery.

Story-telling is thus a meaningful activity and important when making sense of human lives. The narrative technique therefore, uses stories to describe human action (Josselson, Lieblich, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1995) and is known to be an important source of knowledge (Wiklund, Lindholm, Lindstrom, 2002; Reissman, Quinney, 2005; Turner, 2006). Several scholars (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Freeman, 1999; Hawkins & Lindsay, 2006; Turner, 2006) have conceded that lived reality is intrinsically narrative in form and that the world is experienced and thus represented in and through narratives. Moreover, the story-telling participant affirms their experience which is then made meaningful and coherent through narratives (Sarbin, 1986; Denzin, 1989; Frank, 2000). Therefore participants (women academics in this case) do not simply answer questions already pre-empted by the interviewer, instead they tell stories that are authentic in terms of their individual experience (Reissman, 2001). In recent years, narrative has become a major part of the discourse in the field of educational studies and other disciplines including anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, and the humanities. Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) argued that, because the world is understood in narratives, it makes sense to study the world in this way. This is specifically relevant to this study because the researcher aims to gain in-depth insights into academic mothers' experiences and perceptions of organisational support

throughout their maternity journey. Gabriel & Griffiths (2004) advocate the use of such a strategy given that it allows for direct access to individual experiences and in particular the organisational realities which are linked to the former.

There are, however, different ways a narrative can be provided. It may be a short story about a specific event; a more extended story (e.g. about an organisational change programme); or a complete life history (Saunders et al, 2015, p. 189). For the purpose of this study, a specific event emerges as the most fitting given that focus is upon the maternity journey. Whilst some narrative researchers are concerned with the narrative truth of stories and the accurate representation of physical realities, others are more interested in narrative meanings that include social realities (Freeman, 2002; Reissman, 2008). In all these cases, the common and fundamental interest of narrative researchers lies in what the stories tell us about the narrators and their worlds. This is significant because their worlds are shaped by their experiences, what they believe to be their truth, their perception of organisational support. Elliot (2005, p. 18) identified the dichotomy in narrative research as a division between 'narrative as a resource' and 'narrative as a theme'. This research adopts the ontological view that mother academics provide their own representations of physical reality. The kind of organisational support provided by the universities is an external reality and can be understood through the differing perceptions of academic mothers.

A narrative can be defined as an account of an experience that is told in a flow of related events that, taken together, are significant for the narrator and which convey meaning to the researcher (Coffey, 1996). A narrative comprises a set of signs that can involve writing, verbal, visual, built, or acted elements that use a distinct spatial path to generate and convey meaning; it is therefore distinct from description (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013). It is also important to note that some researchers may distinguish between recounted sequences of events, which they call stories, and organised, plotted, interpreted accounts of events, which are, for them, 'narratives' (Andrews, Squire, Tamboukou, 2013). Valuing the narrative voice depends on various assumptions. Key among these are notions of 'possession' and 'authenticity' which assume that the voice of the narrator is their own and gives unrivalled access to their lived experience. These views are supported by a belief in narrative research that narrators create their own stories and the way life is imagined has value simply because it depends on the memory and creative storytelling of the individual. Thus, within the context of the present research, female academics' memories of their maternity as well as experiences of organisational support throughout their maternity journey holds value. Moreover, the researcher

firmly believes that a narrative inquiry provides authentic and unrivalled access to female academics' lived experiences of the maternity journey.

A narrative inquiry aims to transcend narrative as a simple rhetorical structure, which is that of a story told simply, it aims to analyse the underlying insights and assumptions described in each woman's maternity story (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry preserves chronological connections and the sequencing of events as told by the women to enrich understanding and aid analysis. Chase (2005, p. 421) referred to this strategy as providing the opportunity to connect events, actions, and their consequences over time into a 'meaningful whole'. Through story-telling, the female academics provide their interpretations of events throughout their maternity journey. Musson & Tietze (2004, p. 42) placed further emphasis on the ability of narrative inquiry to allow researchers to analyse the linkages, relationships, and socially constructed explanations that occur naturally within narrative accounts and "*to understand the complex processes which people use in making sense of their organisational realities*".

The decision to adopt the narrative inquiry technique aligns with epistemological interpretative philosophy. In light of this, Saunders (2015) argued that, when research questions and objectives suggest the use of an interpretative and qualitative strategy, narrative inquiry may be the most suitable approach to use. Moreover, their purpose is to derive theoretical explanations from narrative accounts while maintaining their integrity.

3.6.1.1 Criticism of Narrative Inquiry

The main criticism levelled against the narrative approach is that incoherent and unconnected details in narrative interviews can create problems for researchers (Tryssenaar and Chu, 2003). In response, some scholars (e.g. Chafetz, 1996; Thompson et al., 2008; Erdner et al, 2009) have proposed that researchers can use concrete reference points perhaps by using visual tools that promote dialogue. Giving some type of structure to the data collection process will also encourage participant engagement. In keeping with this, the researcher therefore framed the interview with concrete reference points; these were presented in the form of four specific stages of the maternity journey (pregnancy, maternity, return, career progression), the purpose of which was to promote dialogue and encourage such engagement. This is supported by Holloway and Jefferson (2000) who state that the best interview questions are organised around specific times in a life rather than one long period of time. Consequently, this research focused on the narrative of the 'event'; stemming from an academic mother's announcement of pregnancy (or adoption) through to her return to work after maternity leave. A recounted story

of an academic mother's maternity journey (the event) is therefore the narrative that was interpreted by the researcher.

However, upon completion of data collection and analysis, the researcher adopted an alternative qualitative technique when interviewing a different set of participants.

3.6.2 Rationale for adapting non-narrative semi- structured interviews with Human Resource (HR) professionals and Line Managers (LMs)

There is an extensive amount of literature on the use of interviews for research purposes. (Gill et al., 2008) stated that the goal of an interview is to elicit the perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of individuals on particular aspects. As far as the present study is concerned, the researcher wished to elicit the perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of HR professionals and LMs regarding the findings from women academics. (Kvale, 2007) contended that interviews are the most suitable method of data collection for capturing the experiences and meanings of subjects in the real world. Similarly, Gray (2013) advocated that when the objective of research is largely exploratory and involves investigating attitudes and feelings, as was the case in this study, interviews may be the best method to use. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are also believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of a social phenomenon in contrast to purely quantitative methods such as questionnaires (Silverman, 2000) which again aligns with the purposes of this study.

There are three types of interviews; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Myers, 2013b; Oates, 2013). The semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was the most suitable type to use for this study. This is because it provided a structure focusing on the main points, yet allowed the need to add more questions depending on the flow of the interview (Myers, 2013; Oates, 2013). Bryman and Bell (2015) describe semi-structured interviews as a guide consisting of a list of questions on a specific topic that the researcher endeavours to cover. This was required in this research, because, even though the researcher questioned the two groups based on findings from the women, their responses often led to further, more apt, 'on the spot' questions.

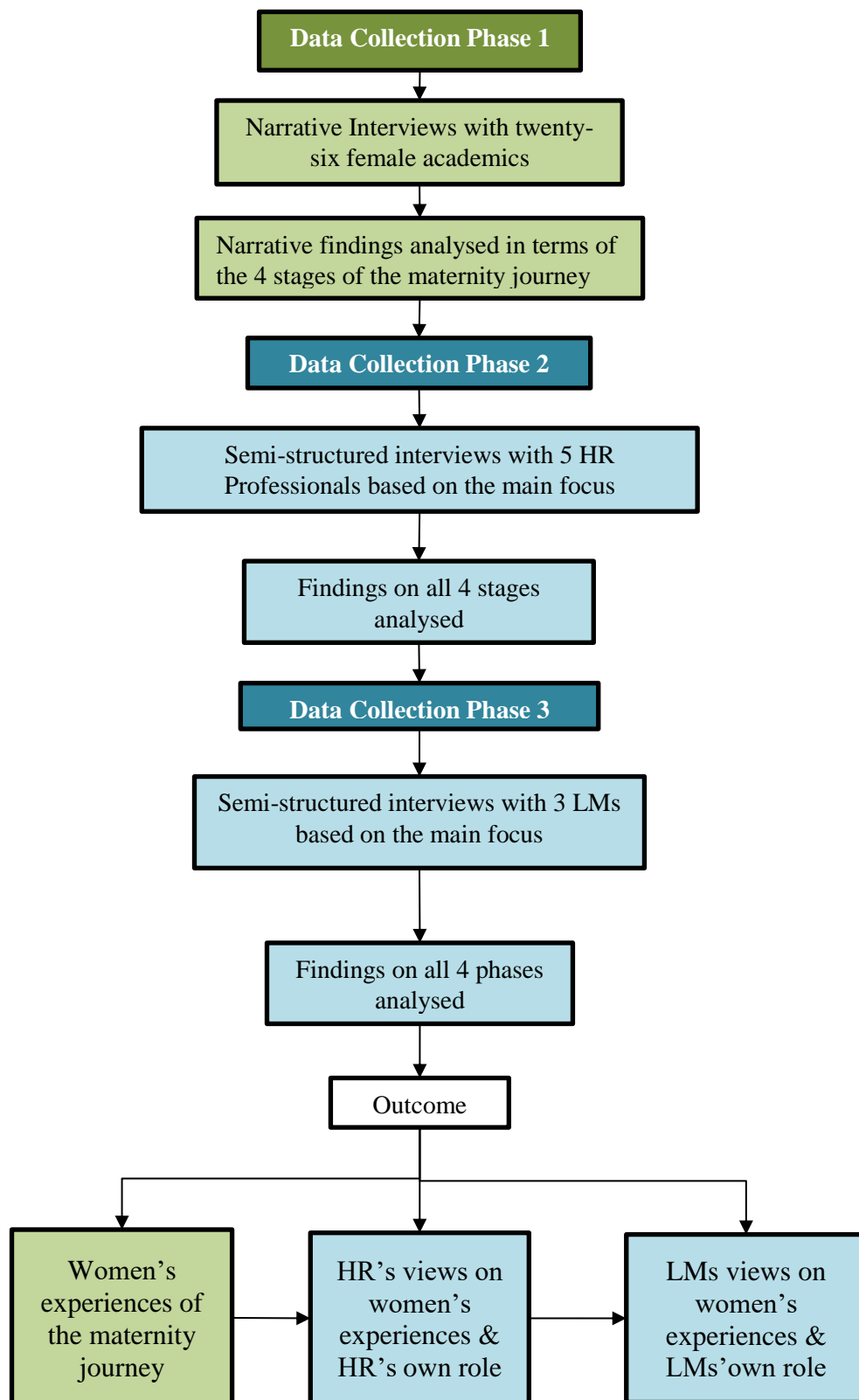
Theorists such as Silverman (1997) and Jennings (2001) have argued that a great strength of the semi-structured interview lies in the fact it enables the researcher to maintain the structure and focus of the interview whilst providing the option to ask further questions, probe further,

and seek further clarification. It also empowers interviewees to raise any points that were not covered but which they deem important within the context of the research topic.

3.7 Data collection methods

In-depth narrative interviews were therefore, conducted with twenty-six female academics in selected UK universities who had experienced the maternity journey. The narrative data collection method, enabled them to narrate their experiences of maternity without interference from the interviewer. Once these interviews were analysed, the findings were presented to a group of HR professionals and LMs for validation. Semi-structured interviews were then utilised with these participants to gain their views on the findings. Unlike the interviews with the women, which aimed to generate new data, insight and meaning, these two groups of participants were not interviewed in the same vein. Rather, they were presented with the existing data and asked for their opinions. The data collection methods for the entire study are presented in Figure 3.3.

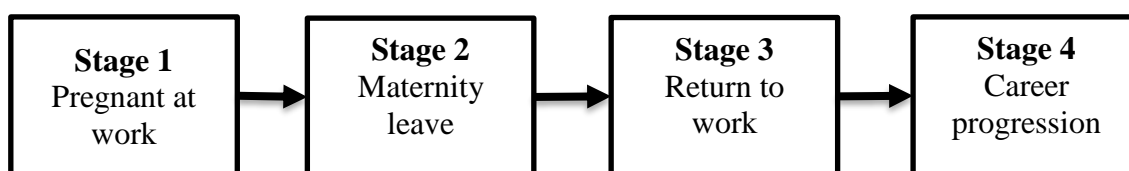
Figure 3.3: **Data Collection Methods**



3.7.1 Narrative Inquiry: In-depth Interviews with female academics

As far as the present study is concerned, narrative interviews served the foremost mechanism through which the opinions and views of the research participants were elicited. The process of a narrative interview comprises three elements; the main story (spoken by female academics), the narrative inquiry (interpreted by the researcher) and conclusion (themes drawn from the narrative) (Maindok, 1996, cited in Sarantakos, 2013). For the main story, the researcher was interested in hearing about women's experiences and perceptions of organisational support throughout their maternity journey. The researcher therefore conceptualised the maternity journey as consisting of four sequential stages: announcement and pregnancy at work, maternity leave, return to work, and eventual career progression. These stages are depicted in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4: **The maternity process**



The four stages provide a framework for the narrative interview. Previously, Miller *et al.*, (1996) had conceptualised the four sequential stages of maternity as; announcement, preparation for leave taking, leave, and preparation for return and re-entry. The four stages in this study are similar to Miller's framework but differ in that Miller concentrates more heavily on individual 'preparation' for leave-taking and for return. Conversely, the focus of this study is on the organisation and support provided at each important stage. Furthermore, whilst Miller's framework stops at re-entry, this research takes it a step further and looks at gradual career progression post re-entry.

Narrative interviews differ to conventional interviews in that they tend to be characterised by a lack of structure. As such, narrative interviews tend to be favoured by researchers who are seeking to gain insight into the life experiences of an interviewee, whilst in some cases, the researcher may be interested in a specific event that the participant has experienced. Nonetheless, the aim of a narrative interview is to stimulate and encourage the interviewee to 'open up' though it is prudent to note that the interviewer's influence should ideally remain minimal. The idea is to gain insight and meaning into a social event or phenomenon which the

interviewee is asked to reconstruct (Bauer, 1996). A Bauer (1996), for example, defined a narrative interview as comprising 4 phases, as shown in Table 3.2;

Table 3.2: **Bauer's basic concept of the Narrative Interview**

PHASES	RULES
0 Preparation	Exploring the field, formulating questions
1 Initialisation	Formulate initial topic for narration; use visual aids
2 Main narration	No interruptions; only use non-verbal encouragement to prompt continuation of the story
3 Questioning phase	Only question: What happened then? No opinion and attitude questions, no arguing, no contradictions
4 Small Talk	Stop recording Memory protocol immediately afterwards

(Source: Bauer, 1996, p. 05)

Furthermore, Lamnek (1993) (cited in Sarantakos, 2013, p. 290-291) presented a more detailed version of the narrative interview which consists of 5 stages, these were subsequently adhered to by the researcher the endeavours of which are presented in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3: **Five stages of the narrative interview**

Stage 1: Introduction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The women were introduced to the interview situation and were familiarised with the expectations and overall framework of the interviews, including ethical standards, anonymity, and confidentiality.</i> • <i>The topic was introduced, outlined and its dimensions were explained in detail.</i> • <i>The interviewer introduced a question (e.g. tell me about your pregnancy experience at work?) that motivated the interviewee to talk about her personal life and experiences. Further prompting questions included; tell me about your experience of organisational support during maternity leave/return to work/career progression?</i> • <i>Arrangements for audio recording were made prior to the interview. The researcher used the voice memo recording app on her iPhone to record the interview.</i> • <i>Direct questions were not asked about motives, reasons, causes, and the like; instead it was left to the women to refer to such issues if these formed part of their narrative.</i>
Stage 2: Narrative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Women were encouraged through specific stimuli to talk freely about their life experiences. The interviewer did not interfere but remained an 'interested listener', only making remarks that encouraged the women to continue, indicating they were being listened to carefully. This was shown through brief verbal expressions and simple gestures. Within the remit of their maternity experience and within the organisational context, the women chose the events they considered most relevant, expanded on topics considered important, stopped whenever necessary, presented events in order of importance or as memory dictated, and were free to decide the order of presentation and which events to talk about (e.g. maternity leave/ return/ pregnancy/ own perceptions of the organisation/ specific experiences with colleagues or manager or with HR)</i>

- *The women were encouraged not only to describe personal and social/organisational experiences but also to compare these with other experiences and explain these events as they understood them. Most women compared/ contrasted different pregnancies (if they had multiple children), while others compared two different pregnancies in two different academic positions, or two different universities. The narrative interview motivated and enabled female academics to consider past events to the present, to become aware of these experiences, to travel back to old times and relive them once more through storytelling.*

Stage 3: Questions

- *When women indicated the end of a story, they were asked for further information where gaps had emerged or for an explanation when statements were unclear, ambiguous or incomplete. This was a fragile part of the narrative interview because the researcher understood that a key characteristic of this stage is that questions were asked to gain information and not to criticise or pass judgement; the process continued to be part of the narrative, in that women offered their wisdom to the researcher.*
- *If new points emerged that required further story storytelling, the women were encouraged to begin talking again about this topic, bringing the narrative inquiry back to stage 2. Only when this stage was fully exhausted did the researcher proceed to 'questions' and then to 'explanation'.*

Stage 4: Explanation

- *At this stage, and after the basic information was fully described to the satisfaction of the interviewee and interviewer, more direct questions were asked. The women were first asked to provide more general and abstract views of the situation and its regularities, identify recurring events, and develop abstractions and systematic interconnections (this was a conversation to ensure the interviewer understood as closely as possible the emotions/information the women were narrating). Second, they were asked to describe more general aspects of the issue in question, and were given the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to assess as well as offer a more abstract explanation of the situation (here, women spoke about why they think their organisational experience was the way it was). Third, to explain their motives and intentions; and, finally, to discuss with the interviewer the meaning of their story e.g. women explained their opinions on the overall organisational support available to mother academics, the HE sector, and what they felt the underlying issues were .*
- *If new points emerged that required further storytelling, women were encouraged to begin talking about this topic once again, bringing the narrative interview back to stage 2. Only when this stage was fully exhausted did the researcher move on to the next stage.*

Stage 5: Analysis

- *The narrative as well as the debate that followed was transcribed. The methods of transcription employed for this purpose were similar to those employed in any other interview, although with a difference. The transcription was carried out by the researcher due to their profound knowledge of the interview and a desire to be fully immersed in the data.*
- *The transcribed text was subjected to thematic narrative analysis.*

(Source: Sarantakos, 2013, pp. 290-291)

Further details of the narrative interview are explained in Appendix G, and narrative summaries of all twenty-six women are presented in Appendix H.

3.7.2 Semi- structured interviews with HR and LMs on women's findings

The purpose of conducting interviews with these two groups of stakeholders was to present them with findings from female academics' narratives for validation. The findings were presented and the two groups were questioned in the following way; first, they were given a brief overview and informed face-to-face about the purpose of the research:

For instance, the HR professionals were told:

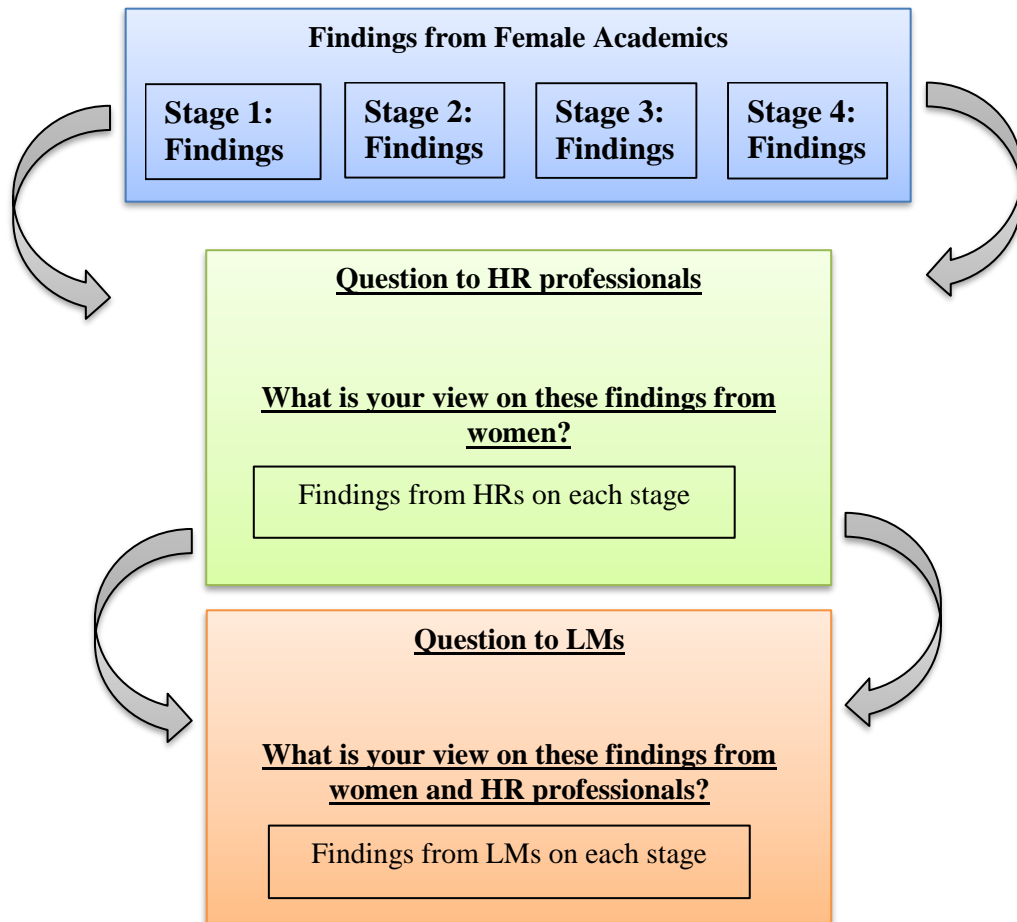
“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. The aim of my research was to explore female academics experiences of organisational support throughout their maternity journey. Therefore, I used a narrative approach where women narrated their experiences and perceptions of organisational support through four stages of their maternity journey; pregnancy, maternity leave, return to work, and career progression. I have now analysed their interviews and have findings for each stage. In this interview I will give you a brief summary of the findings at each stage, and then I want to know your view, or your take on it.”

Similarly, LMs were told:

“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. The aim of my research was to explore female academics experiences of organisational support throughout their maternity journey. Therefore, I used a narrative approach where women narrated their experiences and perceptions of organisational support through four stages of their maternity journey; pregnancy, maternity leave, return to work, and career progression. I analysed their interviews and have findings for each stage. I then took those findings to HR professionals and now I have their views on each stage. In this interview I will give you a brief summary of the findings at each stage, and a brief explanation of HR's views, and then I want to know your view, or your take on them.”

This process is displayed in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5: Interview process with HRs and LMs



After the completion of data collection, researcher analysed the data. The next section explains the data analysis process in detail.

3.8 Data Analysis

This section outlines the data analysis for both sets of interviews. It explains the process undertaken to analyse and make sense of the data.

3.8.1 Narrative Interviews Analysis with women academics

3.8.1.1 Spoken Event Narrative

This research adopted a '*Spoken Event*' Narrative Approach. Several scholars (Labov, 1972; Patterson, 2008) have described this as the universal form of event narratives, which comprise spoken first-person narratives about past events that happened to the teller. However, it is important to point out that some spoken stories are more fragmented than others are, and some researchers might not count them as stories. However, due to the evolving and expanding nature

of narrative inquiry, fragmented stories are increasingly becoming part of the main materials of narrative research. In this research, the recalling of experiences of the maternity journey narrated by women academics. Labov (1972) stated that such stories are clauses that follow each other in time and evaluative material that makes sense of these happenings, effectively telling you why the narrative matters. However, event narratives are difficult to separate from the material around them. Patterson (2008) stated that event narratives relate crucially to the material that came before the event. Indeed, in this research, the immediate contextual happenings before and after the maternity leave had a crucial impact on the returning experience.

3.8.1.2 Thematic analysis of the narratives

The analysis of the narratives focused on the themes that developed across the stories, told by mother academics, rather than just themes that could be picked out from individual stories (Reissman, 2008; Ndlovu, 2012). It was concerned with the narrative content, themes and meaning, such as organisational struggles and the forms of resistance conveyed in the women's narratives (Andrews et al., 2013). The analysis focused on extracts from the interview transcripts, each of which provided a short narrative about a related topic or incident relating to each mother's experience of organisational support during the maternity journey.

Saunders (2015) stated that these extracts tend to be short stories that have a clear purpose, encompassing a situation, an action, and an outcome, and are expressed in a structure that contains a beginning, middle, and end. This was the case in the narrative interview data collected in this research, where the clear purpose of the story was for women to talk through the maternity journey experience at work. These were conceptualised around the four stages of maternity framework developed by the researcher, with an overall focus on organisational support throughout. In thematic narrative analyses, prior theory can be used to develop codes and categories to help analyse each narrative. This research was therefore influenced by various theories outlined in the literature review, but it was mainly viewed through the lens of Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory. However, codes and categories also emerged inductively from each narrative. This meant it was crucial to preserve the data within its narrated context to maintain the sequential and structural elements of each story.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) (cited in Saunders, 2015, p. 2015) outlined the structural elements that are useful in facilitating an analysis of narratives. These can be summarised as follows:

- *What is the story about?*
- *What happened, to whom, whereabouts and why?*
- *What consequences arose from this?*
- *What is the significance of these events?*
- *What is the final outcome?"*

In this study, it was pre-determined that the story would be about the mother academic's maternity journey. At the beginning of the interview, participants were told to start their story from the time they announced their pregnancy, then talk about all the experiences in between, their experience of returning to work, and finally their experience of settling in after their return. Upon completion of all the narrative interviews, the researcher then listened to and transcribed the audio recordings.

The researcher listened to and transcribed each narrative interview verbatim. This resulted in twenty-six 'raw' lengthy verbatim transcripts ranging from 3,000 to 7,000 words each. An exemplary extract of one transcript is shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: An Extract from One Narrative Transcript- [Priya, Lecturer, Languages, Medium Tariff University]

<p>We adopted a 2 2 1/2 year old, so I had a year off, I came back to work when she was 3 I think she just started going to nursery. I came back as 0.5 I think I'd always said I'd come back as 0.5 and I think I'd always said maybe if I had a birth child and not an adopted child I might have said ah well well...everyone just goes back to work full-time so I might as well. But after taking on a child with very particular needs and a very particular background I thought I can't just say about a year that okay now I'm just going to see you 2 days a week and maybe a few evening... so I came back a 0.5 and ever since then there has always been pressure on me to say oh don't you want to be more than a 0.5 don't you want to be more than a 0.5... the best thing to me about being 0.5 is the ability to be able to say no...that's my only day off. I'm not coming to a meeting then because that's my day off and I'm not doing any teaching then...and it gives me that flexibility in the week when that work can flow over into those other days so actually I am working and quite considerably more than a 0.5 actually. But its having that flexibility to think okay if I haven't done a certain task by a certain time okay I can do that on a Tuesday afternoon or a Friday morning. So apart from my teaching time I never actually come in for something apart from graduations which I have to be part of. Its just having that...somewhere else for that work to go that isn't the weekend.</p> <p>Although I do always work on Sunday nights I always end up working on Sunday nights... there are loads of things that are not good about being a 0.5... you do a lot more than you get paid for and it is impossible to get promoted. But for the sake of my mental health and my family life...it is better that I am...that I've got that protected days that I can take, I can take my daughter to school and back two days of the week. We can have evening tea and not be in Worked for 7 years before adopting, then took a year off and then now I've been back 7 years as well...</p> <p>Adoption leave</p> <p>My experience of taking adoption leave was awful, it was terrible. I was programme leader and I was director of postgraduate studies... and I think I was a equality and diversity officer as well. It was a small job team but I had quite a lot of responsibility because adoption is not like giving birth nobody knows about it and the process of it happening. It happens really quickly, there is a long process of it happening...the agency has to match you with the right choice kids with you...and all that but then as soon as the right match is found the process is quite quick. The university's adoption policy says you don't have to let them know until that final decision is made...but I had had some conversations about it... that we were thinking about this and I did speak to head of school that we are thinking/ planning this...he said to me you need to give up all your roles then now. Anything that was going to allow me to a promotion so director of postgraduate stuff programme leader role... and I was told to give that up. And he made it clear that when I come back I won't be able to do it then either. He just wanted me to give them up there and then. Because he said we don't know when you're going to leave now...so just give them up now. I said well exactly you don't know when I am going to leave so why should I give them up? I explained that all the jobs that I do I can still do them on a 0.5 workload, so I shouldn't have to give them up. I had to make a big fuss and I had to really really fight to say why should you give them to someone else when I can clearly do them when I come back...</p>	<p>I think his reasoning for why I couldn't do those roles is because I wouldn't be available enough to students, I can't remember fully but I remember it wasn't articulated very well and it was just like okay you're taking on childcare responsibilities so you're now just seen as an unreliable person. And because of this question of when you might be going on leave we just can't take this risk at all of you going on leave. So just because of that...specifically I told him exactly when the policy demanded and as soon as the decision was made that a match was found with a child I went and told him and I said this is what your policy says- so this is what I am doing- and I am going off on this day. I also made sure...I looked after everything...who will do what in my absence etc...however it would've been much better for the institution had I been talking to them going along throughout the whole process and saying you know...when I said I'll be leaving here so then I left in semester 1...but I just thought right...you know what if that's going to be your reaction to it... then that's what I'm going to do, I'm going to go to the letter of the law of your policy then. But I went, I took action and I went to the union and said you know my head of department has told me that I've got to give up these roles and I said that has got to be illegal, if I was pregnant and went to them and said I'm having a baby and they told me to give up these roles then that would quite clearly be discrimination. In other conversations he had told other colleagues that having children is a lifestyle choice and you make that choice. Implying that you are clearly not choosing to have any serious role as an academic if you're choosing to have children... That just can't be the way that any activity works because lots of people have children... I think how can we think like that...my child is going to be paying for your pension. He was a gay guy, not interested in kids, he doesn't know lots of people with kids, women that he knew in the department were the women without children. So he can't understand that life.</p> <p>I arranged all of my teaching who'd do what when I go. There were certain modules I teach on that could be covered internally then there were other modules that needed people externally so I went and organised those people I looked for who they could be I had all their CVs ready to give and say have this person or have this person. Because of his reaction I couldn't talk to them...I took a year off.</p> <p>Return</p> <p>I came back in the middle of a semester, I knew that if I came back in the start of a semester it would've been better for the institution but I just thought fine, if that's what your policy says that's what I do. So I came back, I might have done 2 weeks teaching and then it was Christmas. But I came back 0.5 so I was reduced in doing what I'd previously done. In the year that I was off, they'd had a reorganisation. They'd reduced staff and loads of people went on a project. I worked a lot on English language which I was running internally that all moved, it split off from our school so now its completely separate. I stayed on the academic side and working for the MA and that was my 0.5 role working on the MA. A lot of the work I did on development and organising the academic English writing went, and with it went a lot of my research which I was carrying out at the time with that role. I came back 0.5 but that just did those bits, did do director of postgraduate studies. They phoned to tell me I might be at risk of redundancy. Uni is making redundant a lot of people and you could be one of them. I think it was everyone in our subject area. I think a lot of people took voluntary redundancy which helped the whole department. I came in saw colleagues went to lunch with one of my colleagues, brought daughter in. I spent some time writing for a</p>
<p>conference proceedings at that time. That was work but institution didn't need to speak to me about it. I Don't remember any Keep in touch days, certainly didn't have an agreement about that.</p> <p>Didn't get a meeting or anything when I came back. I was programme leader before I left, so in a way it would've been me...who would've had that meeting with the returning mother...I know that even if I did it would've been very minimal. I don't think I expected that much support because it was quite hands off I think before I went off I had a meeting with a HR person. Recently had to put timetabling constraints in had to say I don't work Tuesdays or Fridays and HR came back and said we haven't got a contract for you that says that you don't work those days...because when you come back no one set up a contract to say you're now on 0.5 contract. I now remember I did have a meeting when I came back from adopt leave, and I'd said I've organised childcare, I want to come back Tuesdays and Thursdays and my line manager disagreed he said no you have to work Mondays and Thursdays because I need to spread myself over the week and I had to go back and re-arrange childcare. He said you can't work for a block, you have to come in take a day off then come in then take a day off... I think he just did that to be awkward. Also its crap as a way of working because I have to stop everything on Tues and try to start again, or I end up working Tues as well to keep the flow. In a way it worked out okay able to be involved in a different module. Nobody knows what my working days are... because it's a middle working day, everyone I know that's part-time works in a block. It's a weird way of working. Its very stop and start you don't really get a go at anything. Not a good way of working- and I really get the the sense he made me work like this because he knew he could. I know loads of other people that work in the middle of the week.</p> <p>Workload management / work-life balance</p> <p>Well I never had time for research anyway and that time for research got even more less, unless I go to another university to do it its just not there. My other half a full-time academic. Before children use to work 9-6, go home have tea, put pc on at 9pm work till 10-11pm, watch some telly go to bed. That was what we both did- nothing else to do. So we still do that its just shifted. I leave at 4.25pm instead of 6.15pm, go home make tea, when she was younger 6:30pm we could then put laptop on at 8pm get fairly substantial amount of work done and go to bed at 12 that worked quite well. Now period of leaving work and when you can get back to work on laptop is a longer time because she is older and sleeps late and it is eating into...work time of my evenings. Weird because academics just work all the time. Got to review that, got this deadline...that's how I worked before. Now chunks of that where I'm unable to do that. We made a decision that we would all have a family meal at 6pm we had a big job to do continue to do...that we are a family unit, especially with adopted child to work on family togetherness. Really important to have daily meal together everyday.</p> <p>He taken on extra role at work, he was leaving at 7am in morning just to be back for 6pm so we'd be together for a meal in the evening. She has many more activities after school as getting older... in other jobs you finish at 5, you finish at 5. Academics always possibility to be doing more and more, so we do do more and more... I will stop at 11:30pm and say okay I need some downtime. Even before children I use to do at least till 10-10:30pm. I think that</p>	<p>is also a buy-product of living with another academic. I keep telling him he needs to speak to his work people and explain that they can't keep having these 8am meetings... because its unfair people that have kids and need to drop them off just cant attend. Institutions can't booking meetings at that time. Earliest childcare starts at 7:30. Can't guarantee that you'll make it to meeting at 8pm.</p> <p>He also got 6 weeks adoption leave. The university he works at is a lot more flexible and doesn't have such a strong managerial culture the way we do here. He is a professor- he has a lot more autonomy and freedom about when he goes...if I have 8am meeting he moves his diary around, he takes her to school etc. he has much more control over his diary because he does much less teaching. But he does a lot more travelling...meetings etc. although he does a lot less conferences now- makes things more difficult- being away from family not good for daughter. He has less research profile not part of same networks...he's doing alright research wise he knows his research career would be even better too if no child. People with interstellar research careers don't have children- we know that, all the friends colleagues academics we know. Its across the board. I'm interested in an area of research- know some people interested in that area too and they've all written a book together, and I'm like...how come you've all written a book together? Oh I see because you were all at that conference together and papers you were all presenting a paper you decided it would be good to put all the papers together and make a book and now you have a research agenda coming out of that book. I can't be part of that because not part of that conference. That conference was in half-term so I couldn't go to that, even if not in half-term...really difficult...went to one this year came back mid-way...didn't have enough childcare. Two years before went to another country one which was okay but major thing. Particularly if stuff overlaps, if interested in going to a conference I have to ask my husband...what are you doing a year in advance? Doesn't work like that</p> <p>Academics move around...don't have grandparents around the corner- that makes a huge difference, other mums and dad at school that have this its so much easier. We worked in 4 different places before we landed up here. Quite a lot of academic couples would work long distances apart... Even when my child is sick I can't be there for another hour and half, she has to sit in corner with sick bucket.</p> <p>Career Impact</p> <p>Not being part of the culture- because I'm part-time. Any interesting growth opportunities happen at 4:30pm. My academic discipline very small- but lots of research seminars... they're all at 4:30...then pub then dinner...use to go to those stay build better contacts, develop my understanding. Feel much more part of the institutional culture. Now I feel very much end of it. People often send round these group emails congratulating everyone for whatever they did...and I just don't do that because I don't feel part of that team anymore. Since been put into work with a new set of people I'm just not here enough to be part of that institutional culture. They don't know me what I'm interested in and I don't particularly know them... and you know there's meetings that go on till 5 and I have to leave. I have constraints- I do feel very much end of things- before felt much more part of things- not as</p>

One exemplary narrative script is also presented in Appendix I. All the transcripts were then read and re-read to begin the analytic process of coding information.

During discussions with the researcher's fellow colleagues, NVivo software was recommended as a suitable data analysis tool. The researcher was informed that this piece of software had been invaluable for her peers as it allowed for effective data organisation, access, coding and retrieval. These advantages were subsequently echoed within related publications (Bringer, Johnston and Brackenridge, 2004). Thereby leading the researcher to attend a two-day workshop, which would equip her with the necessary skills and awareness, needed to use NVivo. To supplement this, the researcher also spent a considerable amount of time watching NVivo tutorial videos via YouTube. The researcher then spent approximately two weeks 'playing around' with the software to help make sense of the data.

However, after struggling for a while, the researcher realised that this was not necessarily well suited to herself nor the research as a whole. The reasons for this were dual pronged; firstly, there was a constant feeling that important nuances of the data were being missed due to the software's style of organisation. This led to a feeling of discomfort and anxiousness as the researcher did not want to overlook any crucial information. More specifically however, it was felt that the organised, almost quantitative nature of the software stood at odds with both the chosen paradigm and underlying epistemology. As stated earlier, Mingers (2001) emphasises the importance of aligning all subsequent techniques and tools with the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of a study, so as to maintain research validity and rigour. The use of NVivo was seen as disruptive to this particular line of inquiry given that it restricted the ability to interpret the data. It was felt that the processes resembled a more positivist or quantitatively inclined study. This is not necessarily a slight on the tool itself rather this is more of a mismatch with the underlying research principles.

Overall, the researcher felt detached and lost when using the software. This method was therefore abandoned and the researcher went back to basics with a 'pen and paper'. For ease of reading and to manage all twenty-six transcripts, the researcher printed and filed all of the transcripts and created a 'Findings' folder.

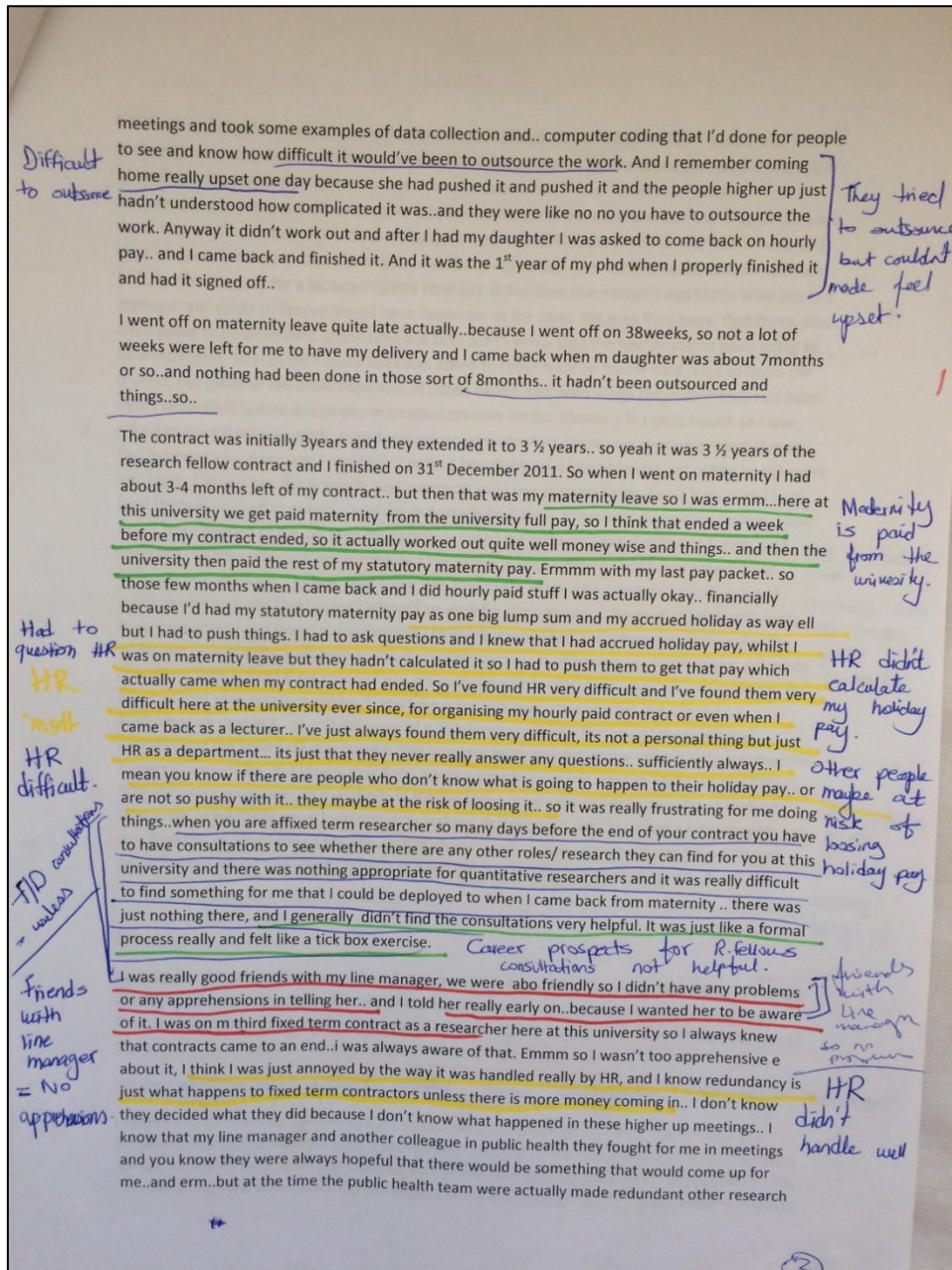
To become more familiar with the narratives and gain an overview of their content, the researcher made a summary sheet of each narrative and attached it to the top of each transcript. This meant that, simply by looking at the summary sheets, the researcher knew the main codes that were discussed in each narrative, and then for further detail the transcript itself could be read in detail. Examples of summary sheets are shown in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6: Example summary sheets

<p>Sue</p> <p>Team supportive/ all women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am "fortunate" I have been supported well! Shouldn't that be the norm?! <p>Research committee/ male colleagues/ judgemental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MALE colleagues mainly- often say can write a bid over the weekend- no feel bad enough not spending enough week day evenings with children never mind loosing whole weekend too. (When majority male colleagues they have a higher expectation for you to work weekends because they can because their wives looking after their kids!) <p>Emotional/ Guilt/ Woman thing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guilt: felt antagonism between children and work - Childcare responsibility is also an emotional thing, men don't feel as guilty as we do. (pg.5) Men are more compartmentalised. Even the kids ask for the "mum"! - Feel not good mother or good worker <p>Line manager/ distance- friendship makes a difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st time pregnancy line manager= close/ near office/ knew well. 2nd pregnancy different line manager/ didn't know so well/ far away office- makes a difference <p>More transparent with manager= more penalised!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes their view- if home can't work, they don't realise you can! - Feel like the more transparent you are the more you get penalised (Issue- <u>major this</u> can be a strong theme) <p>Part-time issue/ working full-time, paid part-time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part-time work issue because on part-time contract and getting paid part-time but actually working full-time (pg.04), eventually went full-time to get the pay I deserve Everything suffers <u>from</u>/ can't research/ out of loop/ no momentum <p>Flexibility= pressure to work all the time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility good but can mean working 24/7 - Some people like to show working all the time outside of work/ I end up working all evenings - More pressure increasing because sector getting competitive - New requirement to teach till 6pm (can't need to pick up children) - Jobs tailored around school times are admin focused and lower pay! <p>Positive role model for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good for my children to have a role model <p>Ill Child = SUPER difficult time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If/when child ill= super difficult especially because no family around, but as academics we move around a lot so don't tend to near family <p>HR/ mainly admin/ doesn't follow it's ow policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR fine- mainly form-filling! Rest of arrangement with line manager 	<p>Emma</p> <p>Fixed term contract redundancy despite not end of contract/ Stopped from being full-time staff member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research fellow on Fixed term contract, went on maternity leave & made redundant even though project hadn't finished. - On Fixed-term contract have consultations when nearing end date, this was unhelpful, formal process, just a tick box exercise. - Also made redundant because if went over <u>three year</u> period would become full-time staff an be eligible for staff benefits. - Took back on project but hourly paid so didn't get any benefits - Because hourly paid, had no integration back into the workplace/ not informed of any of the policies or anything. <p>HR unsupportive/ insufficient/ don't want 2nd child because of HR's experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR unsupportive + insufficient, money questions unanswered - Even when Union representative asked questions, HR unable to answer sufficiently - Teaching in a niche subject, knew it would be difficult for them to outsource, they tried to outsource initially, but went on maternity leave for 8 months and nothing was done. - HR hated me because I was on 4 different hourly paid contracts - It is a conscious decision not to have another child, because team will be supportive but because of the way HR has been I don't want to - Not aware of any formal support for maternity apart from maternity pay <p>All okay for me because friends with line manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive line manager, pushed higher authorities to keep her - Because good friends with line manager had no problems. - In academia as long as you put things in your diary and people know where you are especially when you are friends with your line manager it's all good. - Don't know if I would've liked any more support from the university because already had a supportive line manager and colleagues <p>Supportive colleagues/ small team/ all female</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During mat leave taught as a favour and had very supportive colleagues, brought in my 2 month old and they babysat my child whilst I taught - Very small team, only 4 people, all female, supportive therefore. - Lost quite a few staff to illness so became even closer to each other, most don't have family nearby, so baby-sit for each other <p>Inflexibility/ Made to feel different for being mother/ timetabling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always at work but have to leave 4 sharp to pick up child from nursery, university requires us to be available 9-5 publically got an email to justify/prove why I can't be available till 6pm, this felt intrusive (pg.05) <p>Workload in academia <u>blurry & unmanageable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple carers at home- can't work evening! Can't work any evenings because have disabled mother at home plus child home in the evening. - With PhD to do, lecturing workload totally unmanageable - In academia you never go home thinking I'm now done for the day, there is always more and more to do
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This exercise was also useful when typing up a summary of each woman's narrative story (see Appendix I). Thereafter, having abandoned the use of the NVivo software, the researcher began the data analysis once again from scratch. During this phase, the printed transcripts were manually highlighted using different colours, the aim of this was to ensure that influential organisational factors that were discussed by women were identified. An example of a colour coded transcript is displayed in Figure 3.7

Figure 3.7: A manually coded extract from a narrative script



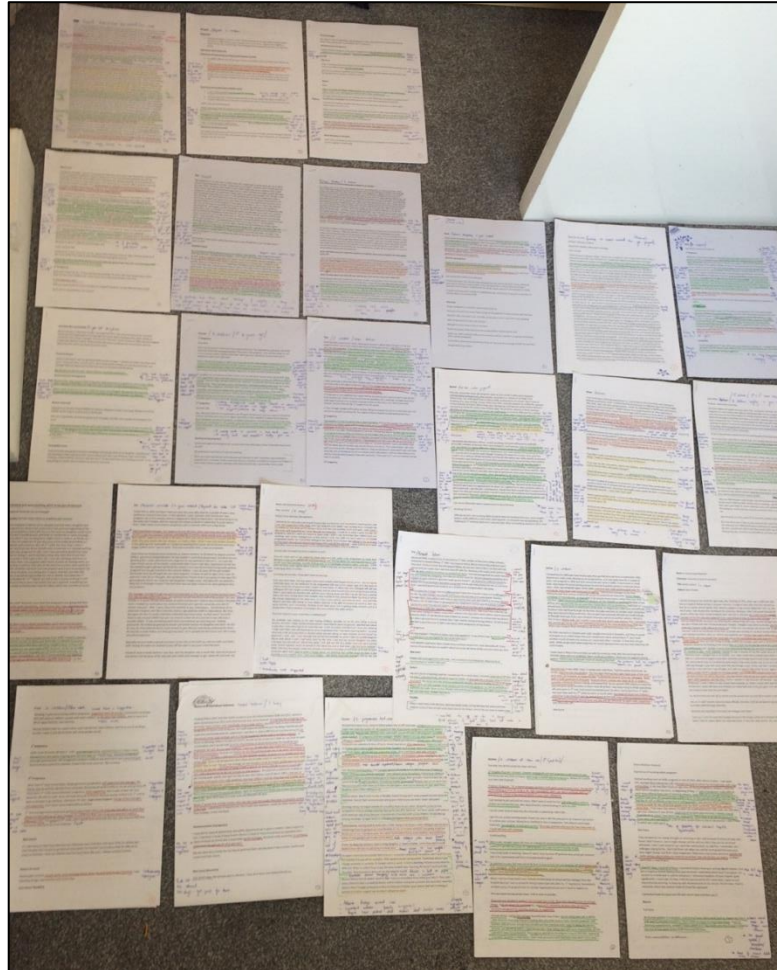
This process was conducted and repeated for all twenty-six narratives. Once each narrative transcript was analysed individually, the researcher then analysed them together.

3.8.1.3 Multiple Narrative Analysis

After analysing all the narrative data, researcher identified the significance of certain events across the multiple narratives, based on the type of experiences that emerged from the stories. When more than one participant provided a personal account of a given context, the narrative researcher compared or contrasted these narratives (Saunders, 2015). The depth this provided

produced *'thick descriptions'* of contextual detail and social relations. The colour coding process was therefore manually carried out for all the transcripts as shown in Figure 3.8

Figure 3.8: **Display of all the manually coded narrative transcripts**



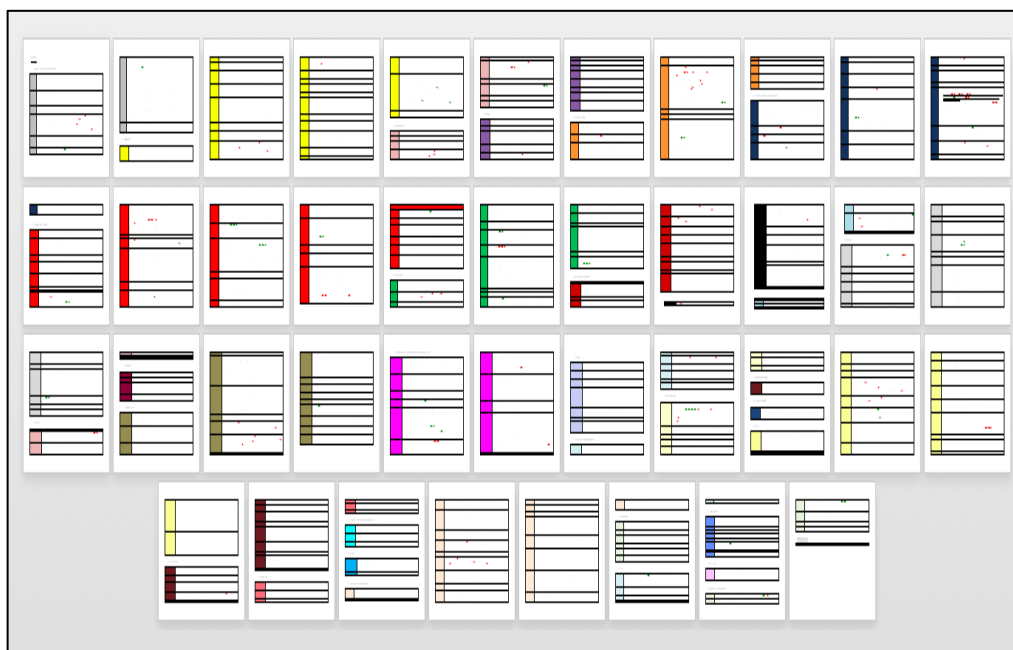
The multiple (twenty-six) stories collected from academic mothers facilitated comparisons between the different narratives, leading to the formulation of thick descriptions that comprised a detailed thematic analysis. This analytical process required the researcher to re-construct the stories which inevitably placed them in a central role when telling the story because *“decisions needed to be taken about what to include and what to leave out, and how to connect parts of the account”* (Saunders, 2015, p. 199).

The analysis therefore involved focusing on narrative aspects, rather than simply analysing stories in any way one chose. Moreover, the researcher was keen to examine stories as stories, rather than simply conduct an analysis of narratives (Squire, 2013). This type of

analysis was intensive and time-consuming, and generated large amounts of data (Gabriel, & Griffiths, 2004) (e.g. Appendix H and Appendix I).

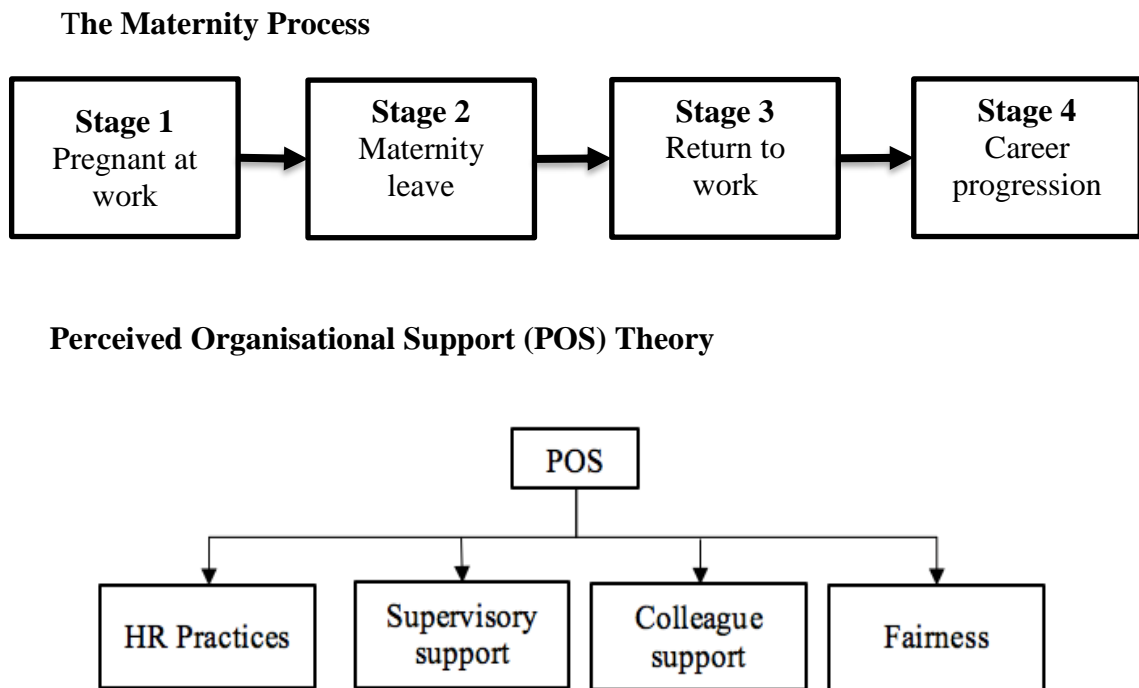
After the first thorough analysis, a total of 33 codes (or emergent topics) had been derived from the overall set of narratives. These were understood by creating a detailed table containing the ‘code,’ the name of the woman who talked about this issue, and ‘direct quotes’ from the interview. This culminated in lengthy tables of 33 codes and 17,124 words in total. A screen shot is displayed in Figure 3.9, and the full is presented in Appendix D.

Figure 3.9: Snapshot demonstrating colour-coded tables as part of the coding process.



Constructing these tables helped provide a thorough understanding of the data. However, there were clearly too many codes thus it was necessary to decide which of these were the most important points of discussion for the purpose of this study. Two useful frameworks were therefore drawn upon to help aid data analysis. These were the ‘four stages of the maternity process’ and the ‘Perceived Organisational Support theory’. Discussed in detail earlier, these are shown side by side in Figure 3.10.

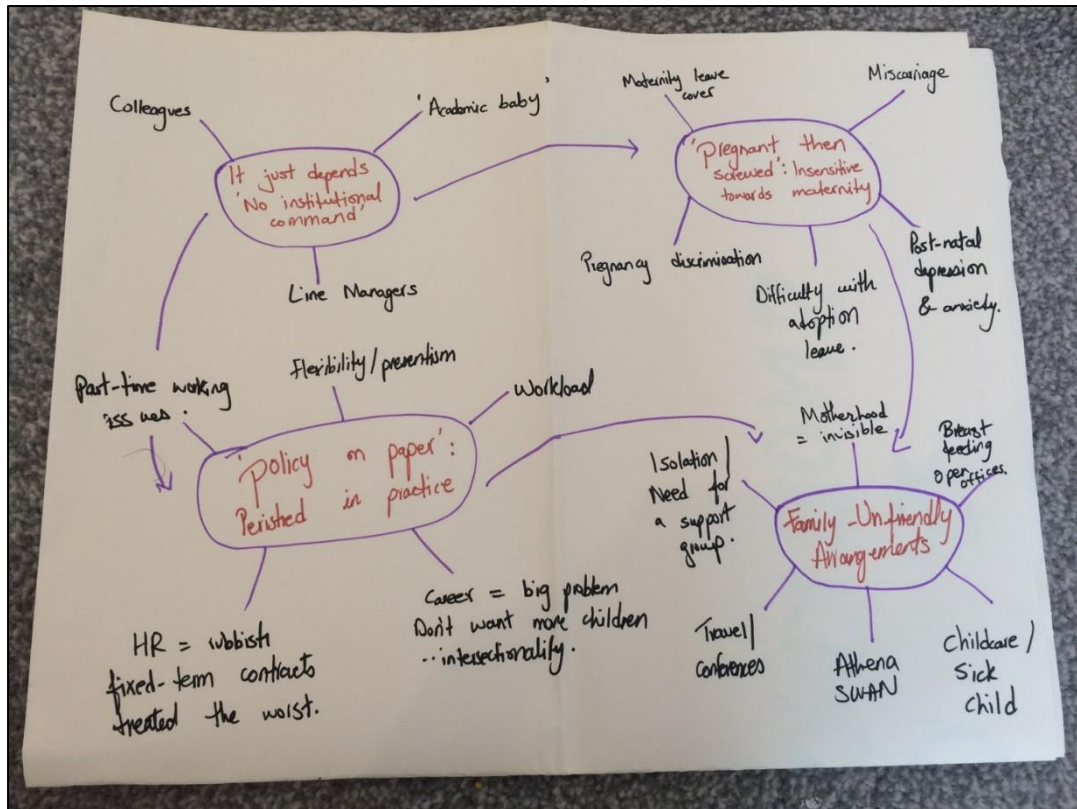
Figure 3.10: Framework for data analysis



The two frameworks helped to streamline the data as it was possible to sift through' and minimise the number of codes initially created (although these were not limited to the framework) and helped to identify the most relevant information in terms of the focus and purpose of this research-.

By engaging and immersing herself in the interpretive data process, the researcher began to form and combine initial thoughts and emergent themes by using spider diagrams. This enabled the researcher to be creative and imaginative as well as deeply interpretative when making sense of the data collected. An example is shown in Figure 3.11.

Figure 3.11: Sketching ideas around initial emerging themes from the data



The themes were revised a number of times in a re-iterative process that involved going back to the theoretical framework, re-reading the transcripts, obtaining feedback from supervisors and academic friends, reflecting on the analysis, and sometimes leaving the analysis for a few days and even weeks and then returning to it with fresh eyes. These findings are shown in Table 3.5 which comprises two columns of main findings and sub-topics under each stage of the maternity journey. For example, the main finding in stage 1 concerned women's experiences of organisational support during pregnancy at work and maternity leave. The sub-topics discussed within this stage were experiences/ perceptions of pregnancy discrimination and problems with maternity leave, and the specific issues discussed in relation to problematic maternity leave are listed in the form of bullet points e.g. no maternity cover, maternity cover but with caveats, and so on. The main findings and the sub-topics discussed in all 4 stages of the maternity journey are presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Findings from the data analysis of narrative interviews

Main Findings	Sub-topics
<i>Stage 1- Pregnancy at work & maternity leave</i>	
Experiences of organisational support during pregnancy and when on maternity leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy Discrimination • Problematic Maternity Leave <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>No maternity cover</i> - <i>Maternity cover ‘but’ with caveats</i> - <i>Not enough communication</i> - <i>Too much communication</i> - <i>Adoption leave</i>
<i>Stage 2- Transition from maternity leave back to work</i>	
Experiences of organisational support during transition period of returning to work from maternity leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing an ‘Ideal academic baby’ • At the mercy of line managers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The ‘friends’, ‘parent’ or ‘feminist’ line manager</i> - <i>The ‘non-friendly’, ‘single’ or ‘non-parent’ line managers</i> - <i>Transparency and Communication</i> • Colleague support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Female dominated department</i> - <i>Male dominated department</i> • Human Resource department (HR): ‘The dark heart of coming back’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Insufficiency</i> - <i>Procedural not supportive</i> - <i>Ineffective policies</i>
<i>Stage 3 -After return to work</i>	
Experiences of organisational support after return to work from maternity leave	<p>Physical support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastfeeding • Open Plan shared offices • Sick Child • Travel and Conferences • Athena SWAN • Childcare <p>Psychological support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invisible motherhood • Isolation and Support Network • Post-natal depression and anxiety • Miscarriage

<i>Stage 4- Career progression</i>	
Experiences of organisational support with career progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility and Presentism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Flexibility is both positive and negative</i> - <i>Allocation of flexible work can be unfair</i> - <i>Perceptions of working flexibly</i> - <i>Inconsiderate management regarding flexibility</i> - <i>Presentism</i> • Impact of Motherhood on an academic career <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Gender inequality and intersectionality</i> - <i>Publications determine career</i> • Concerns with part-time work following return from maternity leave • Unmanageable workload

A detailed discussion of these findings is presented in the next chapter. This table was emailed to all twenty-six of the women interviewed. There were two reasons for this; firstly, because almost all the women requested to be sent a brief summary of the study’s findings after their interview due to their interest in the topic, and secondly because most (but not all) women responded with a positive reaction to the findings sent to them, with many stating that the bullet point topics mirrored their own experiences. This further validated the findings from the women and increased the researcher’s confidence in the outcomes.

These findings were then presented to HR professionals and line managers to gain their perspective, and consequently provide the researcher with a more holistic view of the issues under consideration.

3.8.2 Analysis of semi-structured interviews with HRs and LMs

Musson & Tietze (2004) argued that narrative inquiry can be used as the sole research strategy, or it can be used in conjunction with another strategy as a complementary approach. In this study, the additional semi-structured interviews with HRs and LMs complemented the findings from women academic’s narratives.

Women’s findings were presented to HR professionals and they were asked for their views on each of the maternity stage findings from the women. The interviews with HR

professionals were also transcribed verbatim. For these interviews, a professional transcribing service was used because it saved time, and the researcher did not need to be as heavily immersed in the data. An exemplary transcript an interview with a HR professional is presented in appendix J. The analysis of these interviews was also a much easier and straightforward process because, unlike the narrative interviews, the interviewees were asked direct questions on 4 main themes and the answers lent themselves directly to the focus of the research. However, like the narrative interview analysis, the researcher created a table that collated the responses from all 5 HR professionals. This was also a very lengthy process, as a total of 21,808 words of information were extracted overall. These were then colour coded to highlight the main themes arising from HR’s views. A brief snapshot of this process is shown in Figure 3.12.

Figure 3.12: An extract from HR interview analysis

<p>HR Assistant Middle-Tariff University on [Pregnancy Discrimination]</p>	<p><i>It's not often we get that, to be fair. We're not aware of. It's really not a situation that we've ... Quite often you'll get many a time you'll get a flexible working request that comes in, but we'll have that conversation first and think the negotiations might've gone in. It might going only want two days, but I say no we can accommodate three and then we'll get the paperwork in. So, it could be that we're not privy to this sort of information because it's been ironed out locally within the team.</i></p> <p>Ironic she said that because that's not what the women said/ ofcourse they don't come to you/ and ofcourse you don't hear this/ and no they are not always ironed out on local level and what happens if they are not.</p> <p><i>I'll be honest, I've not personally come across anything in terms of discrimination for anyone that's off on maternity leave or about to go off on maternily leave. So I'm going struggle to answer that, I'll be really honest with you.</i></p> <p>This is quite telling of HR's role. No experieicne of discrimination cases.</p> <p>Questioning women's peceptions about discrimination.</p> <p>because as I was listening to you talk, a lot of people's perceptions are their perception. It's not a fact. It's how they feel and actually there's a lot of psychology in everything that's being said around, oh well, maybe cutting short their maternity leave in order to come back. Oh well I was made to feel like this. Well, actually were they? Or was it their interpretation? The fact that they've been away from work so long, it's very difficult to come back.</p>
<p>Inclusion and Diversity Officer Middle-Tariff</p>	<p>All the discrimination- HR glad that I have collected this information and able to share with them.</p> <p>I think you make such good points, and as sorrowful as I am about the experiences those women have had I am so grateful that they've shared them with you because it can give us a lot to work with.</p>
<p>University [Pregnancy Discrimination]</p>	<p>Jennifer (Inclusion and Diversity Officer, Middle-Tariff University)</p> <p>Recognise that HR needs do/ should do more- shocking that it still exists.</p> <p>We can count each year easily the number of women that take maternity leave and people that take shared paternity, parental and adoption leave we have that information. We have it it's not smoke and mirrors because HR has to be involved. So I think the division has a responsibility to do more there, I am honestly just really so sad that in today's day and age that is still happening we are looking into actually at divisional and school based equality champions</p> <p>Sad that women experience this, but there really isn't a lot that is done at the moment to be honest, in terms of who they can go to.</p>

The extract from the analysis shows the colour coded thematic analysis employed to make sense of the data. Different colours were allocated to different topics so that each time a topic was mentioned they were coloured accordingly, and then all the topics were looked at

collectively to interpret the overall meaning. For instance, the turquoise/blue colour was used every time an HR professional spoke about women's perceptions of discrimination. Similarly, every time an HR professional said they recognised they needed to do more to support women academics, this was coloured purple, and so on.

After all the transcripts were colour coded, they were swept through once again, whereby notes were made, before summaries of what was being said around each sub-theme were made within each stage e.g. the views of HR1, HR2, HR3, HR4, and HR5 on pregnancy discrimination, then on maternity leave, and so on. These summaries were created using 'imindmaps' a recognised mapping software (see Appendix E). They were presented in a visual form so that the information was easy to process for the researcher. It was therefore possible to view all the opinions provided by the HR interviewees about a specific topic. These also facilitated a smooth write up of the findings and an analysis of HR views, which will be presented in the next chapter. All the summaries can be seen in Appendix E.

Figure 3.13 presents an example of the 'imindmap' summaries created from interviews with HR professionals.

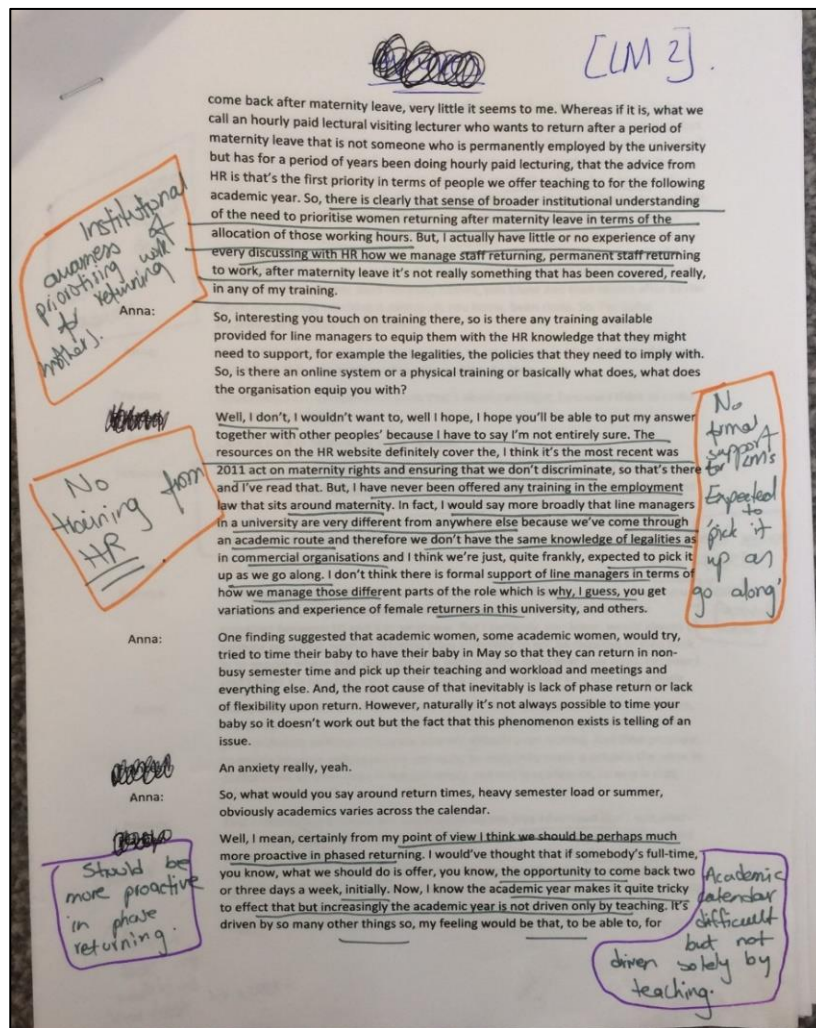
Figure 3.13: Summaries of overall findings from HR interviews



The coding and summarising process enabled the researcher to obtain detailed insights into HR perspectives on women's findings. The findings from women and HR professionals were then presented to 3 LMs to gain their views.

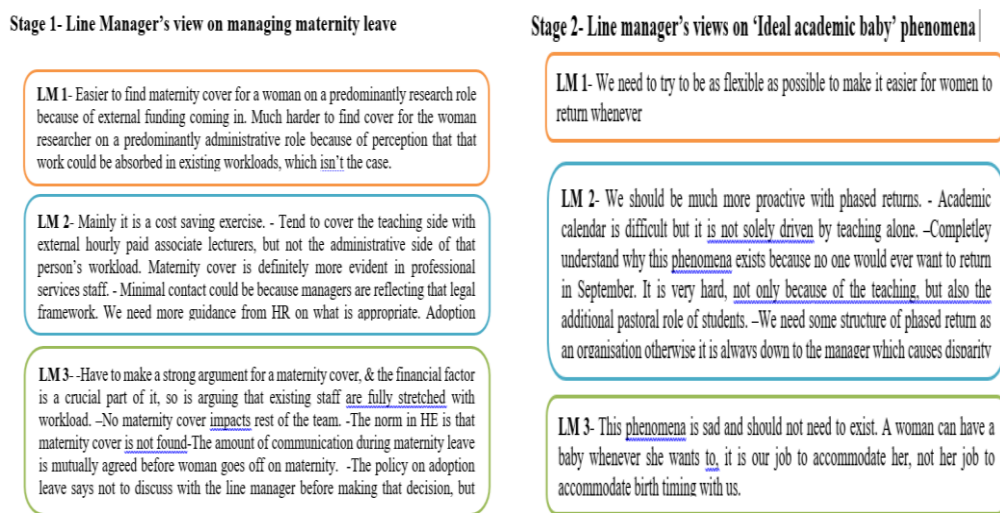
Interviews from LMs were also transcribed by a professional transcriber because the number of interviews was small, and the interviews were shorter in length than the others. This meant the researcher did not need to make a coding table for this set. The three verbatim transcripts of these interviews were then printed and manually coded, by hand using different colours to indicate similarities across the three scripts. An exemplary transcript of an interview with a Line Manager is presented in appendix K. An extract illustrating the process of analysis for LMs interviews is shown in Figure 3.14:

Figure 3.14: An extract from the manual colour coding of interviews with LMs



After the coding process was completed, the overall findings for LMs were summarised. To keep all the information in one place, and to make it easier to understand the views of all three LMs, three boxes were created (orange for LM1, blue for LM2, and green for LM3), each of which presented their thoughts on different topics. For instance, in the example provided, all three LMs give their views on stage 1-managing maternity leave, and then on stage 2- the ideal academic baby phenomena. This exercise helped the researcher to type up both the findings and the analysis of LM's views. These will be presented in the next chapter. The full LMs interview summaries are displayed in Appendix F. An example is also shown in Figure 3.15.

Figure 3.15: Example summary of views from LM's interviews



The findings from LMs were then compared to those of the women and HR. These are presented in detail in the next chapter.

3.9 Ensuring an ethical research

“The term ‘ethics’ refers to general principles as to what people ‘ought’ or ‘ought not’ to do”

Anderson (2013, p. 125)

All forms of social research raise ethical issues when they bring researchers into direct and often intimate contact with their participants, whilst field research in general raises ethical concerns in a particularly dramatic way (Babbie, 2010). Anderson (2013) summarised the key ethical principles relevant to any research involving ‘human subjects’ at both individual and organisational levels as being: *Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity*; the *Dignity and Well-*

being of research participants; and *Potential conflicts* of interest with sponsors and/or organisations. The ways in which this research abided by these ethical issues is presented in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Ethical issues considered in this research

Ethical Issue	Applied in research
Privacy	Interviews were held in a comfortable, quiet place with no one else around (mostly in the researcher’s office; sometimes in the participant’s office)
Confidentiality	Participants were given a written and verbal guarantee that the data would not be shared with unauthorised people (for instance through personal chats)
Anonymity	Participants were informed of the extent to which their identity, for instance, their name or their organisation’s name would be kept anonymous,
Dignity and Wellbeing (of participants)	A high-level duty of care was applied by the researcher to ensure that the interview did not cause distress, embarrassment or harm to participants psychologically.
Potential Conflicts of interest	The interview was approached in an independent and objective manner to allow participants’ freedom of expression without any conflict of interest

(Source: Anderson, 2013, p. 149)

Participants also had the right to a clear understanding of the research; therefore, they were well-informed and were free to give their consent without any coercion by the researcher (Roy., 2009). Informed consent forms and research information packs (in Appendix B) were emailed to all the participants prior to the interview which they were then requested to sign and bring with them (or sign at the interview).

Ethical issues, however, were not only considered at the start of field research; in fact, they arose throughout the research process (Anderson, 2013). For instance, during the *project planning stage* when participants were identified, recruited, and approached, it was acknowledged that female academics were a vulnerable group because of the intimate and personal information they were going to share. Therefore, as well as the formal consent form procedure (Appendix A), the researcher took extra care to provide verbal reassurance to participants that their identity would be kept completely anonymous and their information would not be shared for anything other research related purposes. Due to the personal nature of

the study topic, this reassurance played an integral part in creating an open, honest, and trustworthy environment for the narrative interviews.

The *data-gathering process* also raised ethical considerations. For instance, each participant's consent was obtained to record the data, and they were assured that the recording would be kept in a safe place where only the researcher would have access to the audio, and when a transcription service was used (for HR professionals and LMs) the participant's identity and organisation would be kept anonymous. As a result of this, the study has relied on pseudonyms for all the research participants. The real identities and names of the participants have been protected and deliberately obscured. Participants were also made aware that if they wished they could withdraw at any point. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the interviews were always arranged in a private, quiet, and comfortable area (the researcher's office or the participant's office if no one else was around) so that the interviewee felt comfortable and confident when sharing personal experiences and opinions.

Furthermore, *after data gathering*, the researcher made sure that the use of data for analysis and reporting of findings was handled ethically. As such, names of the universities' that participants belonged to were kept anonymous, whilst pseudonyms were used when presenting the findings, both in this thesis and at conferences. Moreover, the audio data are stored confidentially by the researcher and, when the research is complete, will be disposed of permanently without potential access from any other party.

As well as ethical issues, it was also important that the researcher undertook reliable and valid research. The next section therefore explains how this was achieved.

3.10 Nature of research

Credibility or trustworthiness are significant aspects of qualitative research. This needs attention because there is a risk that the subjectivity of the researcher may cloud the interpretation of the data (Golafshani, 2003). To consider reliability and validity in this research the following terms adopted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were considered (see Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: **Reliability and Validity issues to consider in qualitative research**

Points to consider for reliability and validity	How reliability and validity were considered in this study
<i>Credibility</i> - how truthful the findings are	The data analysis section (3.8) evidences the detailed process that was used to ensure that the views of the participants remained central to the findings of the study. The findings chapter also uses direct quotes from the participants to preserve the ‘raw’ data. Moreover, the integrity of the researcher ensured that the ‘truth’, according to her realist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, was presented to the best of her ability.
<i>Transferability</i> - the extent to which findings are applicable to other groups	This study’s findings can be used as an exemplar to inform scholarly understanding of organisational support throughout the maternity journey of an academic.
<i>Dependability</i> - how consistent the findings are	Throughout the data analysis, the researcher kept meticulous records (this included self note recordings on iphone, to prevent forgetting later) and provided a clear decision trail which ensured that interpretations of the data were consistent and transparent.
<i>Confirmability</i> - how neutral the findings are	The researcher established comparisons between women’s narratives, and between the findings of all three groups of participants interviewed in this research. The aim was to seek out similarities and differences across accounts to ensure different perspectives were represented. There was also respondent validation of the overall findings. This involved inviting participants to comment on whether the final themes and concepts adequately reflected the phenomena being explored.

(Source: Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

3.10.1 Research trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or research ‘reliability’ as termed in most positivist research, is concerned with the consistency, stability, and repeatability of the respondent’s accounts as well as the investigator’s ability to collect and record information accurately (Brink, 1993). The term reliability derives from quantitative research where it is used in the testing of data. Golafshani (2003) therefore argued that if the idea of testing relates to the elicitation of information then the most important test for any qualitative study is that of its ‘quality’. Therefore, within qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the study increases the quality of the research. Seale (1999, p. 266), for instance, argued that the “*trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability*”.

This then leads to the question of how to assess the quality. Healy & Perry (2000) asserted that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged on its own paradigmatic terms. Because this research was situated within the paradigm of *realism* the researcher was guided by the six criteria outlined by Healy and Perry (2000, pp. 120-124) for judging the quality of realist research, these criteria were as follows:

1. “World of Realism”

The ontology of realism assumes that the research is dealing with complex social phenomena involving reflective people; whilst positivism believes in the objective world and constructionism believes in the subjective world. Therefore, in assessing the quality of research it was important for the researcher to ensure that the ‘world’ being investigated was objective and one only understood through engaging with people. In this respect, the research dealt with complex social phenomena such as the maternity journey and organisational support, and involved reflective people, including all the participants who reflected on their experiences and the researcher who constantly reflected on this research journey. Moreover, this research takes the view that organisational structures exist, but we can only learn about them through people’s perceptions. Therefore, this research was strongly embedded in the ‘world of realism’.

2. Contingent Validity

Ontologically, causal effects are not fixed but are contingent upon their environment. The desire of realist research is to develop a “family of answers” that encompass several contingent contexts and different reflective participants, albeit imperfectly (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This research therefore gathered a “family of answers” on the perceptions of organisational support throughout the maternity journey. This contrasts with positivism which looks for controlled variation in an independent variable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and constructionism which believes there is no “benchmark” by which to judge the “family of answers” (Healy & Perry, 2000).

3. Multiple perceptions of a single reality

Epistemologically, positivism views reality through a “one-way mirror” making it value-free while constructivism assumes a subjective relationship between the researcher and the respondent whereby the researcher becomes immersed in the research, making it value-laden. In contrast, realism is neither value-free nor value-laden, it is value-aware. Realists believe that

“a participant’s perception is not reality [...] rather a participant’s perception is a window to reality through which a picture of reality can be triangulated with other perceptions”

(Healy and Perry, 2000, p. 123).

This research used narrative enquiry to gauge academic mothers’ perceptions of organisational support throughout their maternity experience. This was then triangulated with the perceptions of HR professionals and LMs to provide a window onto the reality of organisational support in selected UK universities.

4. Methodological trustworthiness

Methodological trustworthiness in realism is broader than in positivism because it is interested in more than just an estimated degree of error measurement. It is, however, similar to the consistency or dependability of constructivism in its use of quotations in the written report (Healy & Perry, 2000, p. 123). These, along with thick descriptions, helped to increase methodological trustworthiness.

5. Analytic generalisation

Like most constructivist research, realist research is primarily concerned with theory-building rather than the theory-testing of most positivist research (Healy & Perry, 2000, p. 123). This research therefore aimed to add to various theoretical constructs rather than to ‘test’ them.

6. Construct validity

This is similar to the construct of validity in positivist research; it refers to how well information about the constructs in the theory being developed is measured. It is therefore concerned with theoretical rigour. This qualitative study did not aim to ‘measure’ theory building, it further developed and added to our existing understanding of certain theoretical constructs. It was through adherence to these six criteria that the researcher ensured the reliability of this research.

3.10.2 Research conformability

Conformability, or what’s commonly termed ‘validity’ in positivist research, concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of findings. Valid research data represents what it is truthful and meaningful (O’leary, 2004). Using Brink's (1993, p. 36) suggestions as a guide, the researcher ensured the conformability of this research as follows.

- 1) by making sure that participants were very clear about the nature of the research e.g. why the researcher was there, what she was studying, how she will collect data and what she will do with it
- 2) By comparing and contrasting the results obtained with other evidence from the literature review
- 3) By validating the findings and the analysis with participants
- 4) By keeping detailed data notes of the analysis to observe any variations in responses among participants
- 5) By showing different stages of the analytical process to another researcher (usually PhD supervisors or PhD colleagues) to gain their opinion on whether the data was being misrepresented.

The processes involved in ensuring trustworthiness and conformability of this study. Through data validation and external researchers' opinions on the research, as well as a clear and logical process of data analysis, the researcher ensured that whilst there is an element of subjectivity in interpretivist qualitative research given her central role in the research, it was not completely biased.

3.11 Reflexivity: the hitches and smiles on the journey

Because the data-gathering instrument in a mainly qualitative study is the researcher, it was important for the researcher in this study to be reflexive (Golafshani, 2003). Furthermore, narrative and self are inseparable within reflexivity, as they are central to the understanding and 'making sense' of narratives (Ochs and Capps, 1996). Reflexivity is a central feature of interpretivist epistemology (Taylor, White, 2000; Burr, 2003), and the co-constructive nature of research narratives inevitably shapes the story told (Denzin, 1989; Burr, 2003). The rest of this section is written in the first-person narrative so that the researcher can reflect on the data collection journey.

3.11.1 Reflective account of the experience of undertaking narrative interviews with women academics

Before the commencement of the interview process, I was excited but also quite nervous for many reasons; I knew that these were accomplished women (most of whom I idealised as my role models), so I was nervous speaking to them at an intimate level about such a personal experience in such great detail. Moreover, the interview stage was the big 'climax' for my PhD journey because by this stage I had spent two years writing, thinking, and writing some more

about theory/ literature and my ideas as to how I wanted to conduct this research. However, I knew that real-life interaction with women could open up avenues unknown to me which may be different or surprising in the light of what I already thought I knew about this topic- and like most people I was scared of the unknown, but alas that is a fundamental truth of research! Finally, I was also nervous because of my deep passion and care for this topic and this research, and although I had conducted many qualitative research interviews in the past for my MSc, these interviews meant so much more to me on a personal and professional level. I therefore wanted to be the best narrative interviewer I could be for this process to be fruitful; for myself, my research, and hopefully the women who were investing their time and sharing their personal stories with me.

To overcome my nerves and prepare for the interview, as well as reading numerous 'how to' methodology books and writing and re-writing my methodology chapter, I was grateful that a friend in the Business School knew someone in the Sociology department who had conducted narrative research. I was able to speak with her at length about her experiences and what tips she had for me, which helped in two ways; 1) it re-assured me because everything she was saying (e.g. be careful not to interrupt, let the story teller flow in their thoughts, and so on.) was everything I had prepared myself for, so I was on the right track, and 2) talking through the ethos and processes of narrative research with someone who had already done this increased my confidence in a different way than simply reading about it.

All the face-to-face interviews took place in a quiet office, this was almost always my office, but for a few academics (who had an office to themselves) it was their own. The environment was therefore quiet, private, and somewhat comfortable. [A couple of interviews were also conducted on the phone- this was not ideal but necessary due to time and cost constraints]. Despite my nerves, I quickly realised after the first couple of interviews that my participants were women who have volunteered to take part in this research, so they were willing to be open and detailed about their experiences and there was a lot they wanted to share. Such re-assurance from the participants helped reduce my nervousness regarding how I would ask them about such personal experiences.

For the first few interviews, I was quite dependent on the sheet of paper I took with me to the interview which had a list of bullet points of 'things to cover' e.g. each stage of the maternity process. The entire data collection period lasted between 8 to 11 months. During this time, there was also a shift in my own identity both as a member of the faculty and as a woman. As part of the teaching team I became involved in more modules which meant greater

responsibility, attending more meetings, becoming friends with several academics and thus I began to feel part of the 'academic world'. This eased my interaction with female academic interviewees because I felt there was less of a hierarchical dynamic and more of an equal dynamic taking place, and soon I began to see them as me, but in the future. Moreover, as a woman I became more confident in the credibility and importance of the research I was undertaking, so I no longer viewed it as a 'women's issue' type of research- which was a seed some commentators had planted in me in earlier presentations of my research. Therefore, as a result of hearing such enriching stories I became more confident going into the interviews as I knew that talking and asking for organisational support for maternity was an important issue. I then relied on my sheet of paper a lot less, and both the interview process and what I knew I wanted to find out became more ingrained within me.

One difficulty I continued to face, despite my earlier preparation, was trying not to intervene or ask 'why' in the middle of their narration because I was intrigued and sometimes angered by what they were sharing: However, this was a skill that, with training, improved and is one I am still working on.

Nevertheless, with each interview I became more confident, familiar and more experienced with the skills needed to be a narrative interviewer. Consequently, the interviews became more conversational and yielded good quality rich data, to the extent that many of the women told me afterwards that the interview felt like a 'therapy session' to them, which was equally, if not more, enriching to me on so many levels. Each interview lasted between 1 to 2 hours and the women were open about very personal and sometimes heart breaking experiences.

After the interview, often because we felt mutually passionate about maternity in academia, we continued to 'chat'. We shared each other's opinions and hopes for the future, and most women offered me invaluable advice about becoming both an academic and a mother. By the end of the interview we had often become good friends and now they often contact me to check up on me and my research. I really connected with two women in particular and we have continued to be friends and have remained in close contact ever since.

3.11.2 Reflective account of the experience of interviewing HR professionals and line managers

Initially I was apprehensive and sceptical about interviewing HR professionals and line managers because I thought HR professionals would only point me to the 'so-called' supportive

policies they have on paper, and LMs would not admit to being anything other than supportive. However, I was still interested to speak to them because women academics referred to them extensively in their narratives, and it was important to hear their ‘take on it’. To my deep surprise both groups were open and honest about their roles, in particular their inadequacies and the reasons for these. In hindsight, speaking to these two groups gave me an ‘eye opening’ and holistic view of the issue under consideration. It significantly contributed to my overall understanding of this topic and helped me to see the bigger picture.

It was truly an enlightening experience to speak to so many interesting people including female academics, HR professionals, and line managers. However, listening to their experiences and perceptions really provided a window into the reality of an issue I felt very passionately about. The data collection was by far my favourite part of this study because it was through interview interactions that much of my thinking about this study was formed and developed.

3.11.3 Reflective account of the overall methodology journey

As with any journey, however, there were ‘hitches’ along the way, some due to external factors and some internal. The main external issue I faced was finding HR professionals and especially line managers who would agree to speak to me. This took a very long time. They initially agreed and then said that due to time constraints they could not speak to me, not even for half an hour. The line managers, most of whom were approached through contacts or through snowballing, did not express any interest in taking part in this study. Some said they could not take part because they did not have any direct experience of managing maternity, and even when they were told this was not necessary and that I was interested in their general opinions around managing maternity, they still did not want to take part. I took this as indicative of the line manager’s role and stance on maternity. The three LMs that did take part were all from generally ‘supportive’ health and social science departments and had been very supportive to academic women whose maternity they managed. Although this was not an ideal outcome, their opinions added significantly to the findings overall.

In terms of internal factors, my own personal difficulty was mainly around data analysis. I encountered numerous challenges and got lost many times on this long journey, which sometimes felt overwhelming and never ending. For example, I struggled with the NVivo software which was problematic and, in the end, did not work out. I also struggled to grasp

thematic analysis, as I once spent nearly 2 weeks doing content analysis only to later realise this was not my intention and that this was not the best analytical tool for my study. I then began all over again. It was also difficult to refine the collected data and make decisions about what I really wanted to highlight and talk about in this research, but this was a skill that improved with training. In hindsight, the extensive data collection and analysis process was both deeply enriching and satisfying.

3.12 Summary

Informed by a critical realist perspective and an interpretivist epistemology, the research adopted a primarily inductive exploratory analysis. Appropriate approval was obtained from the University of Salford, whose ethical procedures were adhered to throughout. In-depth narrative interviews were conducted with twenty-six female academics to explore their perceptions of organisational support throughout their maternity journey in selected UK universities. Further data were also collected through semi-structured interviews with a group of 5 HR professionals and 3 LMs to gain multiple perspectives on the issue and to triangulate data collection. The researcher played a central and reflexive role throughout the research journey.

Through the conceptual framework of the 4 stages of the maternity journey, and the lens of the various theoretical constructs discussed in the literature, in particular the Perceived Organisational Support theory, the data was thematically analysed. All the interview transcripts were manually colour coded and analysed. There were various revisions of the emerging findings and themes from the study before the findings were finalised. These were then shared with female academics for further validation. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings from the data analysis.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present the reader with first-hand accounts of the field research undertaken by the author during the course of this study. The chapter is structured to allow for the exploration of the various opinions and accounts that are vying for attention within the context of organisational support and the maternity journey. The chapter has also been organised in a way which will convey the competing narratives to the reader ranging from the

women academic's experiences during their maternity journey to the perception of Human Resource (HR) Management professionals and line managers (LMs) as far as their own roles are concerned. The former includes individuals who on behalf of their organisations, are responsible for managing and enacting organisational policies relating to maternity. To this extent, further organisational oriented perspectives are also presented through discussions with the line managers, whose position countered both HR and women academic's perspectives on a number of occasions.

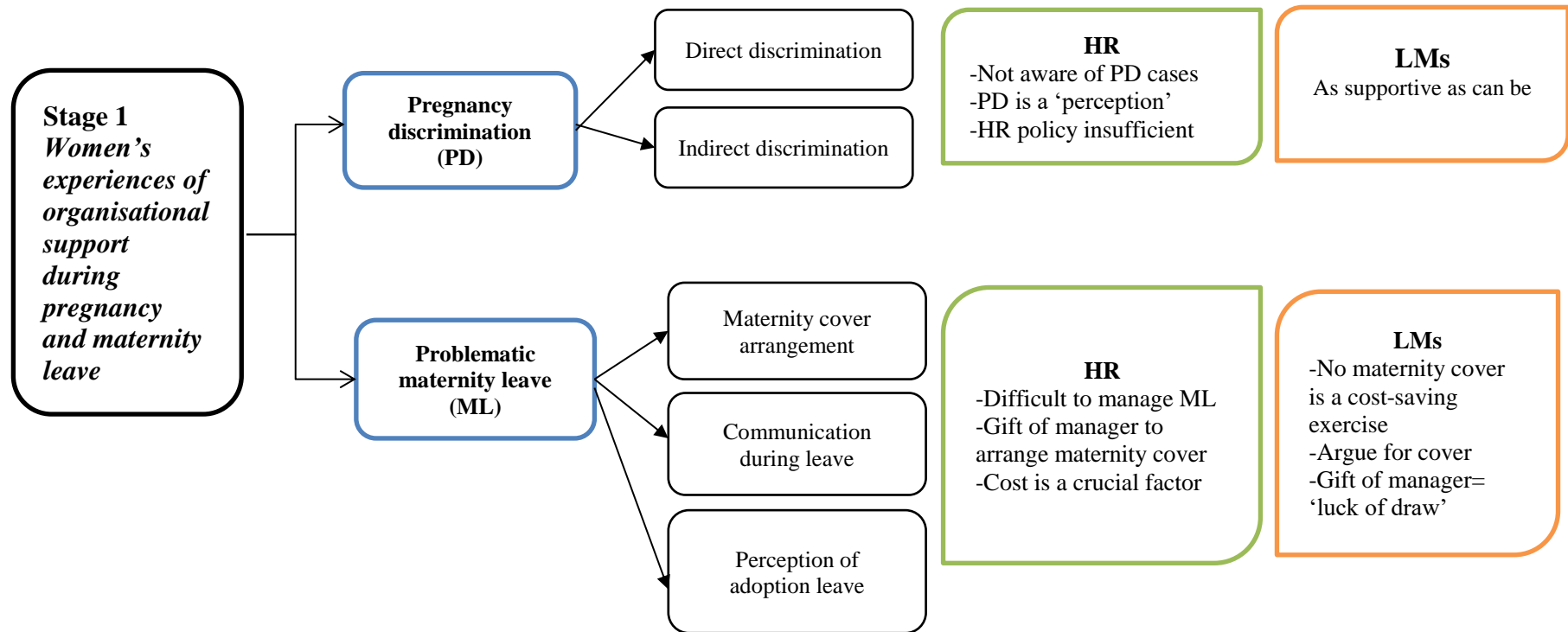
More specifically, the summaries of findings from all three sets of participants are provided in the appendices. Summaries of women academics narratives- Appendix H, summaries of interviews with HR professionals- appendix E, and summaries of interviews with LMs appendix F. In particular, this chapter helps fulfil objective 2- To examine female academics accounts of support before, during and after maternity, and it begins to unravel objective 3- To evaluate collated accounts of support throughout maternity, in order to consider an alternative course of action. A discussion on this objective is elaborated in the next chapter. Findings from female academic's on each sequential maternity stage are presented in this section in turn.

4.2 Stage 1- Organisational attitudes towards pregnancy and maternity leave

Women were first asked to narrate their experiences of working whilst they were expecting, as well as those relating to the actual maternity leave. The participants were also asked to offer their perceptions of the support received from their organisations throughout this stage. During the narrative interviews, the participants revealed that they had tended to be on the receiving end of discrimination, both direct and indirect. The participants were steadfast in their belief and perception that the discrimination faced was directly related to the management of maternity leave. As far as the interviews with the HR professionals and LMs were concerned, these brought to light contrasting opinions on managing the first stage of maternity. These are discussed in this section in relation to the literature that was reviewed and to relevant theory.

The overall findings from stage one of pregnancy and maternity for all three sets of participants are presented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Stage 1- Pregnancy and Maternity leave



4.2.1 Perceived pregnancy discrimination

A consistent theme emerged during the discussions with the women as it came to light that they had all, at one point, experienced either overt or covert discrimination during their pregnancies. In this respect, Aaliyah explained that it was only once she publicised her pregnancy that her manager expressed disapproval for her wishes to attend training. As such, the participant was due to attend specific nursing related training which would develop and enhance her knowledge on training. Much to her dismay however, Aaliyah notes “[...] *my line manager told me I shouldn't take part in training because I am about to have a child!*” Whilst not as direct, Harriet recounted an experience where she was made to feel her pregnancy inhibited her ability to perform her job, during an exchange with her lab instructor. The participant commented that, “*I was made to feel incompetent when I was pregnant and working in the lab [...] my lab instructor often said... ‘Ooh in your condition!’*” Such comments discouraged women from partaking in developmental activities within the organisation because they were pregnant. These experiences illustrate the ‘maternal wall’ (Williams, 2004) and the ‘motherhood penalty’ (Baker, 2012) that exists, which refers to the view expressed by employers that mothers are less committed and competent than other workers. This is attributed to a lack of proper training which allows prejudice and discrimination to remain strong (Bagihole, 1993; Gatrell, 2013) despite anti-discriminatory legislation (Employment legislation guide, 2010; Perren et al., 2012). Pregnancy discrimination is known to persist in the workplace (Gatrell, 2013; House of Commons, 2016; Vonts et al, 2018), and female academics shared their experiences and perceptions of direct and indirect pregnancy discrimination in this research. Perceptions of direct pregnancy discrimination were formed through explicitly discriminatory comments from the line managers.

Similarly, perceptions of indirect pregnancy discrimination were formed through situations within organisations and actions where women felt ‘singled out’ for being pregnant. Katie, for instance, explained that she had been pregnant twice and the news of her first pregnancy was taken well by her line manager. However, by the time she announced the second pregnancy she had taken on additional leadership responsibilities and, although her line manager did not explicitly make a discriminatory comment, Katie perceived a sense of disapproval disclosure of her pregnancy. She went on to explain that the tone, and body language that accompanied the line manager’s expression of “*...ooh not again!*” left her feeling disappointed and as though she had done something wrong. The sentiments expressed by Katie are explicitly echoed by another participant- Ava. In this regard, Ava expressed that

she “[...] felt unique and different, as if it is not normal to be pregnant at work [...]” due to indirect comments and non-verbal expressions from colleagues. She also faced considerable difficulty in walking from one campus to another when she was 8 months pregnant but was told that, because timetabling is centralised, the university was unable to offer any support. The latter in particular, whilst carries shock value, is simply an outcome of the shift towards managerialism and centralisation in the higher education sector, whereby transparency is standardised in the interests of uniform procedures and monitoring across institutions (Ledwith and Manfredi, 2000). It also provides an example of an organisational practice that inadvertently disadvantages the specific needs of a pregnant employee (Ely and Meyerson, 2000) which leads to a perceived lack of support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). For instance, Faith perceived discrimination at a number of junctures during her experience at her institution, however nowhere was this more obvious than when it came to motherhood:

“Once I was asked to be on an interview panel, and because I am a BME woman I was made to feel like a token there. I have worked here long enough to know that I’m a source of exploitation. [...] There’s underlying; sexism, racism, classicism, but mostly you see it with motherhood because there is no choice [...] I did face discrimination for being a mother it’s personal and it hurts the most”

While Faith did not provide accounts of said direct discrimination, her perceptions of discrimination have formed through her experiences over the years and this has contributed to the lack of perceived support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Faith implied that being a minority in more than one way, resulted in her facing discrimination at every juncture in her career. For this participant the issue of maternity support and career advancement goes beyond gender and was simply a reflection of deeper, more insidious issues. More specifically, the participant cast a damning light on the organisation by suggesting that discrimination was deeply rooted and thus institutionalised.

Interestingly however, line managers who partook in the study appeared to be oblivious to the sentiments expressed by the women in academia. The line managers were therefore of the belief that they were supportive, friendly, and welcoming regarding women’s pregnancies in their department. This may be so; however, it would be almost impossible to find a line manager who admits to being either directly or indirectly discriminatory. In theoretical terms, fairness is deemed as the highest contributor to POS theory (Rawls, 1999) because it is generally under the discretionary control of the organisation (Moorman, Blakely, Brian, 1998;

Deem, 2003). Therefore, the discriminatory and unfair treatment of a pregnant worker by a manager undoubtedly has a negative influence on their perceived support.

However, it was surprising that HR had ‘rarely’ come across any pregnancy discrimination cases (HR2/3/4). Both HR professionals emphasised their view that pregnancy discrimination can merely be a result of women’s ‘perceptions’ and there may be a valid business case for certain management decisions (HR1/2/5/3). A HR professional (HR1) reinforced this view, stating:

“[...] the way that the manager has handled a situation may make it feel discriminatory [...] there is very much an emotional attachment to anything surrounding pregnancy [...], so while something may be handled in a very appropriate way it is very easy for a woman to default to feeling discriminated against. That’s the kind of expectation we could manage better”

It was acknowledged that some managers are ‘too smart’ to discriminate in a direct manner. Moreover, the findings revealed that women tended not to approach HR and, even if they did, HR’s policy is insufficient to provide support because a discrimination case takes the route of a formal grievance. This in itself is what is problematic because it increases tension between the two parties and women may not necessarily wish to raise a formal case, instead may prefer a less intensive and more informal discussion with the manager with the help of HR (HR2/3/5). This endorses research by Thornton (2003) who reviewed 81 university policies and found that over a third violated the Act that protects pregnancy discrimination. This is worrying because HR is responsible for complying with legislation and ensuring that employees are not treated unfairly (Employment Law Guide, 2010). They should therefore play an essential role in shaping the workplace culture by designing and implementing appropriate policies (Gailbrith, 1964; Guest, 1987; Allen et al, 2003). Moreover, it reflects a gendered institute- one in which pregnancy is not welcomed, and the women experienced a motherhood penalty due to managerial perceptions of them as less competent.

4.2.2 Problematic maternity and adoption leave

There were three main concerns highlighted by female academics around the management of maternity leave; the arrangement of maternity cover, the amount of communication when on maternity leave, and differences in perception towards adoption leave. Problems surrounding maternity leave tend to be persistent for academics because another member of the department must typically cover a female’s courses during maternity leave (Williams, 2004; Gatrell, 2013).

Interviews with HR also brought to light issues relating to the management of maternity, which it emerged, were not always straightforward. This is reflected in statements such as “[...] it is difficult with [managing] maternity because you don’t know how long someone is going to be off...” (HR1), and that “[...] arranging a maternity cover is the gift of the line manager” (HR3). Moreover, the principal determining factor in arranging cover was the cost (HR2). The POS theory implies that HR practices can be enhanced by an organisation to make the context and nature of work more pleasant. In this instance, HR acknowledged that it should be doing more to support women on maternity leave.

LMs also reinforced the view that “[...] it’s a cost- saving exercise” (LM3), and “[...] strong arguments needed to be made to get cover” (LM1) due to a perception that the workload can be absorbed between colleagues. Moreover, depending on LMs to arrange cover would be considered inadequate because this could mean a “*luck of the draw*” (LM2) experience for women going on maternity leave. It therefore came as little surprise that the women academics expressed being riddled with guilt when it came to having to return to work (Liss et al, 2013; Henderson et al, 2016). Maya, for one, experienced this, expressing:

“Having no maternity cover meant others really having to stretch when I’m away that added to so much guilt [...] I felt a lot of pressure to come back because I knew the added pressure meant my colleagues had to overwork because of me.”

The lack of arrangements for maternity cover also led to feelings of unimportance. For instance, Sally related how she was away from work for two years on two sets of maternity leave and the department engaged in ‘patchwork’ throughout to compensate for her absence. A recurrent theme related to the feelings expressed by the women in regard to their absence from work. Despite being pregnant, the participants expressed being riddled with guilt; their statements reveal that at some level, they experienced a sense of guilt simply for having fallen pregnant. The women interviewed, remained very sympathetic of the impact their absence would have on their colleagues’ workload and carried these feelings throughout their maternity. Rather than bemoan the lack of perceived support, the participants were consistent in their use of words such as ‘unfair’, ‘over-worked’ and ‘long-suffering’ when discussing the impact their absence would have. This is perhaps best encapsulated by Molly, who stated that:

“When I was off on maternity leave all my work got passed onto my long-suffering colleagues, which is really unfair but it’s just what happens [...] It’s just a norm here to always work one person down [...] University’s norm is to be short staffed and overworked.”

Building on this, Patrice, Buzzanell and Liu (2005, p. 8) claimed that maternity leave could create a context for “*oppositional discourses that reinforce gendered divisiveness about the nature and enactment of leave*”, implying that the organisation’s inability to arrange for maternity leave magnifies gender differences and the gender divide. This is illustrative of Acker (1992) ‘gendered institution concept’ because the arrangement of maternity cover is a gender-specific requirement and Higher Education institutions (HEIs) were created by and for men (Bailyn, 2003; Mihaila, 2018); consequently, HEIs see little business or social value in investing time and money in arranging maternity cover. In cases where there was maternity cover, there was a desire among women to become involved in those arrangements (Victoria), which is known to increase perceived support (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003). Lack of involvement led to feelings of systematic exclusion and a fear of replaceability (Emma, Harriett) (Millward, 2006). This relates to POS theory which posits that, while the employers wish to have committed employees, employees wish to work in an organisation that is equally committed to them (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

When on maternity leave, the amount of communication with the organisation was also a source of concern. On the one hand, there were issues around ‘*not enough communication*’, with Rosie and Priya stating that:

“I was not updated on any changes during my maternity leave, so I didn’t feel involved in any way. They really should’ve at least called me because they even moved my office and moved any belongings I had there without telling me”
(Rosie)

“There was a lot of reorganisation that took place when I was away from the university and it wasn’t communicated to me, even though there were changes that affected my role as well” (Priya)

It was not only a lack of casual communication in checking on the women’s well-being that was a cause for frustration (although it was partly that), it was the fact that fundamental changes within the organisation that directly affected the women were not communicated. On the other hand, there was also the issue of ‘*too much communication*’. For instance, Ava recalled the following incident:

“I had two toddlers and a new born whilst on maternity leave, and I kept being bugged from the university to say...oh do this...help us with this [...] that and the other, so I had to outright just say you really should not be bugging me! I am not free!”

There was an assumption by Ava's department that she was accessible throughout her leave. Similarly, Sally explained that she worked throughout her maternity leave:

“Effectively I was working from home when on maternity leave [...] the presumption was that I was off, but I had PhD students to supervise, I had to research, I had to answer all the emails, and all the usual phone calls were made. There was nobody to officially do all duties that I was supposed to do. There was just no support when I was away to say this or that will be taken care of [...] you go on your maternity leave but everything continues the same”

Sally's department did not arrange for anyone to take on her responsibilities, so she had to continue them whilst on maternity leave. One participant however bucked this latter trend and revealed her experiences of communication had in fact been positive. As such, Jasmine revealed that “[...] there were no formal requests from the department, they just told me to enjoy my maternity leave”. At this stage it is worth noting that Jasmine's experiences may have been shaped by other factors and variables which the respondent had herself previously highlighted. In this respect, Jasmine worked in a Higher Tariff university and had emphasised the fact that she is in a ‘feminist department’ that strongly supported women's equality rights. Generally, the woman should be able to negotiate the extent of contact she wants to maintain throughout the period of leave based on changes in circumstances (James, 2007). Moreover, two-way communication and the mutual agreement of a reasonable amount of contact during leave between the two parties is imperative before and during maternity leave. As a result, Jasmine's access to a department and colleagues who were inclined towards gender equality and aware of the intricacies surrounding expecting women, may have contributed to her positive experience. Viewing this from the POS theory lens, it is affirmed that positive colleague support increases perceived support.

The most notable finding at this stage came from two academics who took adoption leave (Rosie and Priya) as their particular experiences sought to highlight the diversity of maternity leave experiences. What Rosie and Priya highlighted in relation to their experiences was significantly different from the experiences of the women taking ‘traditional’ maternity leave. Rather than focusing on their experience of being on adoption leave, they spoke about the perceptions others had of them taking adoption leave.

Rosie claimed that adoption was perceived differently from childbirth because she was not visibly pregnant. HR agreed with this perception, with HR2 stating that, *“My short answer to whether the university perceives adoption leave the same as maternity is no. Definitely not.”*

Other than the perception of adoption leave, Priya highlighted the inadequacy of organisational policies in supporting adoption leave. She recounted that, according to the university's adoption leave policy, she was not supposed to inform the University of her intention to adopt. She was only required to inform them once the adoption agency had found a match. Priya had felt that the responsible thing to do was to express her intentions to her line manager. The reception she received however left her feeling disappointed and disheartened. Whilst Priya insisted she had not expected to receive a specific reaction, she did confide that she was not prepared for the catastrophising on the part of her line manager. Rather than take the news in his/her stride, the line manager had instantly inferred that this would come at an expense. This is evidenced in statements offered by Priya insomuch that:

“[...] just from saying that I was ‘thinking’ about adopting I was told by my line manager that I will need to give up all my roles now! [...] Such a poor reaction from my line manager affected the rest of my communication with the university. The problem is that adoption is just not taken or understood as normal pregnancy so there just isn’t quite that understanding on why I need time off post having children [...] I’ve heard people say why do you need so long off...”

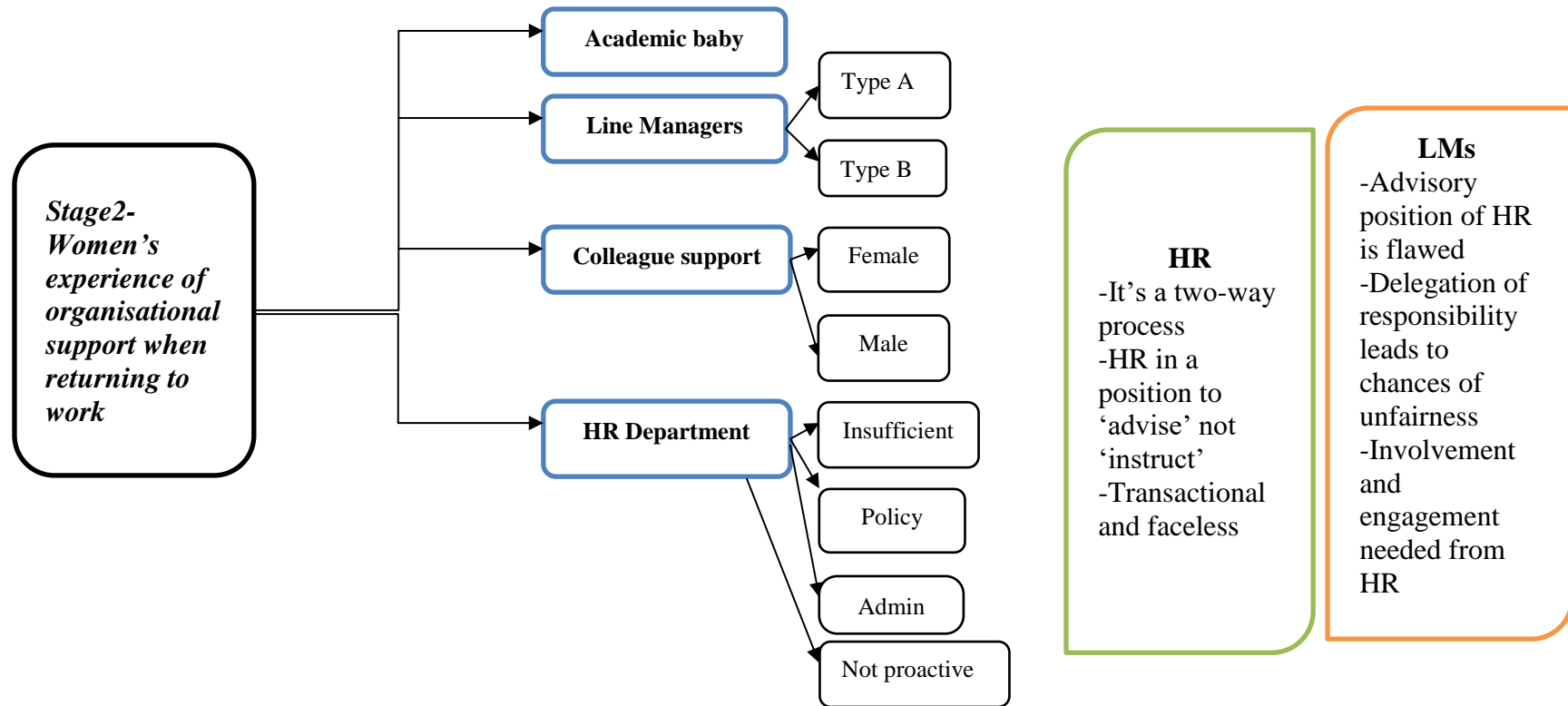
It emerged that adoption was not granted the same level of understanding and legitimacy as far as both management and colleagues were concerned. This is concluded on the basis that taking time off for adoption leave was neither understood nor perceived as legitimate by management or colleagues. LMs also felt that some university policies were not compatible with the adoption framework, making it harder to manage (LM2). HR professionals, on the other hand, explained that the national legal framework does not align with organisational practices. For instance, an adopted child can arrive home within seven days of finding a match, but this does not provide enough notice for an organisation to prepare for an employee's leave (HR1/2/3). There is an overall lack of awareness of an adoptive mother's needs, and broader compelling reasons to change public perceptions towards adoption. The uptake and experiences of adoption leave in the workplace is also a relatively under studied subject area that requires further attention. Nonetheless, Creedy (2001) argues that the whole community will have to unite if perceptions of adoption are to change. The next section presents findings from the sequential stage 2 of transitioning back to work from maternity leave, along with a discussion with related literature.

4.3 Stage 2- Influential factors that shaped perception of organisational support when returning to work

Female academic's narration of stage 2- returning to work from maternity leave- revealed that their experience was very much dictated by the immediate context they found themselves in. The context specific issues were spread across the gamut of work related factors, including the time of year they gave birth and the perceptions and personalities of both their managers and colleagues. There was a lack of organisational command or standardised procedures to ensure a status-quo in the quality of experience of the return to work from maternity leave. Instead, the level of support was influenced by factors that were generally out of their control such as the timing of childbirth, and the different types of managers and colleagues they had. Some were 'lucky' enough to have the perfectly timed summer 'academic baby', and a supportive manager and colleagues. Hence, they experienced a positive transition back to work. However, others were not so 'lucky'.

Moreover, women discussed at great length their disappointment with HR's role in the maternity process. The views of line managers endorsed the women as they felt that HR needs to do more to proactively support women returning to work, while HR contested that their role is to 'advise' not to 'instruct'. These findings are presented and discussed in section 4.3, and displayed visually in Figure 4.2:

Figure 4.2: Stage 2- Returning to work



4.3.1 An ideal academic baby

As far as stage-2 the return to work was concerned, the discussions uncovered an insight that seemed to be unique to women working within universities. The researcher was thus presented with the phenomenon that was the ‘ideal academic baby’. Upon probing further, it emerged that this was not an academically gifted baby, rather it referred to a baby which had been strategically planned. This meant giving birth (and taking maternity leave) in September, which is a heavy workload semester, so that women could return in the summertime, where the workload was markedly ‘lighter’ (Grace). Those who naturally gave birth in September and returned in the summer considered themselves to be “*fortunate*” and “*very lucky*” (Hailey/Harriett).

Moreover, Victoria revealed that she herself was a recipient of the ‘academic baby’ albeit not premeditated on her part. Nonetheless, the participant felt that this occurrence had been the sole reason she was able to enjoy a lighter work load upon her return to work. The participant remained adamant that the organisation played no role in her pleasant experience; rather, she simply put this down to a matter of luck. Unlike Victoria however, Olivia revealed that she was not inclined to leave matters to fate and instead preferred to take things into her own hands. More specifically, the participant revealed that her decision was largely driven by the fact that her organisation offered ‘no’ support to returning mothers. Fearing the worst, Olivia revealed she was not in a position to leave matters to chance as research was integral to not only her role at the university, rather her career progression hinged on this. The participant thus revealed that she had no choice other than to plan her pregnancies, inasmuch that:

“[she] [...] planned all three pregnancies to miss teaching time. I returned in summer all three times, which meant I could have a phased return [...]. I knew the organisation gives no support to women in their career post return, but research is crucial for my post so I returned in summer and concentrated on publishing to ensure I don’t fall behind” (Olivia)

This particular strategy proved to be successful for Olivia who had remained confident that the university would not support this if she returned during semester time. The participant elaborated further that in doing so, she was not only able to experience a naturally phased return in the summer rather this approach had less impact on her research output. The ‘ideal’ academic

seems to take root from the 'ideal' worker ideology, as an ideal worker would not have a long leave to take time off for childcare or other familial events.

Interestingly, the practice highlighted is not necessarily novel when we look beyond the actual month as previous research had highlighted the existence of a 'May baby phenomenon'. These findings contradict previous research which discusses the 'May baby phenomena'. Contrary to the present findings, Wilson (1999) and Acker and Armenti (2004) found that women academics has previously expressed a preference for giving birth in May or during summer time. This period was regarded as being the least disruptive to the academic calendar and allowed more bonding time for the mother and her new-born. The summer months meant that women did not have to take time off to have children and they could avoid upsetting their colleagues and interfering with teaching. It is also interesting to note that the studies cited did not focus on the needs of women as a priority; rather, academia was under the lens of the respective research. The present study however has focused on the needs of women and as such, from a clinical perspective, has aimed to maintain this [needs of women] as the priority subject under research and under due course, improvement within the field and research domain. The former studies espouse the fact that, within their [the researchers'] framework, it is beneficial for women academics to give birth in the summer time. However, the present study posits its lens from a different angle and thus, a different direction, in that this phenomenon of a 'summer time birth' is only relevant due to the fact that women are expected to return to work in the most efficient time frame, in keeping with the highlighted concerns of women regarding their workload post-return.

The emergence of this phenomenon, despite having been reported on previously, highlighted an apparent gulf between the HR professionals and women academics in terms of both perceptions and understanding. As such, when exposed to the idea of the ideal 'academic baby' HR professionals were "*shocked*" at this phenomena (HR4/5) with the majority stating that they had been oblivious to this, much like the very idea of pregnancy discrimination. One HR professional however stated that she had recently heard about this phenomenon through the Athena SWAN committee.

It could thus be inferred that the root of particular issues remains embedded in the organisation's inability to facilitate a phased return. The inability or failure to recognise the issues that appear to be pertinent to the working mothers continue to contribute increasing the lack of common ground between the two stakeholder groups (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This

was acknowledged by HR5 who reflected that *“I definitely don’t think that we are at our optimum [with phased return], women academics are falling by the wayside in comparison to professional services”*. Notably, there appeared to be a sense of accountability as the professional went on to state that *“we [HR] definitely need to do some development in our policies”*. Overall, HR admitted that the reasonable adjustments required upon return are not in place, and there is a need for more transparent policies and procedures, which should enable women to have a baby whenever they want.

However, HR also proposed that *“[...] it is within the line manager’s ‘gift’ to arrange a phased return [...]”* for the woman on leave (HR1/2/4/5). Similarly, line managers accepted that they should be more proactive in arranging phased returns (LM2/3) stating, *“It is our job to accommodate them [women academics having children], not their job to accommodate their childbirth around us”* (LM3). However, they contested that concrete organisational policies are needed to make a phased return a prerequisite rather than leaving the arrangement of a phased return to be solely the ‘gift’ of the line manager, which can lead to a *‘luck of the draw’* experience for women and increases the chances of unfairness (LM2/ 3).

As highlighted, it notably emerged from the interviews with HR that there was a gap between HR’s awareness and the practical experiences of female academics. However, conversations around women’s maternity experiences are slowly beginning to take place through initiatives such as the Athena SWAN (ECU, 2016). Moreover, interviews with HR professionals reflected an honest acknowledgement of their shortcomings, which was a surprise for the researcher as her unconscious expectation was that HR would dwell on their supportive policies (Boxall and Purcell, 2000). Furthermore, the perceptions and personalities of line managers shaped perceptions of support when returning to work.

4.3.2 At the mercy of Line Managers (LMs)

The POS theory suggests that employees perceive their favourable or unfavourable treatment by supervisors, who are representatives of the organisation, as an indication that the organisation either favours or disfavors them. This tends to be rooted in the belief that supervisors are an extension of the organisations, and thus as ‘agents’ of their employers their favourable treatment of employees contributes to perceived organisational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This also links with the theory of justice (Rawls, 1999), which asserts that fairness in the implementation of procedures makes a significant contribution to perceived support because they are generally seen as under the discretionary control of organisations

(Moorman, Blackely & Brian, 1998; Deem 2003; Deem, 2017). The women's narratives in this study also revealed that the character and attributes of their line managers were a significant contributor to their perceived support.

Reflecting on the correspondence with line managers during stage 2 of the maternity journey, transparency and communication were crucial contributors to perceived support. For instance, Sue expressed a sense of dismay at the fact that openness and transparency was not valued based on her personal experience. Sue thus continued “[...] *I feel like the more transparent you are, the more you get penalised*” thereby leaving her feeling unsupported.

This particular development seemed baffling for the participants as their honesty seldom-yielded positive benefits, as far as they were concerned. The excerpt offered by Priya highlighted in the previous section (see section 4.2.2) had also provided insight into her experiences of honesty and how rather than being appreciated, this was wielded against her. Elena who was equally baffled at the fact that her honesty appeared only to create further suspicion where her line manager was concerned further highlighted this honesty paradox. Further insight is provided by the participant who stated that, “[...] *there was such a lack of trust from my line manager. Every time I was honest with her about what I was going through and what I needed support with [...], she thought I was lying*”.

Zara also highlighted the importance of effective communication; “[...] *we really need the line manager to actually keep in contact with us. Communication is so important [...]* *Half of the time I was feeling unsupported because he just didn't care about me*”. For instance, Molly described how her manager communicated well with her and the positive impact this had: “[...] *He often checked up on me and asked about my childcare arrangements, and whether I was managing okay, so I felt very supported.*” Related literature to this, (Ledwith and Manfredi, 2000; Deem, 2013; Deem, 2017) argued that the shift of the university sector towards managerialism and centralisation has meant there is an increasing need for transparency and that procedures which are more transparent would benefit equality agendas. Moreover, this highlights that open and effective communication as a significant antecedent of perceived support.

There were perceptions of a “[...] *strong managerial culture [...]*” (Priya), and it was claimed that “[...] *in other professions as well, but in academia, you are always at the mercy of your line managers [...]*” (Hailey). Most importantly, the focal point of debate concerned the characteristics that line managers embodied and the influence such characteristics had on

their level of supportiveness. Overall, a variety of contrasting characteristics of LMs emerged, and through the analysis, the researcher grouped them into two prominent types and women's level of perceived support from each. Type A and type B LMs were thus categorised as follows:

Type A) LM's who fell into this first category were typified by their value system. This particular development was interesting in that the respondents felt that it was the value systems of these LMs that contributed to their overall quality of support and their relationships. At this stage, this particular claim could be regarded as somewhat obtuse, as no other factors beyond parenthood were given consideration. As such, the female academics were of the belief that they were able to cultivate good quality interpersonal relationship with LMs who held feminist values. The respondents also felt that these LMs were further influenced by the fact that they were parents themselves. As a result, this allowed them to empathise more with the female academics as they held greater awareness of the needs of mothers returning to work. Consequently, this group of LMs were perceived as being supportive throughout the maternity process.

Type B) This sub-set of LMs were perceived as being unsupportive throughout the maternity process as far as the women were concerned. The participants had revealed that they had struggled to build friendships or working relationships with this group. Interestingly, the participants attributed the lack of perceived cohesion and harmony to the parental and relationship status of the LMs. This was rooted in the fact that they showed a lack of understanding regarding needs of women returning to work following maternity leave.

At least four respondents (Emma, Georgia, Sally and Hailey) appeared to equate friendship with the level of support they had received as opposed to professional duty. At this stage, this could be perceived as alarming as it suggests a breach of professional code of ethics as it signals a departure from fair and impartial treatment. Objectively, it could further be argued that in a workplace setting, employees have the right to be treated consistently and fairly regardless of the quality of relationships they may have with managerial staff. In this respect, Emma was adamant that her friendship with her line manager was paramount to the quality and level of support she had received. The respondent proceeded to highlight just how crucial this was in statements such as:

“[...] because I was good friends with my line manager, I had no problems. I was supported because I had her back. Even when the higher authorities tried to end my contract at one point, my line manager pushed them to keep me. In academia [...] more importantly, when you are friends with your line manager, it is all good! I don't know if I would've liked any more support from the university because I had a very supportive line manager who took care of other things for me” (Emma)

“My experience was positive because I was good friends with my line manager; I know that it could be very different otherwise” (Sally)

Similar sentiments were later echoed by Sally who not only mentioned friendship and the impact this had upon support, rather, the participant recognised this was indeed a luxury and matters may have turned out differently had the circumstances been different.

Similarly, Georgia recalled that she was able to tell her line manager about her pregnancy earlier than required because they were friends; this meant she had a long time to negotiate and plan her maternity arrangements than would have otherwise been possible. Likewise, Hailey's manager was a parent and a self-proclaimed feminist; therefore, she felt she was 'protected' by the organisation:

“My line manager was a mother, a die-hard feminist and she researched women's representation in the IT industry [...] obviously that makes a huge difference! She wouldn't let any inequality happen with me, so I was protected”

Hailey's accounts offer a point of interest in that they very much validate the findings presented by scholars (e.g. Buzzanell & Liu, 2007, Deem, 2017, Floyd, 2016). In particular, Deem (2013) investigated whether women were able to retain their feminist values in the course of their managerial duties, or whether this is a concept influenced by masculinity and implemented by male managers. They found that almost all the 40 female academic managers, who openly spoke of their commitment to feminism or actively pursued equality in UK universities, felt that their gender both affected how they managed and the way others responded to their management. This suggests that a manager's gender and personal beliefs can significantly influence their practice.

It became clear from the accounts that subsequent participants provided, that relatability appeared to play big part in how they perceived their managers and the support offered. In this respect, both participants Lily and Priya were of the belief that the lack of support offered by their manager was dictated by their own lifestyle choices. For these

participants, there was no ambiguity or grey area rather they felt that their managers were simply unable to empathise with their situations, given that they did not have families of their own. Lily herself stated that much of the lack of support was due to her manager taking umbrage at the fact she had a family. She substantiates this by providing explicit accounts of his statements to her once she became a mother. Lily opines:

“My manager was single and didn’t have any children. He made it clear that he hated me just because I had a family. He said things like ‘oh it’s a shame you now have children; otherwise, you had a great career here’ [...] If I was single and didn’t have any family commitments apart from work he would have loved me” (Lily)

“My manager is a gay guy who really can’t relate to my family life. He thinks I can easily go full-time and work from home all the time [...] He basically believes that me wanting to have children in life means I am choosing not to have a career” (Priya)

For Priya, her manager was also regarded as being unsupportive; the participant continued that his sexual orientation meant that he was simply unable to relate to her. It is interesting to note that the participant did not appear to separate or recognise the fact that sexual orientation played little part in defining whether one had a family or children and was adamant that this remained an influencing factor. Suffice to say, Both Lily and Priya view the differences in familial lifestyle choices between themselves and their line managers as the reason for inconsiderate and unsupportive behaviour.

What was even interesting was the fact that HR did not refute this and instead agreed with this finding, stating, *“There is a lot of disparity in the way that line managers treat women. A lot of the time it comes from young male managers [...] that may not have experience of being a father, and don’t know how to treat women that are pregnant [...]”* (HR1). Another, argument HR made was that part of a line manager’s job is to manage maternity; therefore, they have to *“get over it”* (HR1), and support women on maternity despite their personal beliefs/experiences. Importantly, line managers also agreed that their management of maternity was ‘coloured’ by their experiences. LM2 was a mother and had two children; she explained that she understood the difficulties that come with managing maternity/children and work, so she tries to be as supportive as possible. Similarly, LM1 was a father and understood the maternity process through his wife’s experiences:

“I think it’s possibly easier if your line manager can sympathise on a personal level with what’s going on [...] but that’s not to say that people that don’t have kids can’t sympathise. I have to be honest [...] I don’t think I would’ve been that sympathetic or as aware of the need to be sympathetic, if I didn’t have children beforehand and lived through that, and learned what my wife did or didn’t experience in terms of organisational practice”

It was quite remarkable for LM1 to admit that, if it was not for his personal experiences, he did not think he would have been as supportive as he was to women on maternity leave in his department. Other than LM’s personal characteristics and lifestyle, Molly put a different view forward as to what influences their level of supportiveness:

“I have had a really unsupportive and awful experience with a senior female line manager who was a mother and went through a lot of hardship to become a successful academic, so could relate to me on everything but she was totally not empathetic [...] She believed that because she had such a tough time, but made it despite that, then so should other younger female academics who are becoming mothers”

Molly advocated that in fact it is not the lifestyle, family choices, or relatability of LM’s life choices that determines how supportive they are (or not), but their attitude towards the family-friendly needs of their employees. Nevertheless, in both views, organisational structures have a limited influence over a line managers’ personal lifestyle choices and their personal attitudes towards family-friendly practices. However, an overarching matter that the organisational structures should be accountable for is the exclusive authority afforded to LMs. For instance, Katie expressed her view that:

“[...] my biggest problem wasn’t even that she [her LM] was being completely unfair, my problem now was that my point of contact to go to, in order to discuss my concerns, was my line manager and she is the one that was being unfair [...], she kind of had the final say. So, I actually just didn’t know who to go to and who to speak with”

This highlights two important issues; the potential favourable or unfavourable impact of exclusive managerial control, and the consequences in terms of the unfairness caused by this. HR interviewees concurred that at the time of the interview they were *“[...] all over the place because there are some examples where it is fantastic and its wonderful and it’s either down to a really understanding line manager who more often than not has had personal experience”*. However, in all the experiences mentioned by women academics, there is evidence of a lack of organisational involvement (by HR for example) in overseeing the management of return to work from maternity. This concern is due to the pressures placed on universities to react to the

demands of increasingly performative systems of accountability and a shift towards a more private-sector style of 'New Managerialism' which gives the manager increased control and responsibility (Floyd, 2016).

Findings from the HR interviews also showed that managing maternity is perceived as the LM's responsibility; "[...] *it's a line manager's job to bring [HR policies and procedures] to life [...] because the manager is the face of the organisation to an employee.*" (HR1). The five HR professionals unanimously indicated that, most organisations are headed towards controlled new systems of managerialism; however, it was felt by HR4 that she has "[...] *experienced more problems with it than positives [...]*". HR3, on the other hand, put it this way "[...] *this whole 'down to the line manager' system doesn't really work [...]*". Therefore, there was a recognition that universities are headed towards the private-sector model of controlled managerial systems, though this transition was by no means regarded as being a smooth one.

In order to combat the problem of disparity among LMs in maternity management, effective training is posited as a potential solution in the literature. Deem and Johnson (2000) found that only one-third of academics, who became middle managers, received any formal training in leadership and management. Consequently, scholars advise that training for department heads should be devised from the bottom up, with the starting point being the individual academic and the department concerned (Hammer et al., 2009; Floyd, 2016). HR interviewees concurred that it was imperative for them to actively train and equip LMs to follow a fair set of procedures (HR 1/2/4/5). There was further acknowledgement that a relationship breakdown between the female academic and the manager has detrimental consequences, "[...] *people don't leave their organisation, they leave their manager*" (HR1). Training is therefore crucial.

On the other hand, LMs espouse a different view by stating that there is a need for HR to acknowledge that LMs in academia are atypical managers; some academics are managers by default and most continue to be full-time academics after taking on a managerial role (LM1/2). Their pressures are therefore unique. For instance, LM2 explained that:

"The line managers are academics, so they've come through an academic route and they're still academics [...] and it's not just with managing 35 people, we've got 800 students as well as these additional responsibilities. I am delivering that on a daily basis and [...] so this over here [maternity] you can imagine actually becomes a problem that impacts all of this [teaching responsibilities] [...] it becomes an issue because you're answerable for those outputs. [...] There is a fine balance that needs to be struck on how much line managers can be expected

to do [...] So, the standard business model of management doesn't work for academic LMs, [...] when the product is education it's a different set of circumstances”

This implied that HR should reconsider its expectation that LMs take on all the responsibilities of managing maternity due to the uniqueness of their role in comparison to typical managers. More importantly, this reconsideration was expressed strongly, while a lack of training was not mentioned. This finding contradicts the researched literature (Floyd, 2016; Hammer et al., 2009) and the findings from the HR participants.

4.3.3 Colleague support: male vs female departments

The organisational culture in a university is structured at the departmental level (McAleer, McHugh, 1994; Floyd, 2016) and is sustained at the level of working groups within different departments (Trowler, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of accountability within universities gives relative autonomy to departments and individual academics; this leads to an informal culture that is both pervasive and powerful, and arguably acts against the best interests of women (Bagihole, 1993; Kristen, 2018). As far as the present study is concerned, the consensus in female academic's perceptions of the important role played by the support they receive from colleagues was that this is considered to be an important factor in shaping the experience of returning to work after giving birth – an experience which was either positive or negative.

Often, what determined whether this experience was positive or negative was dependent on the gender configuration within each department. Only a couple of women stated that their department had an equal gender balance, and these women said that their colleagues' perceptions varied depending on whether they were parents or not. Frequently, however, women identified their departments as either 'male dominated' or 'female dominated' and stated that their colleagues' perceptions towards their return was rooted in this gender split.

Women who identified their departments as female dominant associated their return to work experience with positive and supportive colleagues. Supportive female departments were also described as 'small teams of people'. For instance, Alex professed:

“We had a very small team, there were only 4 people, and it was all females therefore it was really supportive [...] if one was teaching and the other had a few hours free we would even bring our child in and baby-sit for each other”

Alex claimed that the support given by her team was due to the fact it was a small, all-female team. She experienced tangible support such as childcare help from staff members who were hospitable and accommodating towards her childcare needs. Like female academic's experiences with LMs, the feminist values of colleagues influenced their inclination to support, and this is visible in the following accounts:

“My colleagues were very supportive because it was mainly all women and a lot of them were feminists. Even our head of department was a woman and a feminist, which really makes a massive difference! I feel so privileged to be in this department” (Grace)

“Almost everyone in my department is a woman, a mother and a feminist. They are all into gender equality and because they are mothers, they understand how unproductive you are when you have a little baby so there is no pressure to be in full mode. Our department is also very small, it has around 10-15 people [...] I am very lucky” (Jasmine)

Having feminist colleagues added to the level of support because they promoted gender equality. There was also a proactive initiative to support their female colleagues. Maya, for example, noted that her “[...] *female team was so supportive and understanding that they didn't let [her] put [her] name down for re-sits just in case [she] had a premature baby.*”

It is important to note that having a supportive team was perceived as a ‘privilege’ and evidently not the norm. Female academics within these small teams felt supported but they understood this was a unique situation and that they were ‘lucky’ because they knew that most other departments in the university are different. Maya explained that because her team was predominantly female and supportive they openly talked about motherhood, but she also expressed, *“I don't like to admit about motherhood outside of this immediate team because I know people are less supportive”*.

However, there were some exceptions. For instance, Molly said that, in her experience, male colleagues were supportive when compared to female colleagues. Similarly, Holly explained that:

“There were some female colleagues who judged me for saying yes to things [...] like ‘why are you not spending time with your family?’. Things like ‘oh you've been successful but at what cost?’”

Holly strived to achieve a successful career, but in her experience, female colleagues were judgmental about this and questioned the time and care she devoted towards her family. She later concluded that, “*You just can’t win!*” While the majority of women in this study had received a positive supportive experience from their colleagues, the experiences of these two participants indicate that simply sharing a gender does not mean one is likely to be exempt from any prejudice. There is some instructive literature around the concept of unsupportive female colleagues (Staines, Travis and Jatrente, 1974; Bagihole, 1993; Bagihole and Goode, 2001; Floyd, 2016). It implies that in order to become successful or even survive in universities, where primarily men succeed to higher positions and have decision-making powers, then women learn to become ‘honorary men’. This apparent metamorphosis allows women to further their careers, a caveat being that identifying with their gender will only hold them back. This leaves women who intend on furthering their career in no position to support other women (Bagihole, 1993). Staines et al., (1974) termed these women ‘Queen Bees’ because they are strongly individualistic and dismiss the existence of discrimination against women within universities. However, later research by Bagihole and Goode (2001) argued that the reality for a woman living in a man’s world is that at some point, usually a crucial time, she will recognise that her male colleagues never really considered her to be ‘one of them’. Therefore, women have no choice but to promote both each other and themselves as a wise and strategic move upwards.

Moreover, Sheppard and Aquino (2017) talked about ‘Sisters at Arms’, and critiqued the queen bee syndrome by arguing that it is an exaggerated perception that women have more dysfunctional workplace relationships. While this study has found some experiences of the ‘queen bee’ syndrome, mainly the findings support scholars; Bagihole & Goode and Sheppard and Aquino, further strengthening the argument that female departments were perceived as generally supportive by participants in this study. This finding also develops Acker’s (1990) argument regarding gendered institutions that organisations are an arena that widely disseminate cultural images of gender that are invented and reproduced. Furthermore, not only masculinity but also ‘unsupportive’ female colleagues or ‘Queen Bees’ are products of organisational processes and pressures.

On the other hand, the women in this study who identified themselves as working in a male dominant department said they were not supported and it was harder for them to transition back to work after maternity leave. This was primarily because their male colleagues were not sympathetic towards their childcare needs and held the view that ‘mothers are less serious academics’, with some even making disrespectful/ discriminatory comments. The most

frequently recurring experience was a lack of empathy towards mothers' working arrangements due to their childcare needs. This was due to flexible working arrangements or high expectations regarding working outside of normal work hours. For example, Holly and Harriett opined that:

“Male colleagues are quite patronising, they think I should be able to work all the time when I am home. All of my research collaborations are with men [...] they find my working pattern annoying because they go home and be an academic whereas I go home and be a mother. Men colleagues just do not understand or empathise with my struggles, they have no idea” (Holly)

“Men are really unsympathetic towards women, if I say; ‘I’m tired’ then I hear ‘Oh I’m always tired’. If I say, ‘I’m sleep deprived’ then ‘Oh I’m always sleep deprived’. Just very unsympathetic” (Harriett)

The male colleagues did not fully understand Holly and Harriett's working lifestyle pressures or, as Holly puts it, their 'struggles' as academics and mothers. Furthermore, there was also the revelation of comments ridiculing them, such as; *“It’s such a pain when you go on maternity leave” (Georgia)*. Faith also stated that her male colleagues always made comments about her going home early; she described these as *“really taunting comments”*. She added that some of them resented the fact that she finished early. Moreover, Faith felt strongly about the lack of support she received in a male dominated department:

“It is a male dominated, male professors, and white man middle class dominant culture in Higher Education in general, especially in my department [...] the view is very much that because you are a mother you don’t really take yourself as an academic that seriously. They even make comments about how childcare is just an excuse! And when I’m needed to volunteer for open days on weekends they make patronising comments like ‘oh she has kids so she can’t do it!’”

Faith explained that not just her department but HE in general was male dominated and viewed mothers as less serious academics. This echoes previous research findings, which have shown women tend to lose their perceived competence after having children (Cuddy, Fiske and Glick, 2004). Additionally, some employers believe that women will have children and as a result become an 'organisational liability' (Miller, 2006). The implication is that they place the organisation at a disadvantage by having to cater to the maintenance of maternity needs. This links with Bagihole's (1993) earlier claim that women need significantly more encouragement and support in a male dominated and hostile academic climate. Researchers later on, (Haynes & Fearfull, 2008; Savigny, 2014) have also found evidence for discriminatory comments made by some male colleagues, in general male dominated departments in universities. Savigny

(2014) explained that colleagues performativity of women academics gender made their experience of sexualisation an ‘ordinary’ experience rather than something that, when observed, should generate comment or pause for thought.

This discussion was further extended by Haynes & Fearfull (2008) who argued that the devaluing of women has become a normalised social relation within universities. They stated that they have had “[...] *gendered roles sanctioned or imposed upon them by the perceptions of colleagues and managers and by organising practices and hierarchies of their departments*” (Haynes & Fearfull, 2008, p. 197). The authors went on to argue that, according to their experience and the experiences of female academics with whom they have worked, they have come to realise that the identities of female academics are subject to stereotypical notions of ‘femininity’, whether or not they have children. This not only confirms the findings of this study, it does so within the particular context of the experience of returning to work in a specifically male dominated department.

Additionally, Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2014) argued that the gender disparity in senior representation in academia is largely a result of the gendered institution. Much like the findings of this present study, the authors regard male-dominated networks and a general lack of relatability to the strife faced by expecting mothers as being a significant factor in their lack of senior representation.

4.3.4 Human Resources department (HR): ‘The dark heart of coming back’

The existing body of literature surrounding HR’s role in organisations acknowledges that its purpose is to ‘understand’ and ‘effectively’ manage individuals in the workplace (Schaper, 2004; Boxall & Purcell, 2000)), as well as comply with legislation to ensure ‘fair’ treatment of employees (Employment Law Guide, 2010). It also emphasises that HR professionals work to replace older, mainly administration based personnel management functions to identify the most appropriate culture for their workplace (Bratton and Gold, 2017). This stems from the belief that trusting, developing, managing, and empowering employees as humans with specific needs will lead to positive attitudes and improved performance (Allen et al., 2003). There is however, also a recognition that HR has a limited impact on employee well-being because the rate of adoption of more advanced or progressive HR practices is, in reality, quite low (Peccei, 2004).

When the female academics narrated their experiences and perception of HR's role in the maternity process, three main aspects emerged. Firstly, HR was so inefficient in doing its job that it barely played a role; second, even when it did play a role this was mainly administrative rather than supportive; third, HR's policies were ineffective and never implemented. In a striking comment Grace summed up her perception of HR as the "*Dark heart of coming back*" because "*it is terrible and no one warns you about it*".

Insufficiency and lack of proactiveness

The concern surrounding insufficient management by HR relates to its inability to answer important questions regarding maternity leave or pay, delays in paperwork, not being proactive, and sometimes even being discriminatory. Maya and Lily illustrated the inadequacies of HR by stating that:

"HR delayed things; they weren't on top of things. I had to chase and re-chase them all the time! They have no role anyway just admin and that is too poor admin. They are not efficient, not personal, non-friendly, and procedural. They never tried to proactively look out for me or help me" (Maya)

"HR is messed up. They didn't keep track of my return. They are insufficient not smooth, they had no risk assessment procedure [...] they were not proactive, never made me aware of their policies. I sent documents to Athena SWAN because there is nothing to support pregnant women here" (Lily)

Lily also found HR to be inadequate because it was reactive rather than proactive and failed to conduct a proper risk assessment. She took the matter further by reporting her concerns to the Athena SWAN body.

Moreover, poor experiences with HR in managing a smooth return to work were not merely limited to 'having a bad time'; they also had consequences for personal decision-making. For instance, Emma explained that she had four different hourly paid contracts when she returned and HR 'hated' her for this. She was subsequently made redundant and has had difficulty getting her contract and job role back on her return, so much so that she had to seek union representation. She went to the extent of stating that:

"It is a conscious decision not to have another child even though I know my team will be supportive because of the way HR has been. I don't want to go through all that again!"

The perceived incompetence and inadequacies left a significant mark on the psyche of the women. Emma in particular emphasised that her experience with HR was so troublesome that it stopped her from wanting another child in case she might have to go through the same unpleasant experience again. Similarly, Amy said that she was worried about getting full or half-maternity pay because of an open-ended contract. The participant suggests that she had to actively chase HR for answers regarding payment and was seldom provided with the necessary information. She speculates that this may have been related to the fact that HR had previously not encountered a situation akin to her own and thus adds that this was “*annoying because it felt like HR had never dealt with a situation like this before*”. She also added:

“It was quite ironic how they suddenly couldn’t renew my contract because I was pregnant, [...] whereas they had happily renewed it for 4 years before that. They literally give you no support. I fell through the cracks [...] There was so much confusion on their part. No clear direct communication whatsoever”

Amy later explained that she was still confused because HR had not made it clear to her whether childcare was considered a timetabling constraint, despite asking many times. The narration of unfair and discriminatory treatment by HR such as ending fixed-term contracts before their due time because of maternity, led to perceptions that “[...] *they literally give you no support [...] [and that women academics are] falling through the cracks [...]*” (Amy).

Here, the respondents directly equated the lack of support offered to female academics during such a tentative time in their lives to the lack of career advancement amongst women in academia. This is perhaps best illustrated by the participant’s analogy that women in her environment simply ‘fell through the cracks’. Policies and HR in general are thus viewed to be at the crux of the issue as far as they are concerned.

In contrast to the perceptions of female academics, HR’s response to this issue was that women are not inert agents, this is a two-way process and women need to play a more proactive role in their own maternity process, stating that:

“[...] so when you become pregnant, you're not an inert agent within the process, you do have a responsibility upon yourself as a member of the university community, to find out what is available to you. HR will provide you with that information if you ask for it. You are proactively sent it. It is available on the website, and there are sections on the website. The line manager should provide it. So, if the line manager doesn't do those things, a woman can ask for those things [...] there are failures at various points [...], but a woman needs to be able to stand up and speak up for herself”

There is thus a difference of expectation from both parties involved in that, while sending online policies is ‘proactive’ by HR’s standards, women wanted more engagement and involvement from HR. For example, HR2 claimed that, “[...] *women can't just rely on organisations and line managers to flag all of these things; there has to be individual accountability because the information is there*”. HR insisted that line managers should be proactive in supporting and walking women through the process and women must be proactive agents in this process (HR1/ HR2/ HR3).

This debate is rooted in different perceptions of HR’s role from both parties. Women expected HR to be proactive because they believed HR should be in charge of, or play a key role in, leading support for returning mothers. However, HR explained that their role is simply advisory. They claim that it is the line manager’s job to engage, involve, and lead support throughout the maternity process, while HR’s job is to advise the line managers on how best to do this. An inclusion and diversity officer (HR5) explained that people working directly in HR would have a different view:

“So, if you asked a HR, pure HR manager [...] they would probably say it completely differently to me. They would say, actually; their expectations of HR should be advisory. Yeah, advisory, so it is very different but then that might be my background and my direction I took in my career and that I think is something that we need to change.”

In contrast, HR2, a ‘pure’ HR professional, held the opposite view:

“I fully believe this as a HR professional that the job of HR is to make sure that HR isn't needed anymore. It's to facilitate managers so much that they can eventually do it themselves but maternity for some reason is one of the most challenging aspects of that”.

It is evident that there is a striking contrast in expectations because HR believes support should come from the line manager. However, there was acknowledgement from HR that managing maternity is challenging for LMs; therefore, even though their role is advisory, they should do more. HR4, for example, stated that:

“ [...] the division is aware that there are those negative experiences, personally having not experienced it myself but having sat in your chair and kind of going to focus groups gathering data, it is very evident that whether it is a lack of training, whether it's a fault in the culture, whether it's a lack of support at a senior leadership level, institutionally buying into the process that we're letting women down at the moment definitely and that ties into paternity leave, adoption leave, and shared parental as well”.

Specifically, there was a recognition that HR is letting women academics down because they are unsure as to the best practice to implement. The researcher was told that if she conducted the same research with the professional services staff in the university then she would see greater objectivity. This is because maternity practices for professional staff align with the way organisations in all sectors approach maternity, and they can ‘steal’ practices from other organisations. However, HR5 stated that:

“[...] academics and the nature of their work is very traditional [...] and it’s a beast of its own”; [...] so I would definitely say that the division is aware of the fact that the devolving of the responsibilities to the line manager to manage e.g. the keeping in touch element, and the smooth transition of return to work is problematic because either the policy is unclear, it’s buried too deep for people to find, or HR don’t communicate well enough with line managers what their responsibilities are before, during and after a woman goes and then returns to work”.

While there was agreement that it is the line manager’s job to support maternity, it was felt that, because this often proves to be challenging, HR should do more to support the line manager in implementing best practice. There was also further reiteration, however, of the claim that HR is an advisory body and it cannot start doing the line manager’s job. For example, HR1 claimed:

“[...] I think maternity support, generally, would benefit from additional attention, whether that be a person dedicated to it, because that almost would let some of the managers off. But, HR do already provide that support mechanism for managers, and for staff, of that conversational thing, but they can’t override decisions, unless they are specifically discriminatory. HR is in a position to advise, not instruct. They’re an advisory body really, within the organisation”

There is need for organisational structures within HR to facilitate support as far as possible, but ultimately, HR is there to enable the business to operate and that involves line managers managing their staff. Therefore, HR cannot intrude into that space because this would mean HR would be doing all the work on behalf of the line managers, the schools, and the professional services.

The discussions with the participants brought to light an underlying discord between HR and line managers as issues surrounding delegation and a lack of support emerged. More specifically, line managers had disagreed with HR’s stance on delegating the supporting role. They contested that they have no real support from HR in managing maternity or in the return

process. HR provides no training whatsoever to equip LMs to support the maternity process, and HR is mostly reactive rather than proactive in terms of their role and involvement in maternity. When told that HR's stance was 'advisory' not 'operational', LMs responded clearly that HR's 'advisory' position is not working. Therefore, it is important that HR plays a more involved and engaged role in the maternity process to support both LMs and women returners (LM1/LM2). This is reflected in the following statements:

"[...] I think we're just, quite frankly, expected to pick it up as we go along. I don't think there is formal support of line managers in terms of how we manage those different parts of the role which is why, I guess, you get variations and experience of female returners in this university, and others". (LM2)

"I always feel very frustrated that HR contracts all those legal decisions and really significant decisions around wellbeing and welfare, back to line managers who have different levels of experience and familiarity with the governance ranges on line management. I'm absolutely convinced that areas such as [...] maternity leave, are really important than some people's lives that you can't get wrong because people [...] are vulnerable in those situations. That can lead to a whole range of other problems around people [...] whether they're being treated fairly and the relationships that they can change within the team, with the line manager and wider institutions. But, I think HR should play a stronger role in those things" (LM1).

LM1 explains that each line manager has a different level of understanding and familiarity with legal governance, so to contract all the responsibility to LMs can be dangerous in terms of ensuring a standard of fairness across the board; HR should therefore play a more significant role in this process. He also added that all HR does is point LMs to web links to read policies. Although they clarified that that is okay, they often wondered where it all ends. A line manager cannot be as comprehensive in their understanding of policies as HR; therefore, it is important for HR to play a stronger role than simply one of being 'advisory'. Similarly, LM2 said she was unsure what HR does, which was telling in itself. She stated:

"I don't really know the answer to what HR do, in all honesty [...] I think they expect line managers to do the dirty work and [...] I think as HR, it seems to me that they only make themselves known as it were when there is a problem. So, when it's already, somebody has, you know, they'll be straight onto it if there's a grievance".

This hints at HR playing a 'reactive' rather than a 'proactive' role because LM2 explains that HR only gets involved when there is an issue and the situation is already headed towards a grievance rather than proactively supporting LMs and mothers to minimise any damage.

Procedural administration laden and ineffective policies

Findings from female academics revealed that HR policies existed on paper but perished in practice. Harriett argued that universities should explore whether any of their ‘family-friendly’ policies were implemented in any of their departments “*We wouldn’t be here complaining if the university just implemented its own policy*” (Harriett). Moreover, any intended support coming from HR was considered meaningless because, in reality, women were simply self-managing- “*HR can only create policy, it can’t implement it. Policies need to be locally effective within the school or department that you are in. HR has a very one fits all policy which is not good*”.

Sue also experienced HR’s failure to implement its own policy. The policy stated that staff could work compressed hours if needs be, however, Sue was an ‘anomaly’ because no other department worked that way, therefore neither could she. She highlighted the irony of this because, at that time, the university was applying for an Athena SWAN bronze award with an emphasis on their support for women academics. Similarly, Faith highlighted that the policies were in fact too broad and hard to implement. She said that no one understood how to implement them:

"We need more firm and more practical policies. The policies they have are meaningless; they have no substance to them. I bet you couldn't find 5 people in this whole university that spoke positively of them! Policies need to be more apparent and more involved"

Zara, on the other hand, contended that an established organisational culture is necessary to practice policies. She questioned the effectiveness of some policies, for instance if the organisation/government want to give the father time off (shared parental leave), then that was fair; however, she felt this should not constitute a fraction of the mother’s time. Grace raised further concerns, stating “[...] *there are people in HR making policies for women without a gender bone in their body*”. This was in relation to a decision by the HR department that they would give sabbaticals only to women in science because others could work during maternity leave. Grace insisted that HR should never assume that a woman could work during maternity leave. Therefore, policies need to be fair and effective.

This contradicts the claim in the extant literature that HR works to manage and develop employees with ‘specific’ needs (Allen, Ericksen and Collins, 2013). This concern echoes Acker’s argument (1992, p. 565) that “[...] *theories that are silent about gender are fundamentally flawed*” because organisations are inherently gendered having been created by

and for men (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). This has led to practices and norms constructed around the life experiences of men, making masculinity the universal requirement for university life (Bailyn, 2003). Evidently, it was important for the women in this study that organisational policies and practices were created with a gender specific and gender supportive frame of mind. This extends Eisenberger et al., (2002) definition of organisational support as an experience-based attribution that concerns the benevolent or malevolent intent of organisational policies/practices. This further highlights the importance of an intentionally gender-specific framework of organisational policies, practices, and norms.

The impact of individual departmental cultures on the implementation of policies further addresses the discussion on universities' move towards adopting 'New Managerialism', which encourages managers to control and regulate the work of academic staff (Wilson, 1999; Deem, 2003; 2017). The fact that the women in this study complained about and missed out on accessing HR support that existed on paper but perished in practice, due to stronger managerial autonomy, exposes deficiencies in the shift to 'new managerialism' systems in universities.

Far from being altruistic as once believed, HR was perceived an entity which held little concern or regard for the women. The participants felt that this was almost ironic as they had assumed that the entire purpose of HR was to ensure that human 'resources' and talented were nurtured, managed and looked after. This however could not have been further from the truth as participants bemoaned having to 'chase' HR. Ultimately, the women expressed not only disappointment but also a sense of betrayal when they were faced with the reality that their role was mainly administrative rather than supportive. Georgia contested:

*"HR is purely administrative; they are difficult and bureaucratic. They only work to cover their *** it's all about legality to them. I used to think they are here to help me, but I soon realised no, they are here to help the organisation"*
(Georgia)

To contextualise her feelings of betrayal, Georgia later explained that she viewed HR as a 'boyfriend' with whom she was once in love but then discovered he had cheated on her and so she saw his true character. The more she needed support from HR, the more she realised they did not in fact care about her; they cared much more about protecting the organisation's paperwork. Similarly, Olivia alleged that HR was not proactive because *"they did not really have a role, they just handled paperwork"*. Everything was self-arranged and HR *"just gives lip service"*.

Once again, HR interviewees did not contextualise this particular view and instead agreed that academic women were within their rights to hold this view. For instance, HR1 said; “[...it's a fair description for women who have returned to work to say that HR's role was paper based, processes, admin, or ideally it should be more than that]”. Others agreed that HR's role was procedural because they are not operational, the latter being the job of the line manager. It was notable that one HR professional (HR3) stated she disagrees with the women's views and believes that HR is not mainly administrative. She explained HR's role as being the following:

“Though the other side to it is yes there is ... I won't say there's a lot of administration. It literally is, notify your manager, either the individual notifies us or the manager notifies us, we send an email out to say that Joe Bloggs has notified us that they're pregnant. Please attach risk assessment. So that then is asking the manager to undertake a risk assessment in the work environment to make sure that they're safe. Do we need to make any reasonable adjustments, or any adjustments to accommodate that person whilst they're going through maternity right through pregnancy? The email to the individual will be, here's the code of practice. Here's the maternity leave scheme. Any questions whatsoever, please feel free to give us a call. That then tends to follow with a number of emails about like I said annual leave, et cetera. We ask them then once they've got the MAT B1 form to send that in to HR and then at that point we can then liaise with payroll to ascertain exactly what their pay entitlements are, and we will then confirm it in a letter. Once they know what their intended maternity leave start date is, check the payment, what their entitlements are and pop it in a letter and that's it. And that's the end of it from a HR point of view. It just tends to be a little bit probably longer and drawn out because we get notified, then we've got to wait for the MAT B1 and the intended start date, then we need to get the information from payroll with regards to SMP and then we write it out. So it can be over a few months, but that depends also when they notify us. [...] But it's not heavily administrative. It's more a fact-finding mission I think for a new mum or anyone that's expecting”.

This quote is purposely left lengthy to show the contradiction in HR3's comment that HR is not administrative, yet she then describes a long list of administrative tasks. HR3 admits that the processes take a long time and for mothers it is a 'fact finding' mission, which correlates with female academics' perception of HR during the maternity journey, i.e., that the onus is on them to find out the information for themselves.

Furthermore, HR professionals explained that the main issue with HR's shift to a transactional approach is that of barriers in communication structures, particularly in the university, as there is a big disconnect in the way information is shared. Consequently, structural boundaries are not defined and some people do not know who their manager is (HR1/ HR2/ HR4/ HR5). When HR professionals want to communicate and support a woman

proactively, the system does not support smooth communication structures. Moreover, HR professionals explained that it is very important for their department to have a ‘face’ in front of the employee, so that women have somebody to contact and to build a warm professional relationship with (HR1/ HR2/ HR4). However, this is not possible because there has been a shift from a personnel welfare focus to the transactional policy driven approach. Currently, it is moving more towards the human element, reclaiming the “human” within Human Resources (HR1). Some HR professionals suggested that they need to revert to its old approach in the personnel department. HR2 recalled an experience from times past:

“I remember having a colleague that worked alongside me, all she did in her role was actually support female staff through the process, and it was an amazing role. And then the cuts came and that post went...”

Findings from the academic mothers in this study showed that having a designated HR professional to support them through the process would be the ideal scenario. HR2 also opined that HRM overall needs to change its approach and go back in time because it now adopts a hard line, tough stance which means HR is sitting on the side of the managers, while the staff member can go and find a friend, colleague, or trade union representative to represent them. This contradicts the literature that HR has moved on from being administrative to more concerned about the ‘human side’ (Bratton and Gold, 2017). HR5 understood the business case for this arrangement but claimed that, collectively, HR has moved backwards rather than forward. However, the other HR interviewees explained that there are not enough resources for such a ‘hands on’ approach, and to revert would mean doing the line manager’s job for them.

LMs, on the other hand, agreed with the female academics. They strongly believed that HR should play a more involved and engaged role in the management of maternity and the return to work process. LM2, for instance, stated, *“I think HR can do a hell of a lot more from what they're currently doing”*. LMs also elucidated the need for catered, individualised support. They highlighted the importance of an appointed HR representative, whom is a ‘key-worker’ appointed to each maternity case to provide individual support and guide the LM through the intricate nuances of the legal framework. The researcher informed LMs that HR’s response to this is that there is a lack of resources and this is the LM’s job; HR cannot do LM’s jobs for them. LM2 then explained that this needs to be applied in a *‘very light touch way’* so that there are two bodies involved in the maternity and return to work process. In so doing, both the LM and the academic mother will have a ‘third eye’ and a point of contact:

“I think you probably need to get some kind of a key worker working with you, checking in with you at regular intervals, where you can talk about where that person is off to, in terms of their maternity cover, they can then interpret that into [...] what responsibilities are on us, as an employer. I'll gladly enact that, as a line manager, but I am weary that I may be missing things, misinterpreting things or minimising events when actually there is a legal framework which we need to ensure we adhere to, for both the organisations to be happy with their legal framework and also, [...] to ensure that, most importantly, the individual is supported as much as they can, at that moment in time of maternity leave”. (LM3)

“So generally it will be a better role to ensure proper governance around the system of a key worker ... in terms of the HR person, that you check in with every fortnight for a five, ten minute phone call, just to get an update on where that person is, so they can catch anything that's happening and ensure that everybody's being treated fairly under legislation”. (LM2)

This would ensure support in an involved fashion, which can be ‘light touch’ but will also have a big impact. Moreover, it was deemed important for HR not to implement policies, which are ‘too rigid’ or inclined towards a and ‘one size fits all’ approach because, then if the LM wants to be more empathetic and generous it is hard for them to be so. This is especially pertinent in cases where the line manager may not know the woman very well, as some people do not get on with their line managers. For instance, LM2 said, *“I think it's probably best if it's both together rather than just being incumbent to one person who may or may not have an agenda of their own”.*

In contrast to the above, however, LM3 stated that he did not think HR needed to become more involved. He was of the opinion said that the policies are available online and he knows that he can contact HR if he is unsure about the implementation of a policy or a procedure. It is enlightening to hear contrasting perspectives from LMs; it reveals that HR's current approach of simply being advisory may work for LMs such as LM3. However, this very small sample of three LMs shows that whilst it might work for one person, it may be difficult for others; therefore, it is valuable for HR to provide not only catered and individual support for mothers but also LMs. For instance, a HR can be the ‘third eye’ and an additional party in the maternity management team to ensure fairness and appropriate policy implementation.

Although HR professionals said it was not their job to manage the relationship with a female academic, they admitted that it was their job to be a safety net and ensure that the mechanisms are in place to support managers (HR1/ 2/ 5). However, there was no evidence of such being mechanisms in place at the time of the interviews; *“we really want to do that*

[proactively support], but our mechanisms, our structures and our processes stop that information getting out". When professionals questioned more deeply on this, HR explained that, the shift in HR from 'personnel' to 'transactional' has meant that the bureaucracy in the system prevents them from supporting women in the way they would wish. However, the job losses HR underwent years ago were rooted in the idea that the organisation will ensure line managers have the skills to deal with all situations, HR would only be there from a strategic and advisory point of view (HR5).

Overall, the experiences and perceptions of female academics in this study revealed that their expectations of HR were to provide proactive support, create and implement gender considerate policies, and be supportive of women returning to work. LMs agreed that HR should play a more active and engaged role in academic maternity cases, mainly because delegating this responsibility increases the chances of unfairness and LMs are not equipped or resourced to provide efficient support. In contrast, HR professionals contested that it is the job of LMs to manage maternity and that women should be proactive in the management of the maternity process. HR claimed their role is administrative and advisory, and they cannot do the LM's job of 'managing' maternity for them. However, HR also recognised that they could do more to implement training and put support mechanisms in place for LMs. However, there was no evidence of such mechanisms being in place in this study.

4.3.5 Emerging Findings

At this tentative stage of the analysis, a break is provided in the narratives offered in order to summarise the key findings thus far. Through this pause in analysis, the researcher has been able to draw out through her interpretation, number of contextual differences in the ways in which the issue under investigation is perceived. This study echoes Ashencaen-Crabtree and Shiel's (2018) attempt at explaining the gender gap in senior positions within academia by the gender constructs and their negative impact on interpersonal and institutional strategies that continue to perpetuate the schism that emerges within academia. Incidentally, it seems that thus far, the greatest sense of accountability has emerged from the HR professionals. As such, rather than refute or oppose the claims put forth by the women in academia, they acknowledged that there was basis to these claims and suggested that they were indeed culpable for some the transgressions which they were accused of. That said, the findings thus far highlight what could be interpreted as a discord between the different organisational groups. More specifically, whilst HR professionals do indeed take on responsibility for some claims, they have also been

quick to suggest that some of the claims being levied are simply a reflection of a failure in line management. Understandably, line managers refute such claims, thus squarely placing the blame onto HR.

Additional points of consideration also include the relative impact the actual environment had upon the women in academia. More specifically, the researcher refers to the fact that the type of university and department appeared to dictate the extent to which women were supported. High-tariff universities appeared to be more conscientious as far as maternity was concerned as one participant (Jasmine) noted that her university went above and beyond to ensure that she was supported throughout her maternity journey, for instance laying out the option for her to communicate to the extent that suits her when on maternity leave.

Thus far, it would seem that context specific factors such as the disciplines which departments fall under also appear to shape and impact upon the women's experiences. A gulf of understanding, empathy and more importantly support for expecting mothers emerges between departments that are Science and Engineering oriented and their Humanities and Nursing counterparts. The latter of these departments were regarded as being more accommodating of maternity issues and expecting mothers in general. Participants add that reasons as to why this may be largely down to the gender make-up of the respective departments. In short, women were perceived as being more accommodating and understanding. Empathy and relatability thus appear to sit at the heart of most grievances aired within the first part of the analysis.

Furthermore, it also came into view that the level of seniority in academic positions impacted experiences of support. For instance, women academics that took maternity leave when they were senior lecturers had greater autonomy and flexibility in managing and negotiating their maternity arrangements than lecturers. Women in post-doctoral positions appeared to experience the least amount of support in their maternity journey. Whether the differences in experiences can be attributed to these factors or not is beyond the scope of this study. However, later researcher can investigate this further.

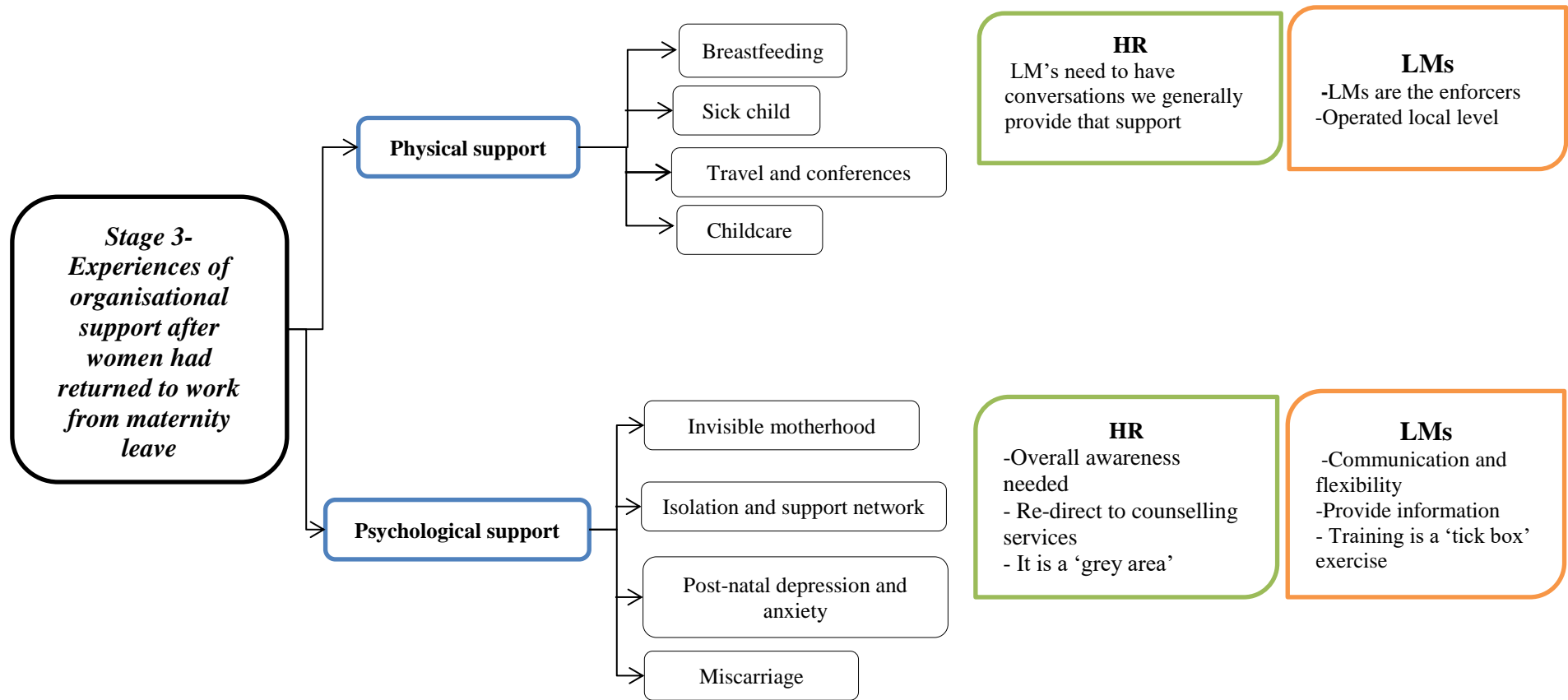
4.4 Stage 3- Tangible and Intangible types of organisational support required after return to work from maternity leave

Analysis of women's narrations of their experiences and perceptions of organisational support following their return to work from maternity leave, has revealed two distinct aspects of support that are required. These included *tangible* and *intangible* support. Tangible support is related to the physical aspects within the organisation, such as breastfeeding and childcare facilities. Intangible support, meanwhile, is related to the acknowledgement of psychological aspects of organisational support that are required, such as if the individual experiences post-natal depression or miscarriage. The terms are not mutually exclusive because 'tangible' support can be provided for psychological aspects also; however, for the sake of clarity, the researcher presents them in two separate sections. Notwithstanding that, they are indeed interlinked and connected.

Additionally, HR and LMs respective views on these findings echoed their stance on other organisational support discussed throughout the maternity stages, where both parties place the responsibility upon on each other. However, they provide a detailed insight regarding the organisational angle, which adds a holistic view to the findings from women interviewees.

The findings from Stage 3 of the maternity journey are presented in Figure 4.3 and then demonstrated in detail and discussed in line with the related literature in this section.

Figure 4.3: Stage 3- Returned to work



4.4.1 Tangible Support (Physical facilities)

❖ Breastfeeding

There is evidence for both short-term and long-term benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and infants (Britton *et al.*, 2007; Schimed *et al.*, 2011). However, women's return to work can be a significant barrier to continued breastfeeding (Kosmala-Anderson and Wallace, 2006; Daud *et al.*, 2017; Hunter *et al.*, 2018). Existing literature acknowledges the importance of person-centred communication skills and workplace relationships in supporting women to breastfeed (Schimed *et al.*, 2011), and professional and peer support to aid the success of breastfeeding in the workplace. Employers are encouraged to do more in order to support breastfeeding by implementing policies and practices that promote continued support (Weber *et al.*, 2011).

Hausman (2004) implores wider society to re-think the act of breastfeeding and to question whether there are inequalities existing within our institutional and societal systems that constrain women from having the natural and biological experiences that they should have as mothers. She insisted that:

“Breastfeeding forces us [the society] to reconsider equality frameworks that limit the biological aspects of reproduction to childbearing [...] nursing [breastfeeding] is about recognising women as cultural mammals whose choices, decisions, and experiences as mothers are circumscribed both biologically and socially”

The argument is that women are increasingly asked to work in ways that disturb or make the biosocial practices of maternity impossible. The absence of breastfeeding facilities was a compelling concern in this study, described as a “*nightmare*” (Maya), and that “*after return to work, breastfeeding is the biggest challenge! [...] [Because] it required a lot of pumping, organising, and there was hardly any room accessible or time allocated to do this*”. Maya explained that no one from her HR department supported her, and “[...] *never mind a discussion, they didn't even ask [her].*” Additionally, it was found by researchers that others quit breastfeeding altogether in favour of work because there was no support (Elena & Faith). This relates to reports that some women self-regulate their maternal bodies, so that their breasts produce milk supplies only in the late evening; this enables them to keep this aspect of their lives separate away from the workplace (Gatrell, 2013).

Additionally, Faith initiated a conversation about how she could breastfeed at work, since her baby was using childcare on site, and in her experience “[...] *the on campus nursery said just pop by whenever he needs a feed... really?! That is not easy! The system is just not built for it! And they have no understanding of it either*”. Furthermore, whenever Faith needed to breastfeed, she would have to walk to and from the nursery; this occurred multiple times a day. Therefore, she concluded that the system is not built to support a mother’s breastfeeding needs. On the other hand, Molly and Aaliyah did have a breastfeeding room available but they explained:

“Breastfeeding rooms don’t exist for students or for academics. University provides a horrible room, like a little storage cupboard, we tell our students to come to our office because it’s more pleasant there if they need to pump”
(Molly)

“My colleague had to express milk in university, in what was a lunch staff room for colleagues. So she had to put up an ‘expressing milk’ sign on, which is quite uncomfortable. As an organisation they have an obligation to provide a space, a room without a mirrored door, but unfortunately that doesn’t happen”
(Aaliyah)

Both explanations show that, in their cases, spaces for breastfeeding were not up to the required standard. A storage cupboard-like room designated for breastfeeding was perceived as ‘horrible’ and it was important for women to have privacy when breastfeeding. This agrees with the literature which states that flexible work options and lactation breaks, as well as access to a private room, are identified as the main factors that facilitate breastfeeding at work (Weber *et al.*, 2011; Hunter *et al.*, 2018). Harriett highlighted a different aspect of breastfeeding. She worked in a male dominated department and said that some of her male colleagues made uncomfortable comments on her breastfeeding, they “[...] *smirked and said ‘we were wondering if you’re going to be breastfeeding or not’. In others, words are you going to get your boobs out or not?! Not funny! In fact, it’s really derogatory*”. She did not feel sufficiently respected in her department to consider breastfeeding at work. Molly was allowed to take shorter days at work in order to breastfeed her baby who did not take the bottle; this presented a contrary view and it was a rare experience reported in this study.

The trend of universities moving from private offices towards open plan shared offices was explained as “*especially problematic for breast feeding*” (Harriett) and a point of concern for breastfeeding mothers due to a lack of privacy (Hailey & Grace). Vischer (2008) explains this phenomenon as ‘Territoriality and Belonging’ in the workplace; this surpasses the physical

attributes of spaces occupied by individual workers. It is also affected by a worker's sense of privacy, social status and perception control.

This links with the narrative of POS theory which posits that informal supervisory support for a family is deemed a critical determinant in whether or not a worker has access to formal work-life policies (Hammer et al., 2009), and support can include encouragement of employees and providing a wider selection of user-friendly services (Igarria et al., 1997). This research extends this theoretical implication and highlights the importance of supervisors to 'initiate' open communication and show awareness and acknowledgement of a returning mother's breastfeeding needs.

❖ **Sick child**

There was discussion regarding the difficulty and lack of support experienced whenever children (specifically young nursery-going children) fell ill. It was common for children to catch bugs from each other and fall ill quite often, especially when they initially joined. Many unions are known to negotiate paid compassionate leave to help parents in times where for when their child falls ill (Trade Union Congress, 2012). However, this was not the experience of women in this study. They instead highlighted the following concerns: the difficulty to negotiate time off to be with the child when they fell ill (Harriett, & Elena), the inability of nurseries to look after the child when ill (Molly), and the fact that it was not considered suitable to bring children into work. Harriett explained:

“There is just no leeway for you or your child to be ill. If you're ill, or off because your child is ill you're breaking the consumer act because students are now consumers. The problem is that when my child is ill even the nursery doesn't keep him, and there is no leeway to take time off for it”

As we can see, there are multiple issues at hand; at an organisational meso-level, taking time-off for a sick child would pose strategic difficulties, at a governmental macro-level, nurseries are not equipped to look after a sick child, and on a personal micro-level women battle between the desire to look after their child and to keep their job stable.

Two women (Emma & Hailey), however, experienced support from their manager and colleagues when their children fell ill. Related literature highlights that working parents' anxiety levels increase when they get an emergency call from the nursery to say their child is ill, not only because their child has fallen sick, but also because they have to find a way to keep their jobs while tending to their family's needs (Phillips, 2004). Lovell (2004) adds another

angle to this concern and argues that the burden of inadequate paid sick family leave falls heaviest on mothers. Therefore, expansion of paid sick leave and integration of family care-giving activities into authorised uses of paid sick leave are crucial for working mothers, their families, employers, and our communities at large. This shall have a positive impact on hospitals; this is particularly true for the paediatric health care system and children's physical and emotional health (Schuster and Chung, 2014). It becomes apparent that parents have a substantial unmet need for leave to care for ill children, specifically chronically ill children. This finding echoes the importance for organisations to provide proactive family-friendly support and to acknowledge that mothers can sometimes have unpredictable circumstances and as such, need their respective organisations to be flexible.

❖ **Travel and conferences**

Another family-unfriendly arrangement upon return to work concerned the need for travelling and attending conferences in order to present papers (Lipton, 2018); women raised various concerns; primarily that it is “[...] *really difficult to attend conferences because childcare is impossible*” (Sue), and for instance, Molly stated “[...] *where will I leave my children for three whole days whilst I attend the conference...?*”. Besides, travel and conference attendance has a significant impact on promotion with Hannah adding that “[...] *the more geographically mobile you are, the higher the chances of your promotion*”; furthermore Rosie explained, “[...] *as a mother it is not possible to manage travel, so compared to our male counter-parts we are academically disadvantaged*” (Rosie). This refers to the opportunity of networking that conferences provide, which increase the chances of research collaborations:

“In order to go to conferences traveling is required, there is no childcare arrangement at academic conferences, that's where all the networking happens [...] and all the networking leads to research collaboration and publications. Success in this job requires a lot of travelling and for mother's that is very difficult” (Amy)

This agrees with literature which states that travel and conferences are a prominent aspect of being an academic (Crang, 2007), and there is a ‘childcare- conference- conundrum’ (Calisi, 2018). There are barriers related to travelling to conferences, which disproportionately affect women. For instance, family responsibilities are more likely prevent a woman's conference attendance compared to male academics. Furthermore, the conference arena is a gender-neutral space where the specific needs of women as consumers are not well recognised, such as their heavy involvement with childcare and home responsibilities that do not seem to

affect men in the same way (Ramirez, Laing and Mair, 2013; Park et al, 2013; Fetterolf and Rudman, 2014). Therefore, more work is required to address the specific needs of women, given that there are now many more female conference attendees (Nicholson, 2017).

❖ **Childcare**

Britain is known to be lagging behind many other European countries in helping mothers return to work (de Muizon, 2018); for instance, countries including Denmark and Sweden have heavily subsidised childcare (Ronzulli, 2014; OECD, 2016). Women in this study were concerned about the cost of childcare. For instance, Lily explained how her childcare cost was three times more than the cost of her mortgage, and Faith explained that “*it is insane*” because if she was ever got late to pick up her child from the nursery, then it would cost her five pounds per for every five minutes. This reflects the wider scale research where it has been demonstrated that childcare costs are named as the biggest single obstacle to work by more than four in ten mothers in the UK (Del Boca, 2015; Roberts et al., 2017). Another macro-level issue was the inaccessible places in after-school clubs for school going children (Molly, Ava, Harriett), Molly explained that “*In [her] son’s school there [were] 700 children and only 15 spaces in the after school club, [...] this [was] a major concern [...] [and] this [made] working till a set time a lot harder*”. Moreover, even if wrap around care was accessible, Harriett explained that it meant, “*[...] your child is in school from 7 am to 7 pm that means someone else is raising your child, so you can work what’s the point?*”

Women were also disappointed with the University for not recognising their childcare constraints. For instance:

“As an academic, you are expected to have all your childcare sorted before you come to work. There are absolutely no concessions made for childcare going wrong. Also, voicing childcare constraints impacts your career, so you are scared to voice it!” (Aaliyah)

“I had to speak about childcare constraints upfront. They couldn’t care less about my childcare difficulty. Anything outside of work is your own problem, even if it is really effecting your work. I tried to get something changed once due to a childcare constraint and it was doable for them, but they made it exceptionally difficult for me. I learnt from then that they don’t care. We’re just machine to them!” (Ava)

This relates to Savigny's (2014) research wherein she refers to a societal and structural concern, as well as within academia, that childcare is positioned as a woman’s concern rather

than a parental one. She argues that conflating childbearing with childcare produces the assumption that childcare is a woman's problem. This is a concern that regularly plays out within academia to women's disadvantage in their everyday experiences.

There were also reported experiences where the university had an on-campus nursery; this was viewed as an affirmative and supportive action from the university. However, Molly said that the nursery on campus closed at 6 pm and she was expected to teach until 6 pm too, so she always struggled to pick up her child on time, and “[...] *thoughtless things like this make [her] think, [she is] not supported as a mother*”. Moreover, Amy observed that while it was supportive of the university to have an on-campus nursery, it did not have a good rating, and as such, so Amy was reluctant to put her child in the nursery. This emphasises the importance of universities ensuring that a good quality of childcare is provided on-campus.

The overall comments from HR and LMs on tangible organisational support for returning mothers echoed their previous stance on support, where HR believed it is LMs job to manage tangible resources for returning mothers, and LMs stating that this was problematic and led to increased chances of unfairness. For instance, HR emphasised that it is the LMs responsibility to have ‘conversations’ with the mother and make arrangements because HR supports those provisions (HR 1/ HR2/ HR 3). While LMs (1/2/3) highlighted that for physical support, the manager is the ‘broker’ who lobbies on behalf of the mother returner for facility arrangements because HR has left all the responsibility upon them. Additionally, physical resources operate at a local level rather than at university level. This can cause discrepancies in fairness across the board. The next section presents women's perceived need of intangible support.

4.4.2 Intangible Support (Psychological facilities)

❖ Invisible motherhood

It is claimed that women academics who are mothers suffer from the duality of being both ‘invisible’ and ‘extra-visible’, meaning that the motherhood aspect of their lives is not acknowledged or celebrated (Bagihole, 1993; Akass & Duthie, 2016), and when it becomes known they stand out due to being a minority. Being a minority is a disadvantage as like all minorities, mothers are less able to negotiate for their needs, and they experience added performance pressure and marginality (King and Botsford, 2009). A study on women academics in British universities found that they had implicit feelings of disempowerment,

marginalisation and invisibility among themselves (Savigny, 2014). The study also found that in order to perceive their organisation as supportive, women academics desired their motherhood to not be limited to ‘visible’, ‘extra-visible’ or ‘invisible’, but rather for it to be discussed as a norm without any negative implications.

The present study revealed that the lack of discussion or mention of motherhood, as well as apprehension in talking about their motherhood in case it was perceived negatively in terms of their commitment to their job, resulted in some women (Emma, Victoria, Aaliyah, Grace and Maya) describing their motherhood at work as being ‘invisible’. For example, Aaliyah and Victoria explained how before the due date they are often unsure if some of their colleagues are mothers and they are nervous to ask;

“Everyone around me here is really nice, but motherhood is just not discussed! The atmosphere is such that that no one talks about it. Until date, I don’t know if some of my colleagues have kids or not. I’m nervous to ask ... I know that any aspect of my motherhood has to stay at home” (Aaliyah)

“There is an increasing number of senior women now, but I have no clue if any of them have children. They haven’t made it common knowledge. It’s just not something that’s openly discussed in my institution or academia for that matter” (Victoria)

Engaging in dialogue related to motherhood was not a norm, and mention of this in their narratives, shows that it was important to them to have the opportunity and contextual environment in order to engage in that dialogue.

On the other hand, Aaliyah got an overwhelming response when she mentioned her motherhood at a conference:

“I had recently become a mother and I gave a talk at a conference, in the talk I mentioned that I had recently had a baby [... I got so many emails form students saying ‘wow so inspired’. The fact that it’s a big thing that someone even talked about being a mother is outrageous!”

This revealed how unusual it was to mention motherhood in an academic setting, and whilst this was simply touched upon by the participant, it did add weight to the concern that motherhood was in effect the ending of an academic career. Furthermore, it was considered easy to talk about motherhood in front of students, but Maya explained “[...] in meetings [she] would never mention it because they would think oh you’re a mother and can’t commit 100%,”

I don't know if that's their perception or mine, and it's not a lie because my son is 100% my priority". She asserted that her priority was her son, and she highlighted that this this can be viewed as a weakness, so she was careful not to reveal it.

❖ **Isolation and support networks**

Closely linked to the concern of invisible motherhood was the feeling of isolation after a return to work (Zara, Olivia and Faith). Stemming from this was the desire for a women's support network group (Priya, Holly, Elena and Harriett). Zara expressed this in detail:

"A big challenge on my return was that I felt really isolated. I was in an alone office for a long time, that is quite common in academia. You teach alone, you research alone; you do your PhD alone, especially since I was part-time [...] I couldn't attend all the meetings. I just needed more support, I needed someone to check up on me, and someone making sure I was integrated well post my return. Even most of my colleagues had left, so I had no social support network which led to me feeling further isolation [...] stronger staff networks should be encouraged because that is a major support for returning mother's, there is a massive need for a woman's support network. The best thing on my return has been speaking to senior staff, from my own accord, to make the experience more relatable. I think the main thing on your return is to be supported to not lose confidence and to not lose touch with others."

Zara's individual expression highlights the struggle with feelings of isolation following one's return from maternity leave, specifically for female academics due to the nature of their working arrangements. Furthermore, the importance and benefits of having women's support networks established, in order to help with isolation are highlighted. Moreover, Faith added that formal paperwork was not sufficient support, and that the best thing the university could have done for her would have been to have provided her with a women's support group because she was struggling by herself and had no one to talk to; she stated that *"HR should do this! Put mums in contact with each other."* It was important to have a women's support network in place, not just so that women could share their experiences and struggles with each other, but because they were not able to be part of social groups at work due to their childcare responsibilities as Harriett explained;

"[...] because I'm a mother and I have childcare constraints I can't be part of the pub culture I can't go to evening dinners. Networking outside of work is really problematic. So, university should have a formal support network when mother's return to work, women can choose to opt out of it if they wish [...] I looked for a woman's or parenting groups here but there is none here. That would be really helpful even on a bigger scheme, a critical mass of people

lobbying for a change would be really good. There needs to be a women's support network and a mother's support network group."

Harriett emphasises the importance of women's support group networks specifically because they find it hard to be part of the 'pub culture', but also the larger scale importance that of a group of women standing together embodies for positive change in the academic setting. This finding supports the emphasis in existing literature regarding the importance of women's support networks. Bagihole (1993, pg. 272) claims that in the academic profession, women suffer from a lack of informal support systems, which play "*a major role in enhancing reputations and status and inducting academics into the reward system. Formal effective procedures are, therefore, crucial for women's establishment in the profession*". However, she found that women frequently reported that in order to compete they had to behave like men, and so were not in a position to support other women. Therefore, females report suffering from social isolation and are less integrated into university departments than their male counterparts men (Bagihole, 1993).

Building upon this, Ledwith and Manfredi (2000) questioned whether this was due to a generational gap, but they found that neither younger nor older academic women showed any collective working or networking interests for other women in the university. They concluded that even though the number of senior women in the academic profession may continue to increase, the strong gendered individualistic culture currently in place is unlikely to be challenged. In contrast to this, however, Bagihole (2007) cites a women's group 'Through the Glass ceiling' (TTGC), who recognised that we must not be fooled by the image of an individualistic academic career just because it is depicted that way by many men in academia. This emphasises the concepts of 'Gendered institutions' (Ackers, 1992; Meyerson & Ely, 2000) by reinstating that organisations are deeply gendered from the onset.

In addition, Bagihole (2007) asserts that academic careers are dependent on the support of colleagues. Therefore, the strong need for a women's support network group persists. One initiative that is pushing this need forward is the Athena SWAN charter (ECU, 2015b) which exists to promote gender equality in HE, and it actively encouraging universities to create women's support networks.

❖ **Post-natal depression (PND)**

Another striking aspect related to psychological support was that of the experience of post-natal depression (PND) after a woman's return to work from maternity leave. PND is identified as a

major public health concern which affects approximately 13% of women worldwide (Royal College of Midwives, 2015). Pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood have been identified as potentially vulnerable periods for women in terms of their mental health (Williams, 2013; Cust, 2016; Carter, Cust and Boath, 2018). In keeping with that, a number of PND related issues were expressed in this study:

“I was always very worried, I was really emotional, I was going through serious post-natal depression and there was just no support at all. I didn’t even know who to tell even!” (Katie)

“I felt really vulnerable, I was so stressed, I had lost a lot of weight and I was suffering from post-natal depression, but there was no support. I was nervous to even mention this to anyone” (Faith)

“I was mentally really struggling! I really needed someone to step in and ask if I needed anything” (Harriett)

“There is a serious lack of support for women that have traumatic birth experiences or post-natal depression. In fact, it is not even acknowledged or addressed ever” (Zara)

These reports echoed that there was no allocated body to speak to regarding post-natal depression at work, or it was unclear whom women could speak to if they needed that support. Furthermore, women wished for the organisation to proactively ‘step-in’ and check up on them. Two interesting cases that stood out were that of Elena and Jasmine. Elena experienced severe post-natal depression, and she managed to find support for herself:

“I experienced severe anxiety and depression. I had such bad post-natal depression, I was referred to the cognitive behavioural therapy through the NHS, but there was no support in the organisation whatsoever. My manager said she understood but showed no sensitivity towards it. Anyway, I found that the university had a counselling service for students, so I decided to contact them and see if they could help me... and they did! That was really useful”

Although Elena managed to find support, it was self-driven, rather than being initiated by the university. Contrary to Elena’s experience, Jasmine found that the university was actively supportive of her during her post-natal depression. She recounted:

“This [PND] was the most difficult thing after return to work. I started having post-natal depression and my depression was generally accelerating because of working in prisons, managing all that plus coming back after a baby

was too much [...] I had to take anti-depressants and do therapy to ease my pain. My university however, was really supportive with this. They have a system of mentors, my mentor was a huge help when I was going through all this. She made sure I got all the support I needed. She had also gone through the same thing, so I was really well looked after”

In contrast to the other women’s experiences in this study, Jasmine experienced organisational support through a ‘system of mentors’ that her university provided. This is excellent support for returning mothers. This is particularly so because a lack of social interaction and isolation has been highlighted as a potential factor within PND (Cust, 2016). Moreover, 1 in 4 people are affected by mental health conditions in their lifetime, and the stigma behind it makes it difficult to cope with, mainly because one feels isolated and judged (Williams, 2013). Postnatal depression is particularly tricky because it occurs at a time when the mother should be happy; therefore, the stigma is worse. There are still not enough support groups for women with PND, even though they are consistently reported as being a useful platform for conversation and peer help during this tough period (Williams, 2013).

❖ **Miscarriage**

Closely related to the above finding was prenatal loss (Miscarriage). This is a life-altering event for a mother, affecting every aspect of her existence, including her work and career (Hazen, 2003; Moulder, 2016). Harriett was the only woman in this study who had experienced a miscarriage, specifically a late miscarriage, and she explained that she had no support from the organisation on her return; in-fact, it was “*Abysmally handled*” which led to a painful transition back to work which Harriett expressed:

“There is just no support for a miscarriage anyway, and mine was a really late one. I had zero support after my miscarriage. It was the worst handled, not one little bit of support. Coming back to work was really, really difficult for me anyway, and then I had people still asking me if I was pregnant when I had returned after a miscarriage. It was very difficult, I had to tell everyone myself, there was no support and it was such a tough time”

Understandably, a late miscarriage was traumatic for her, but receiving no support from the organisation on easing back into the workplace, with and people around her still asking her if she was pregnant, made her experience even worse. In this time, she needed extra support, especially in terms of a support network to allow a smoother, less painful transition back to work following the miscarriage. There is limited research that focuses on women academics’ experiences of miscarriage and related organisational support.

However, existing research surrounding miscarriage reports that the psychological effects after a miscarriage are similar to the bereavement process (Conway, 1995; Hutti, 2005; Evans, 2012). Although, society does not view miscarriage as a bereavement, and the emotional effects are overlooked by researchers and health care providers, who focus primarily on the physical aspects of miscarriage (Evans, 2012). Winegar (2016) argues that while there has been a more public conversation about motherhood, there remains a glaring absence of discussion regarding the private reality of miscarriage. About fifteen to twenty-five per cent of all recognised pregnancies end in miscarriage; however, whilst most organisations know what to say to a woman announcing her pregnancy, no one knows what to say to a woman sharing their loss. Therefore, the culture of silence surrounding miscarriage acts as a further strain to the ability of female faculty members to succeed in the academic setting (Winegar, 2016). A recent auto ethnographical study by (Porschitz and Siler, 2017) casts lights on the combination of secrecy and grief that is layered on top of a difficult physical experience that makes miscarriage a unique that, to date has mostly been ignored in management literature and practice.

Social support from families is considered significant after experiencing a miscarriage (Conway, 1995; Hutti, 2005). However, social support also includes the workplace and the relationships at work. Therefore, organisations are encouraged to change policies and practices to help managers and employees transcend denial and defence and consciously support bereaved co-workers (Hazen, 2003). It is contended that there is significant room for improvement in the academic work on this front, and there is a need for recognition that gender inequality starts when a woman tries to have children, not only after she has them (Winegar, 2016). In that sense universities could do more to support the one in four women who suffer miscarriages while trying to have children. She suggests that department chairs/ appointed mentors could receive formal guidance on this concern, perhaps as part of already existing human-resource or diversity training, and counselling centres could establish support groups for faculty members who have experienced miscarriages (Winegar, 2016).

Furthermore, Hazen (2003) suggested that supportive colleagues should acknowledge the loss appropriately, and they can act as witnesses listening to the mother's story of what happened, so her grief is acknowledged in a meaningful way. Hazen (2003) recognises that some employees might feel uncomfortable or awkward even in giving these signs of support. However, managers can initiate policies, educate employees about how to respond to others, and act as role models.

Overall, HR's stance on the intangible support was that there is a need to raise overall awareness of the impact on mental health impact following maternity leave. They explained how this was reflective of society in general where specific topics such as menstruation and menopause are still taboo (HR 4/ HR 5/ HR 3). Therefore, HR is in need of to do a 'massive campaign' to raise awareness about the potential mental health impact upon returning mothers (HR 4/ HR 5). Generally, HR representatives in this study agreed that a cultural shift is needed which "*[...] only more communication, more awareness raising, training, just making it part of how we [HR/ Universities] do things will change*" (HR 5). Moreover, HR recognised that for a returning mother's psychological needs "*we [HR] are literally at the end of the chain and if people don't tell us, we have no way of knowing. But certainly, there is the counselling service*" (HR 3). As such, Therefore, it is down to the line manager to support this aspect; however, HR can direct women to other services that can support them. For instance, HR 3 explained that the university offers a 24 hour counselling service:

"Managers and colleagues need to pick up on the fact that actually, there isn't much that we can do as an organisation in terms of that support because that woman might need to be at work, and she might need additional support from her GP [...], and we have counselling services here, and it's about tapping them into those other support mechanisms, but it's very difficult when somebody is ill to move past that".

HR professionals explained that the legal framework restricts them. "*It is a grey area*" (HR 4) because the government does not recognise or support it:

"Miscarriage/ adoption/ foster to adopt are all grey areas they are encompassed under different protected characteristics and they are all under the equality legislation but no big dog is shouting about it in society there is no support from local government, local bodies to educate organisations on how to deal with that so on those two areas as an institution behind closed doors because we are not strong on that comms [communications] piece on it" (HR 4)

HR 2 put it simply; "*[...] our HR itself up until very recently has been very legally based and traditional. And so the law just doesn't help us here*". This links to the macro-level factors that are at influential within the organisation. HR 2 expanded by giving an example of bereavement leave that a parent can get if they lose a child, and how at this moment in time there is no policy to cover that scenario. There is not even a career break scheme in place. If somebody loses a child and needed to take unpaid leave because of this, there is no facility to allow them to do that. This is reflective of other aspects of the pregnancy that may not go to

plan or may need additional support upon return, e.g. PND and miscarriage. However, there is not a legal framework to empower HR to support these needs.

LMs agreed that their role is to create a culture where the returning mother feels comfortable in talking to them openly about anything, and returning mothers are aware that LMs are willing to be as flexible as possible with whatever their needs may be (LM 1/2/3). However, LMs stated that unfortunately motherhood is seen as a weakness in the organisation; therefore, some women may pretend to be ‘okay’ even if they are experiencing psychological distress (LM 2). It was established that once LMs have created a comfortable environment where returning mothers feel comfortable to talk about their psychological support needs post return, then it is the LM’s job to direct women to organisational facilities that they can seek or access for professional support, e.g. counselling service. For instance, LM3 stated:

“We have a HR team, we have occupational health. We have a counselling clinic as well at the university, so it's being able to say there are a sweet of options and ensuring people realise where they can go”.

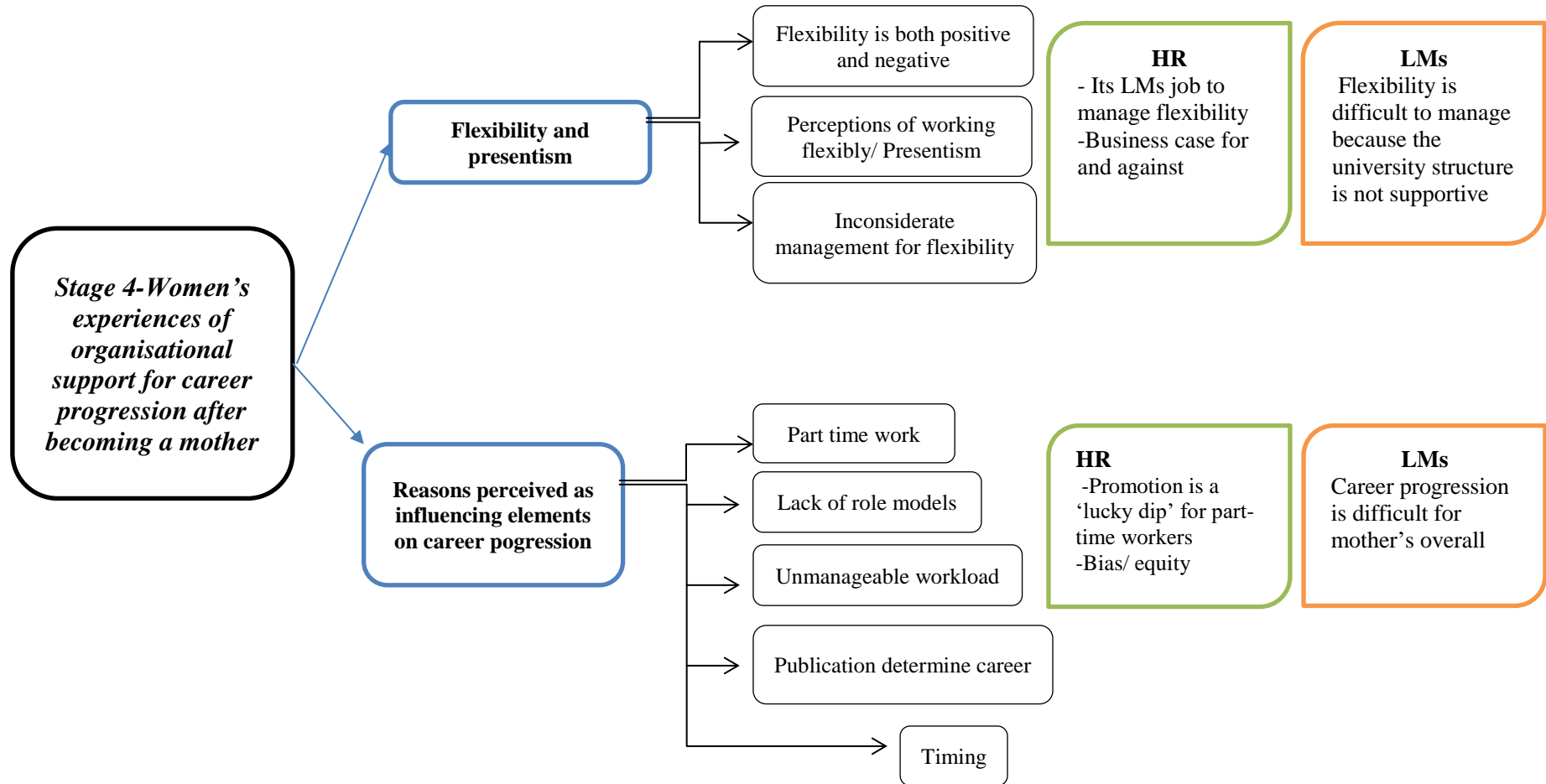
LMs emphasised that it is essential for people to be happy to come to work, and if someone is experiencing psychological distress, her efficiency will not be a hundred per cent. However, LMs are not qualified to provide psychological support for returning mothers. Therefore, their job is to have an open and supportive conversation and direct individuals to organisational facilities available. LMs further explained that there is a need for HR’s involvement at every stage of this process; the best type of support that LMs can provide is to be as flexible as possible. In that respect, HR’s involvement is vital to ensure maximum support is explored and implemented in regards to psychological support.

4.5 Stage 4- Motherhood and career progression

The fourth stage of the maternity journey was based around women academics’ experiences of progressing in their careers during motherhood. The findings revealed that flexibility is a significant contributing factor in career progression. Additionally, whilst flexibility is, in essence, a positive aspect of the academic profession, it has negative connotations. Moreover, various organisational practices and procedures hinder women’s academic careers.

HR contested that it is the LM's responsibility to manage and support mothers with flexibility, whilst LMs discussed insufficiencies in the organisational structures that hinder them from being as flexible as they wish. Additionally, all interviewed parties, including the women, HR and LMs, agreed that, due to some micro-level—but mainly meso-level—factors, career is inevitably impacted by motherhood. The findings are outlined in Figure 4.4 and discussed in reference to relevant literature in this section.

Figure 4.4: Stage 4- Motherhood and career progression



4.5.1 Flexibility and Presentism

Concerning managing motherhood and an academic career, flexibility was an essential factor for women (Cheung, 2014; Kinman, 2016). Hannah and Victoria described flexibility as a positive aspect of their job because of the option to work from home:

“Academics in most HE institutions have a higher autonomy over their timetable, and they can work from home. You don’t have to be in the office 9-5 and there are not many other jobs where you can do that.” (Victoria)

However, flexibility was mainly explained as negative because of its blurred boundaries between work and home; homeworking can mean working 24/7 (Sue) and it increases pressure to do ‘everything’ (Zara). This agrees with existing research that, whilst flexibility is seen as the ‘the solution’ in academia, there is also a presumption that academic time is almost infinitely malleable and infinitely extensible, with always something more ‘to do’ (Crang, 2007, p. 512; Sang et al., 2015). Further, excerpts from women’s narratives stated that:

“The thing with academia is that some things are really flexible, but then there is rigidity in the workload because deadlines just can’t change [...] so, yeah some things are flexible and some just not questionable!” (Maya)

“Academia is flexible as long as it doesn’t clash with something you can’t do, so they’ll say okay we’ll put you down to work an evening that is convenient for you, but I don’t have any evening that is convenient for me because I don’t have childcare!” (Aaliyah)

Flexibility appeared to be ‘double-edged’; whilst it was positive in some respects, other aspects, such as teaching and meeting deadlines, were completely inflexible. Moreover, in contrast to common belief, there was narrative of the culture of presentism (Rosie, Faith, Holly, Harriett, Emma and Grace). As Rosie expressed:

“There is a major culture of presentism my manager checks up on me to see if I am in the office or not. I can’t hang my coat in the door. It’s not allowed so that she can check up on me”

Rosie further explained that presentism significantly affected promotional aspects, “because if your face does not fit with the right people” it affects one’s career prospects. Even when not teaching, Rosie was expected to be physically present, and she was not allowed to work from home unless permission was obtained from her line manager.

Moreover, there was a “*pressured vibe*” (Aaliyah) in terms of the perception of colleagues “[...] *that the later you stay the harder you are working*” (Rosie). Harriett explained that she “[...] *had to fight people’s perceptions of [her] flexibility [because] leaving at 3pm is always looked upon as if you are not working hard enough, but no one sees you starting work at 7am*”. Williams (2004) reports this as a type of ‘attribution bias’, where colleagues may have previously attributed women academics’ absence from the office to the assumption that they are writing or at a conference, but after returning from maternity leave, may assume they are taking care of kids when absent, even if they are at the library working on a book. This reiterates the narrative of ‘the ideal worker’ and ‘gendered institutions’, and further confirms ‘the motherhood penalty’ (Baker, 2012).

There was also a reverse effect of the confident assumption that flexibility offers women a ‘choice’ to work from home. Hannah explained that she was encouraged to work from home, and she was “[...] *upset from the assumption of [her] department that [she] can work from home*”. She added, “*I can’t work from home because of my children!*”. Savigny (2014) explained this as cultural assumptions taking structural forms and expression. Additionally, Crang (2007) argued that whilst the ability to work from home has long been treasured as a part of academia, “[...] *maybe more staff will see ‘working at home’ not as the flexible solution to juggling home-work commitments but as a Trojan horse- letting the demands of academia in to private time*” (pg. 512–513). The present research contributes to theory by arguing that this is the negative side of flexibility; instead of its intended purpose of increasing perceived organisational support, flexibility may have the reverse effect.

Moreover, it was important that management made it easy to negotiate and approve flexible working hours, and that they were considerate of the limited hours of working mothers, as Faith explained:

“I was pushed around to speak to different people, and in the end, it wasn’t even approved. This is why I say that we need actual practical flexibility [...] We need them to be considerate of our restrictive hours.”

Additionally, emphasis was placed on the need for a manager to formalise any agreed flexible working arrangements for an academic with the timetabling team. This is because childcare constraints were not considered as a timetabling constraint. As such, it was problematic for working mothers, as Harriett explained:

“My line manager informally agreed to a 9am-3pm working pattern, and I was told not to formalise it, then the following semester I was put on to teach from 4pm-6pm! How can I do that? Who will pick up my child from nursery? Now I have no grounds to properly dispute because it was never formalised.”

In another instance, there was perceived sexism when negotiating flexibility. Ava said, *“I wanted to start teaching at 10 am and not at 9 am for childcare purposes, and I was told ‘you can’t change’. Then a male senior colleague asked for a late start to walk the dog and his was approved!”*. On the other hand, Harriett highlighted that, *“[...] rather than pure sexism there are no structures in place to allow people a better work-life balance [...]”*. Reay (2000, p. 19) argues that changing practice is very difficult when the context remains the same. She asserts:

“Academia, with its ethos of, at best, mutual instrumentalism, at its worst, individualistic, competitive self-interest and self-promotion lacks any intrinsic ethic of care, and this is extremely problematic for female academics committed to feminist ways of working”.

HR professionals’ views on this were similar to their views on other aspects of maternity- that managing flexibility is the responsibility of the line manager (HR 1/2/3/4/5). Communicating flexible working policies with line managers was reported as difficult; however, because there was a concern that if the policies are written down point by point on what line managers can or cannot do, then the managers can sometimes adhere to it rigidly, which may be worse for the returning mother. According to HR5 it is *“a tricky one to get right”* (HR5). Additionally, HR contested that there is a business case both for and against flexibility, but there is a need for a cultural change in order for flexibility to be practised more widely. Essentially, there is a need for a change in the attitude of management styles so that managers can be as flexible as they can be and yet remain focused on getting the results (HR 5). HR professionals demonstrated that it is important for line managers to be as productive as possible within the constraints of the service needs.

On the other hand, LMs contended that providing flexibility is difficult because whilst they (or their department) may be flexible, the university structure is not. This includes the centralised system of timetabling. Staff have to be available to teach between 9am and 6pm, which poses problems for childcare responsibilities. However, childcare is not considered a timetabling constraint, so this limits what the LM can do to support flexible working. Moreover, they have a business to deliver, which it makes it harder (LM3).

The timetabling system was described as rigid and fairly inflexible, meaning LMs had to make a very strong argument for exceptional circumstances. LM3 said, *“It is easier to return part-time than to return full-time and work flexibly”*. This agrees with scholar (e.g. Fagan, 2009, Tomilson and Dubin, 2010) existing that impractical flexible working arrangements and their perceptions are problematic for working mothers. They are problematic for working mothers to a) manage in terms of working flexibly because others are working around the clock, and b) compete with people who are working above and beyond full-time hours; *“so it’s a catch 22”* (LM3).

4.5.2 Organisational elements perceived as influential in career progression with motherhood

On a personal level, there was recognition that motherhood impacts one’s productivity because *“your mind is always full of too many things and you are always tired”* (Jasmine), alongside constant feelings of guilt for not paying enough attention to children over work (Sue, Justine, Aaliyah and Holly). Justine stated, *“Motherhood should be re-named guilthood”*. This is reported in the literature as a dialectical dilemma, which places stressful demands on women’s time and induces personal stress that results from attempting to balance these conflicting roles (Guendouzi, 2006; Liss et al, 2013; Henderson et al., 2016).

In keeping with this, there were related organisational structures and practices that were criticised for making career progression problematic for mothers. This, as a metaphor, is labelled a ‘firewall’ by Bendl and Schmidt, (2010), involving an image of discrimination as ‘virtual flexible spaces’ that cannot be touched; these boundaries are considered to be devised intentionally based on personal and organisational interests managed through structural characteristics (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010). The ‘firewall’ was evident in the findings of the present research. It revealed that motherhood inevitably impacted an academic career negatively, especially if one worked part-time because of lack of time allocated for research, which directly impacts publication and promotion due to the unmanageable academic workload.

From the outset, the lack of female role models in senior academic positions led to feelings of discouragement. For instance, Amy described a time when she was contemplating having a baby:

“I looked up and down the corridor, and there was no female faculty apart from the PA everyone else was a man. Two ideas came to my mind: 1) Why are there no women and I’m thinking of having a baby? 2) My baby decision could really really damage my career! [...]. I thought the reason why there are no women is because they couldn’t make it and I probably can’t either” (Amy)

The lack of female senior role models in her surroundings led Amy to question the possibility of having both a child and a career. Katie, on the other hand, was both a mother and a successful senior lecturer and Associate Dean of her department. She explained, however, that in her female-dominated department it was “[...] all men at the top [...] all the professors were men [and she] just got ‘lucky’”. This is reflective of broader HE statistics; the proportion of women in academic roles declines significantly as positions become more senior. Indeed, only 25% of professors are female (HESA, 2018).

From the outset, the readily accessible information to employers showing that women have taken time off for childbirth was a concern. Sue questioned, *“Do we need some positive discrimination here to allow women to have that time off on their CV because the baby is not going to feed itself is it?”* Numerous scholars (Coleman, 2011; Baker, 2016; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Hardy *et al.*, 2018; Huopainen and Satama, 2018; Ladge, Humberd and Eddleston, 2018) have claimed that women find it harder to progress in their careers when compared with their male counterparts due to a higher need to take time off if they have children, and negotiating the labyrinth of career challenges is often regarded as a problem for women to solve by themselves (Pradhan, 2018). On the contrary, it is argued that these are problems that should be addressed by the organisations presenting such barriers, which hinder women’s progress as opposed to men (Acker, 1990).

To address the issue of women academics’ under-representation in senior positions, the Athena SWAN agenda was established to support equality and diversity for staff (ECU, 2016). In the present study, Olivia and Katie perceived the Athena agenda as positive and impactful for their career progression. On the other hand, Amy and Harriett perceived Athena SWAN as an activity that is *“just on paper”*, especially since Amy described how she was experiencing *“major pregnancy discrimination”* while her university was applying for an Athena SWAN award. In connection with this, Cheung (2014) presents an interesting debate concerning whether rewards help institutions focus on gender inequality or whether the allure of funding shifts an institution’s focus onto getting an award, rather than genuinely committing to gender equality. Cheung’s (2014) research cites one advocate of equality and diversity working in HE who wishes to stay anonymous but stated that, *“[...] the mentality is that you get an Athena*

SWAN award by saying X, Y and Z, but not necessarily doing it” (pg. 57). While there are arguments for and against the effectiveness of Athena SWAN (Dickinson, 2013; ECU, 2015b) it does seem to encourage HE institutions to open up conversations on gender concerns.

Amy also recognised that Athena SWAN had not been around long enough to demonstrate positive results, and Munir *et al.*, (2014) reported that persistent barriers remain, impacting the delivery of institutional change. This includes the recognition that delivering cultural change remains hugely challenging in HE. In that sense, Athena SWAN is a step in the right direction and its long-term effects on internal cultural change will require further investigation.

In addition, there was recognition that an academic career is demanding, as Faith expressed “[...] *this is what makes coming back harder for returning mothers because I don’t just have a job I have a career and then some*”. This agrees with the view of Bailyn (2003) who explained that there are characteristics of the academic job that are particularly demanding, “[...] *an academic must fulfil multiple roles- teaching, research, service both to the university and to the profession, and that increases the level of demand*” (pg. 138). It is the struggle to balance both career and childcare that leads some women academics to choose one or the other. As Katie stated: *“I choose not to apply for a promotion because it is not the right time family-wise, even though it is the right time career-wise.”* The ‘biological clock’ and the ‘career clock’ seem to be set against each other at the same time. Moreover, it is extensively reported that women—and mothers in particular—tend to do the bulk of childcare and domestic work (Elliott, 2008; Fawcett, 2014) This inevitably gives women less time to pursue full-time careers and/or gain promotion (Baker, 2012).

The concern of the ‘time clash’ led Grace to be strategic. She ‘strategically’ planned to be promoted before having children because she said: *“I know after having children promotion will be really difficult and I knew many other colleagues who were putting off having children in order to be promoted before becoming a mother”*. Contrary to the prospect of strategically planning promotion before having children, Grace offered a different perspective. She claimed that in academia it was women of a certain age whose children had grown up and moved out who were progressing in academic careers, and for herself, she decided that:

“In academia, I need to take a step back and only really re-enter it properly after my children are older. That’s the problem here in academia because the

time when you should be putting in absolutely everything and establish your research profile is the time that you are actually having to take a step back”

Timing emerged as a significant concern for returning mothers wanting to establish an academic career, because there is a clash between family responsibilities and work responsibilities, which makes it twice as difficult to succeed.

Inevitably, research publications were at the forefront of issues when women narrated their experiences of progressing in academic careers (Gillard 2018). It appeared that the general academic mind-set posits that academic success is determined by the number of research papers published. Sue explained that:

“Publications count for everything, and this really puts you down as a mother because there is no time to publish. If you want to publish you have to put in lots of outside-of-work hours on research; however, if you want to be promoted you should not have to sacrifice time with your children.”

There was an unsaid expectation that research would be undertaken outside of university working hours, which is problematic for mothers with young children (Lillis & Curry, 2018). In line with this, Holly said she was allocated a “*so-called research day*”; however, due to her workload, she was unable to do any research during this allocated time. Holly further described this as ‘the norm’ in academia. The organisational assumption that research publications are more important than teaching was questioned, and it was further questioned why, if both research and teaching are existent in the job description, is only research rewarded? (Sue, Holly, Justine and Hailey).

In addition, publications are rewarded with more time to research, as Justine explained: “*Your request for more time to research is based on existing research therefore it is a vicious cycle, we cannot catch up.*” Therefore, due to the disadvantage of lack of time to engage in research in the first place due to childcare responsibilities, mother academics are continually disadvantaged. With regard to published research, women in the present study wished for a more balanced career, where their teaching was also rewarded, and noted that “*serious help is needed in speeding-up the catching-up process for returning mothers*” (Hannah) in regards to research publications. HR interviewees also recognised this issue and highlighted the importance of recognising equity over equality. This means taking positive action to support the implementation of supportive activities for those who may be disadvantaged, to help them

proceed in the same way as others. The same type of support for everybody is not sufficient (HR4). Furthermore, HR 5 passionately expressed that:

“It's absolutely recognised that we can't carry on like this where a big portion of our staff are not getting the time or the support to return under REF because actually they've got caring. Does that mean that we never get a chance to do those things, that we never get a chance to go to a conference in another country because we've got caring responsibilities or we're pregnant? It's just ridiculous so I know there is an awful lot of work happening there around that. And actually that doesn't necessarily always come from the organisation, there's pressure from outside saying, 'how many of your females return under REF? What's going on?' Which is great, it's really good”.

HR5 added that, although some charter marks can be a ‘box-ticking exercise’, the introduction of the Athena SWAN award has at least elucidated these issues. By being attached to research funding, Athena SWAN means that universities are forced to consider gender equality in HE statistics at the top level. This relates to the theoretical claim of Ely and Meyerson (2000) which proposes that organisations may attempt to revise the working culture through various experiments; however, there is indeed resistance to change. This indicates that institutional settings can create gender differences and may inadvertently disadvantage one group over the other; in this case, institutions need to actively—and consciously—work towards decreasing gender differences by providing quality support to those who may suffer because of gendered circumstances, such as motherhood.

There has been a debate on the relationship between being a successful researcher and a successful teacher, and whether teaching and research departments should develop separate from each other within the UK (Euwals and Ward, 2005). Research and teaching are often pitted against each other, with research emerging on top (Reay, 2000). There have been reforms on this front, such as the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2016, which links funding of teaching in HE to quality rather than quantity, as it did for research (Office for Students, 2018). However, as of yet, there is limited evidence of its impact (Gillard, 2018).

The element of ‘choice’ was also referred to with mixed perceptions. On the one hand, Lily said it was her choice not to be promoted to a professorship. She stated that there is a gender mentality difference over what is viewed as ‘success’; she said *“I think it's all a choice and what we view as success in a career. Most men see success as being at the top but women see success as having a balance and being happy”*. This relates to Hakim’s preference theory (1995) suggesting that most women chose to be ‘adaptive’, combining employment and family

work, or ‘home-centred’ rather than ‘work-centred’. Hakim (2004) explains that work-centred women were, and would continue to be, in the minority.

On the other hand, Priya contradicted this view of ‘choice’; she contested that *“My mum in the 1960’s made a choice and I’ve also had to make a choice between career and motherhood, so how have we progressed”*? Historically, a woman’s role was confined to motherhood, and any role or thought that deviated from this was seen as a threat to nature (Neff, 1929). The concept of women working has been essentially viewed as an attack on the traditional family set up and upon society as a whole (Hewett, 1958). Priya argued that, for many years, women in the workplace had to choose between having a career and bearing children, and she questioned how society and employers have progressed. She further explained that people with exceptional research careers tended not to have children, indicating that it was not so much about choice, but rather that it is not usually possible for mothers to excel in a research career because the research culture is generally geared towards a ‘boys’ club’. Likewise, a line manager’s opinion also concurred that *“[...] it is very convenient to say that it’s a choice but it clearly is not when you track the trajectory of people’s careers”*.

This lies in agreement with critiques of Hakim’s theory (e.g. Broadbridge, 2010; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010; Lewis and Simpson, 2017) who question its applicability and the idea that women have a completely ‘free’ choice with respect to career life or home life. They argue that women are unable to make real choices because they are constrained by childcare difficulties, social forces and institutional factors (Ginn, 1996). In keeping with this, Molly contested that:

“The university makes you feel like your career is for yourself, however; your career is only a career within the institution, so the university should create a structure where you can be promoted without sacrificing everything to do with your life outside of work”.

The requirement of having to research and publish outside of work hours assumes that a successful academic career is for the individual, and that workers should, therefore, use their own time to invest in it [a career]. Similarly, Molly said that she could not get her promotion because she did not have enough research output. She claims that she had been openly told to research in her “own time”. However, Priya’s argument remains that career development is mutually beneficial for the employee and the organisation and therefore the organisation should create a suitable structure in order to facilitate this. In agreement with this, HR highlighted the

importance for universities to cost and fund a research assistant for returning mothers so that their research publishing is not penalised for taking maternity leave (HR4).

Furthermore, extant literature recognises that many women return to work in part-time roles after having children (Atkinson & Ummary, 2013; Eagan Jr, Grantham, 2015). Whilst this should theoretically provide a solution for women who would like to combine caring with paid work, in practice this often translates into reduced opportunities for career progression, and may also force women to take up less senior and lower-paid roles despite maintaining the ambition to achieve in their career (Fawcett, 2014, p. 5). This organisational barrier is based on the premise that “*Trading down hours should not mean trading down status.*” (Equal Opportunities Review, 2014).

The findings of the present study concur with the latter stance. Part-time work was said to have a negative impact on promotional prospects (Priya and Molly) and it was argued that “*even on a fractional contract one should be able to be both; academic and mother. One shouldn't have to feel that just because I'm a mother now I can't be a successful academic*” (Priya). It was also questioned as to whether it is fair that part-time employees people are judged with the same criteria as full-time workers for promotions (Priya and Rosie). Molly questioned if it is fair for the organisation to look at research from the past four years for part-time workers, because “*[...] part-timers are generally women, generally mothers, so is there a discriminatory element there?*” At the same time, HR asserted that promotion is a case of luck for part-time working academics. It was suggested that, regrettably, a part-time academic has to plan their career according to the “*lucky dip*” of part-time opportunities emerging (HR 2/3). Furthermore, HR acknowledged that they can get complacent and assume that the university is a meritocracy; however, “*it is not as simple as that*” (HR 1/2/4). This aligns with Blackmore (2014) and Leonard and Malina (2017) who suggest that there is there scope for universities to ‘re-think’ research practices and expectations more realistically, in particular because it can inadvertently disadvantage mothers.

In relation to academic workloads, Barrett and Barrett (2011) pointed to a lack of transparency in universities, which allows cases of—often unwitting—discrimination to go undetected through the skewed allocation of types of work, strongly associated with promotion. This hints at the service and administrative tasks that take a considerable amount of work time but which are not activities taken into account when being considered for promotion. They argued that there are trends for “unwitting discrimination” at an organisational level in workload allocation, which is particularly challenging for mother academics.

The issue of unmanageable workload on a part-time contract was prevalent, in line with Deiana (2013) who asserted that the excessive workload that requires outside of ‘working-hours’ is significantly difficult for working mothers. It appeared that pro rata workload does not equate to the part-time working arrangement, which most returning mothers undertake, and that the work that takes up most of their time does not contribute to promotional prospects. For instance, Hannah explained that upon her return from maternity leave, her workload significantly increased, and she felt this was akin to a penalty for taking time off to have a baby. There were further complaints of being constantly overworked, being expected to ‘produce’ at the same rate as full-time staff, and to work evenings and weekends to get everything done without any financial reward or relevance to promotional prospects (Victoria, Holly and Molly).

It was contended that, instead, there should be a lighter workload upon return, or no additional responsibilities, for a smoother transition back to work. However, it was recognised that, regrettably, the academic culture rewards those who do not have a work-life balance. It is highlighted that a system that relies on allocating work that cannot be completed within work hours may tend to facilitate inequalities of career progression, with specific groupings, such as women are more vulnerable in the face of such an approach (Barrett and Barrett, 2011).

Line managers in this study agreed unanimously that career progression is difficult for academic mothers. However, they added that they are restricted in how they can rectify this. Furthermore, LM2 added that it is more nuanced – that at each stage, women dip slightly in what they have achieved, “[...] so when it comes to that point they feel that their achievements are not great enough to warrant applying for a professorship because they think they just won’t get it, and that is probably the truth of it”. This concurs with related literature that establishes how women are much less likely than men to see the benefits and importance of asking for what they want. Furthermore, it is reported that women can show reluctance to putting themselves forward for progression, even when they meet the stated criteria. This situation is exacerbated by inconsistent advice and support, or even by outright discouragement (Doherty & Mafredi, 2006).

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented women academics experiences and perceptions of organisational support throughout the four stages of their maternity journey and discussed them in line with related literature and theory. It has also set out the views of HR and LMs on women’s perceptions of organisational support throughout their maternity journey. The discussion shows

that women academics in the present study perceived insufficiencies in organisational support throughout their maternity journey. With this in mind, the issues raised within this chapter will be examined in closer detail within the final chapter of this study. Here, the researcher will use her own 'voice' to further cast light on the context investigated as well as discuss these insights in line with the aims and objectives of the research.

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

5.1 Introduction

This research study aimed to explore female academic's experiences of organisational support throughout their maternity journey. Specific focus was given to the elements of organisational support experienced by twenty-six female academics across five UK based universities. The participants were interviewed using a narrative approach for data collection and an extensive analysis was conducted using thematic narrative analysis. As a means of building further insight into the research domain, follow-up interviews were undertaken with five HR professionals and three line managers. Doing so allowed the researcher to gain a different managerial perspective, ultimately allowing for the development of a more holistic view. The key findings from the previous chapter included the perceived lack of support throughout each stage of the maternity journey and consequential career progression. The women's concerns were validated by HR who accepted that there was a lack of understanding and awareness when it came to the individual needs of women who 'policy' simply did not accommodate. Based on this, it can be concluded that organisational practices and procedures in the institutions included in this study in general are currently underdeveloped and fail to provide sufficient support.

This final chapter provides an overall summary of the thesis. It revisits the research objectives and explains how they have been achieved. It then describes the theoretical and practical contributions this research has made to academic knowledge. This will be followed by a discussion of the limitations of this research and recommendations for further studies. Overall, the research has established that significant elements of organisational support shape female academic's perceptions of support throughout their maternity journey and this potentially impacts on their future career progression. Overall, it helps fulfil objective 3. To evaluate collated accounts of support throughout maternity, in order to consider an alternative course of action.

5.2 Overall research summary and conclusions

The researcher was motivated to examine this area of study due to a growing interest in the lack of representation of female academics in senior academic positions (HESA, 2018). Coupled with this, the researcher was also interested on the impact of motherhood on career progression and sought to marry these two research areas in order to uncover aspects of organisational support throughout maternity. An extensive multi-level review of macro, micro,

and meso-level factors was therefore, conducted to establish their influence on female academics, especially the career trajectories of mothers.

As far as existing literature was concerned, there was evidence to suggest that motherhood was an impediment to career progression (Donovan *et al.*, 2005; Duxbury, and Higgins, 2005; Hoskins, 2010; Coleman., 2011, Kleven, Landais and Sogaard, 2018). Pursuing this trail of thought, it further emerged that women in academia faced a slew of organisational barriers (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2013; Peters, 2014); despite macro (e.g. a right to request flexible working and shared parental leave) (Kaufman, 2018), and meso level (e.g. the Athena SWAN agenda) (ECU, 2016) initiatives to support them. During the interaction with the literature, it came to light that there was limited research on female academics' experiences and perceptions on the nature of organisational support afforded to them throughout their maternity journey which, when combined, had a potential significant impact on their perceived future career progression. This study therefore sought to address this particular gap and sought to investigate the organisational mechanisms afforded to women academics throughout each sequential stage of their maternity journey.

To facilitate this overall aim, a narrative enquiry was adopted to elicit the experiences and perceptions of organisational support afforded to female academics throughout the following stages; pregnancy and maternity leave, transitioning back to work, post return to work, and eventual career progression as a mother. This approach was used to elicit authentic, detailed, and rich accounts from female academics through the medium of storytelling (Wengraf, 2001) This particular technique was chosen over the qualitative approaches because researcher was interested in finding out women's authentic stories of the elements of support that was important to them through their maternity journey, without instigating pre-determined aspects that may shape their perception of support. Additional interviews with a group of 5 HR professionals and 3 Line managers (LMs) provided a managerial perspective on female academics' experiences and perceptions of organisational support. This was important to gain an insight into the 'other side', and thus build a 'bigger picture;' of the topic under investigation. It was felt that this would imbue the research with a greater degree of validity given that the HR professionals and Line Managers were regarded as an extension of their organisations. Any criticism and grievances highlighted by the women were thus levied at these stakeholder groups and as a result, their inclusion was crucial to the study as it would allow for balanced and fair perspectives to develop.

The use of qualitative interviews as a data gathering tool aligns with the researchers ontological belief in critical realism, which assumes there is an objective reality that can only be understood through people's perceptions of that reality (Hunsinger, 1987), and an interpretive paradigm which assumes that reality can be 'socially' and 'specifically' understood (Guba and Lincoln, 1998)(Guba and Lincoln, 1998). This study relates to this because the researcher was interested in the academic's perceived support from their universities. In doing so, this provided researcher with a proverbial a 'window' into reality.

A number of theoretical constructs underpinned the study and provided a basis for the theoretical grounding of the analysis and findings. Some of the underpinning theoretical constructs include the idea of gendered institutions and the 'ideal worker' theory. The first of which refers to the belief that institutions are gendered and characterised by a dominant male culture (Acker, 1990), whilst the second relates to the notion that organisations prefer an ideal worker who gives priority to work (Acker, 1992; Bailyn, 2003). On the basis of these particular theories, it is upheld that after having children women can experience a motherhood penalty (Baker, 2012), and that being home-centred may be a choice.

Moreover, the research was driven by the theoretical assumption that certain social/organisational practices lead to unintended gendered outcomes (Ely and Meyerson, 2000) and that organisations should assess these practices if they are to ensure gender equality (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Perceived Organisational Support theory (POS), which posits there are various organisational elements that lead to increased perceived support among employees (Eisenberger et al., 2002), was therefore be subjected to scrutiny. The researcher was compelled to analyse these constructs in line with female academics' perceptions of organisational support to establish a deeper understanding of the organisational practices that can enhance support throughout the maternity journey and in future career progression.

'Falling through the cracks': Maternity and Progression

Women's detailed narratives of experiences throughout all four stages of their maternity journey, as outlined by the researcher, elicited rich and insightful findings regarding their perceptions of organisational support. Problems and organisational deficiencies in the provision of support were identified at each stage. In the *first stage*, there were perceptions of direct and indirect discrimination, insufficient arrangements made prior to maternity leave, different expectations of communication, and negative perceptions towards adoption. In the *second stage*, their experience was heavily dependent on the immediate department, for instance, the

LMs, colleagues and HR department, and there were related instances of planning an ideal academic baby due to the lack of a phased return. The *third stage* showed that both tangible (physical facilities e.g. childcare, breastfeeding) and intangible support (psychological support e.g. with miscarriage, post-natal depression) were essential aspects post return, but there was a general lack of awareness and acknowledgement of intangible support. The *fourth stage* revealed that motherhood inevitably affected career progression, primarily due to a culture of inflexibility and presentism, and there were several other organisational factors that affected working mothers such as part-time working, a lack of role models, pressure to publish, and an unmanageable workload.

The four stages discussed served to highlight the feelings, emotions and perceptions of women in academia once they enter a new phase of their lives. Alarming, the women experienced discrimination at the very onset of their journey and as they transitioned to the second stage, the lack of support really came to light. The research therefore finds that each phase of the maternity journey was riddled with issues and concern for the women, the culmination of the stress, inflexibility and all around poor experiences, meant that one of two outcomes was most likely. Feeling traumatised following the lack of support and fears of uncertainty meant that some women were put-off having another baby. Staying on at work meant that they would indeed stagnate due to the issues highlighted in stage four- emphasis on presentism, the lack of respect of work/home boundaries and the inability to accommodate mothers. In other instances, women were also likely to simply ‘fall through the cracks’.

To reiterate, this remains a major contribution of the research given that the domain had indeed identified motherhood as a potential catalyst in the career stagnation and lack of senior representation amongst women. This latter assertion has consistently been veiled under suggestions that this remains a ‘choice’ and motherhood is ultimately the ‘anti-career’- a fact that women simply have to accept and take responsibility for. That said however, this study emphatically argued against such assertions and instead argues that women’s experiences of maternity support within the halls of their organisations, ultimately determine whether or not women stay on the career-ladder. Organisations in academia have been found to inadvertently make the road to motherhood (maternity) extremely difficult. Upon reaching the end of this road, women are faced with what seems like another challenge ahead as they are faced with having to scale new peaks, now with children in tow. Women Academics are now confronted with the task of balancing increasingly large workloads (publications specifically for career progression in academia) with the demands of parenthood.

By contrast, interviews with HR and Line managers revealed that they were driven by wider economic and organisational imperatives relating to performance management and to which everything else was subordinated. They lacked training and were woefully ill equipped to understand the issues and act in a genuinely sympathetic fashion in their provision of support for maternity leave. During this process, both parties appeared to want to pass on the main responsibility to the other. However, the real culprit may well be the broader university and higher education policies that establish the framework within which they operate.

Bringing it all together: A discussion of the implications of the Findings

In line with the theoretical constructs identified in the literature review, the findings show that women's experiences were those of a gendered institution where their maternity needs were viewed as an inconvenience (Acker, 1990). They experienced the motherhood penalty through the perceptions placed upon them by management in relation to their maternity related needs (Acker, 1990; Baker, 2012). Furthermore, there was pressure on them to be an ideal worker, which reflects the public-private dichotomy that is problematic for mothers due to their childcare responsibilities (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). It was also described as 'convenient' to explain women's lack of progression to senior academic positions as a 'choice' (Hakim, 2004), and thus organisations need to create equal opportunities and equity for academic returners by assessing and revising the existing work culture (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). The findings extend POS theory by highlighting the significance of communication and mutual expectations between each party (women, HR, LMs); they also show that managerial attitudes/ and non-verbal communication make a fundamental contribution to perceived support, and that an awareness and acknowledgement of psychological support is essential in increasing employees' perception of organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 2000). Moreover, organisational support may be limited given the wider national policies within which it operates.

Rather than seek to ostracise a particular group and provide glaring judgment on their neglect of women in academia, the research has sought to uncover a number of organisation specific intricacies and machinations that contribute to the advancement of women in academia. It is felt that these are crucial to the research as a whole regardless of whether they may appear as being somewhat 'generic'. By this, the researcher acknowledges that often issues around perception, asymmetries of power and departmental struggles tend to make up the very fabric of organisational politics. Indeed the latter will persist regardless of time and era, however perhaps it is our acceptance of such 'politics' and our general apathy towards this phenomenon

that has contributed to the difficult and painful experiences relayed by women in academia. Issues such as micro-aggressions, off-hand discriminatory remarks and a lack of 'effort' on the part of line managers and HR could perhaps be viewed as the culmination of organisational politics when left unchecked. Indeed, the allegations and claims that emerged during the interviews raise call for concern, particularly as the negative experiences have made such a mark on the psyche of the women academics that some have simply decided not to have any more children.

It is even more alarming that discussions with management brought to light some undercurrents of apathy; this perhaps casts light on the lack of orientation towards universities 'human' resources and more towards set-policy, rules and frameworks. To clarify, here the research refers to the focus on doing things by the 'book' as opposed to treating expecting mothers as individuals with their own set of unique needs and concerns. The discussions with the female academics further highlighted the fact that they themselves attributed the lack of support and attention during such a crucial period as being an influential reason that women find it difficult to progress to senior positions in academia. To state the participant verbatim- '*female academics fall through the cracks*', when referring to the maternity stages and the impact the lack of support actually has. The researcher at this stage raises the question- would there be more equal and proportional representation at senior levels in academia had motherhood been facilitated and given the due support? The findings certainly make a case for this as the women acknowledge that this is a crucial period in any woman's life and ultimately, organisational support and nurturing is likely to act as a 'bridge' which would allow women to traverse the glass 'ceiling' that they so commonly face.

Ultimately, the researcher uncovers the crucial nature of the maternity stage and just how this influences and impacts upon the psyche of the women in academia. The lack of support and the sheer distress and uncertainty they face particularly during the penultimate and final stages, raises questions to the current state of the sector. The academic sector can be considered the lifeblood of any functioning, progressive and successful society. When taking this into account, it seems almost incredulous that such a sector fails to nurture the very people that it relies on. The academic sector is unique in that it relies on intangible output such as thoughts, ideas, hypotheses and propositions, hence it is crucial that those responsible for generating such output are granted the due respect and consideration. How then, do we find ourselves amidst such gross inequality whereby an entire gender is ignored and undermined through a rigid set of policies and practices simply for bringing life into this world?

The research domain has struggled with empirical evidence into this phenomenon despite women lamenting the fact that a lack of support consistently led them to shelve their career aspirations within academia. Baker (2016) expressed alarm at the continuing and ever persisting gender pay gap that has existed within academia over the course of four decades; this pay gap has gone unfettered throughout this period despite family friendly initiatives and supporting policy. Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2014) argued that the gender disparity in senior representation in academia is largely a result of the gendered institution. Much like the findings of this present study, the authors regard male-dominated networks and a general lack of relatability to the strife faced by expecting mothers as being a significant factor in their lack of senior representation. The latter study focused on positions in Science and Technology and further found intimidation and harassment as being a continual issue faced by working mothers. The present findings testify to the role gender played in facilitating ease and support during crucial stages of maternity as women dominated departments were revealed as being far more supportive, empathetic and understanding in comparison to male dominated spaces. Similarly, the narrative interviews as part of this research echoed Ashencaen-Crabtree and Shiel's (2018) attempt at explaining the gender gap in senior positions within academia. The latter authors suggest that gender constructs and their negative impact on interpersonal and institutional strategies continue to perpetuate the schism that emerges within academia.

The present study sought to address this very gap and bring to light the specific experiences of women in UK universities. The culmination of the researcher's efforts coincide with recent insights offered by Kleven et al., (2018); the authors' examine Danish data across the past three decades to conclude that a 'child penalty' indeed exists. This penalty refers to the fact that women in Denmark have consistently behind their male peers once they gave birth whilst this diminished the probability of career advancement. Whilst these findings served to validate those of present study, Kleven et al., (2018) failed to examine the crucial maternity period, rather the authors disappointingly attribute this phenomenon to 'preferences' and generational conditioning which has led to women 'choosing' to rear children in place of a career. These findings however leave the researcher feeling a sense of unease as they fail to account for the underlying organisational related factors that lead women to make this 'choice' and ultimately 'choose' their children. One could go further and question the absolute terms that women have to face when it comes to children and their career and why institutions balk at the idea of affording them such opportunities?

5.3 Achieving the aim and the objectives of this research

The general aim of this research was to extend existing organisational support theories to female academics, focusing especially on the nature of organisational support provided throughout the maternity journey and how this influences career progression among female academics.

Specifically, *this research aimed to investigate the perceived support afforded to female academics throughout their maternity journey in selected UK universities*

This overall aim was achieved by meeting the three objectives adopted at the start of the study. This section summarises how each of the objectives were met and the conclusions that can be drawn.

5.3.1 Existing Elements to Support Women, Mothers and Academics

Objective 1: *To establish existing elements that shape female academics experiences of motherhood*

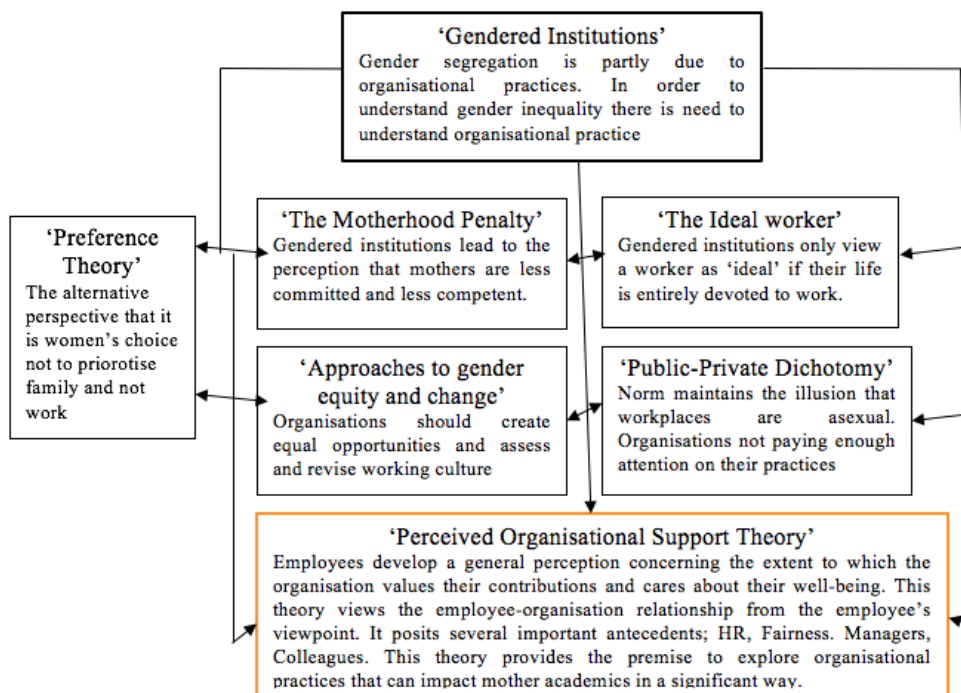
In fulfilling the first objective, the research literature has revealed that women's, in particular mothers', participation in the UK workforce has generally improved in the recent years. The introduction of (HESA, 2018) various government policies including; the Equality Act (2010), shared parental leave policies, and the right to request flexible working have contributed to this advancement and continue to encourage working mothers (Kaufman, 2018, Atkinson, 2017) . At the micro-level, however, women are reported to lack the confidence to put themselves forward for promotion, they often experience working mother's guilt, and continue to carry out most of the household work at home. These factors can all impede their career progression (Guendouzi, 2006, Liss et al., 2013; Fetterolf and Rudman, 2014; Part el at., 2013).

Most importantly, at the meso-level research has focused on organisational mechanisms and theories that influence female academics' career progression. It showed that women find it harder than their male counterparts to get ahead in their careers due to their need to take time off when they have children (Coleman, 2011; (Baker, 2016; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018). These organisational barriers include: difficulty in managing a work-life balance (Heijstra, Steinthorsdottir and Einarsdottir, 2017; Hardy *et al.*, 2018). Inflexible working arrangements (Cheung, 2014; Kinman, 2016), and organisational issues surrounding part-time working (Equal Opportunities Review, 2014), breastfeeding (Daud et al., 2017; Hunter et al., 2018), and

others that hinder career progression. It was apparent that taking time off for maternity, and the structural barriers that academic mothers experience, hinder their career progression despite wider government level policies and initiatives such as the Athena SWAN agenda (ECU, 2016) which are designed to enhance gender equality.

Additionally, the researcher reviewed various theoretical constructs that explain why women continue to experience inequality in the workplace. These include the following:

Figure 5.1: **Theoretical template**



(Source adapted from: Acker, 1990; Bailyn 2003; Baker, 2012; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Hakim, 1995,2004, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2015)

The theories that were discussed contended that women operate in gendered institutions made for and by men; therefore, there are expectations placed upon women to work in the same way (Acker, 1990; Sallee, 2012; Mihaila, 2018). Thus, when women become mothers their careers are penalised (Baker, 2012; Bygren et al., 2017). A contrasting argument has been made that this is a choice (Hakim, 1994; 2004; 2015), although this has received criticism (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010, Lewis and Simpson, 2015). Additionally, there are reported organisational practices that lead to unintended consequences (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Therefore claimed organisational practices should promote gender equality. Particularly

influential in making sense of the data was Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger and Ford, 2015), which views the employee-organisation relationship from the employee's point of view. It addresses factors such as HR, colleague, and supervisory support which leads employees to perceive their organisation as supportive or unsupportive.

Thus, there are issues at multiple levels that explain women's lack of representation in senior academic positions and place an emphasis on motherhood and the structural barriers generally faced by working academic mothers (Duxbury and Higgins, 2005; Hoskins, 2013) Baker, 2016; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Hardy *et al.*, 2018; Huopainen and Satama, 2018;. There is a lack of understanding as to what kind of organisational support is provided throughout the maternity journey, which is a crucial part of a working mother's life and career. Consequently, a gap in the literature was identified which would greatly benefit enhance the current understanding of female academic's under-representation in senior academic positions. This was achieved by collecting empirical qualitative data and addressing the second objective.

5.3.2 The Women's Narratives

Objective 2: *To examine female academics accounts of support before, during and after maternity*

Using narrative enquiry, the second objective was achieved through an investigation with twenty-six female academics that had experienced the maternity process in a UK university. The detailed narratives of women's experiences and perceived support throughout four stages of their maternity journey are considered in turn in this section.

❖ Stage one: Concluding female academics' perceived organisational support during Pregnancy and Maternity leave

Findings in the first stage revealed perceptions among women of direct and indirect discrimination against being pregnant. This supports existing literature which claims there is persistent discrimination in the workplace (Gatrell, 2013; House of Commons, 2016; Vonts et al., 2018), especially in universities (Thornton, 2003; Gatrell, 2013). There was a general lack of knowledge and negative perceptions towards taking adoption leave (Creedy, 2001) and many women experienced difficulties due to a lack of maternity cover arrangements (James, 2007). Research also shows that colleagues typically cover work during maternity leave (Williams, 2004) and that a lack of maternity cover may reinforce gender divisions (Patrice, Buzzanell and

Liu, 2005; Mihailia, 2018). There were also issues around communication during maternity leave, even though it is often contested in the literature that women should be able to negotiate the level of communication they engage in throughout their maternity leave (James, 2007).

❖ **Stage two: Concluding female academic's perceived organisational support when returning back to work from maternity leave**

The second stage of the maternity journey revealed that the return to work experience was heavily dependent on the immediate organisational context, including the 'ideal academic baby' phenomenon. This finding contradicts previous literature that identified the 'May baby phenomenon' (Wilson, 1999; Armenti, 2004) whereby May is presented as the ideal time to give birth because it was less disruptive to the academic calendar and to colleagues. However, the findings of these studies focused on academia as the priority, whereas this study focused on women's needs as the priority. The nature of line managers also emerged as a critical contributor to the experience of support when returning to work. Overall, the findings revealed two dominant types of LMs that were based on characteristics and attributes that affect the support women perceive they receive. This accords with research that argues a manager's gender and personal beliefs (e.g. feminists/ family-friendly, etc) affects how they manage and how others then respond to their management (Winter, 2009; Deem and Brehony, 2003).

The organisational culture in a university is structured at the departmental level (McAleer and McHigh, 1994; Floyd, 2016). This study revealed that experiences in female dominated departments were generally perceived as positive (Sheppard and Aquino, 2017). while experiences in male dominated departments were generally perceived as negative. However, there were also instances of 'Queen Bees' (Staines et al., 1974)- female colleagues who were perceived as 'honorary men' and unsupportive (Bagihole and Goode, 2001). This research has found that this informal culture acts both favourably (female department) and unfavourably (male department) for women returning to work from maternity leave. Additionally, the involvement of HR in maternity was perceived as insufficient and minimal; administrative rather than supportive; and as implementing ineffective policies or policies that existed on paper which perished in practice. These findings contradicted claims in the literature that HR's role was that of 'understanding' and 'effectively' managing individuals in the workplace (Schaper, 2004), primarily because it was the line managers who managed, not HR. It also contradicts Bratton and Gold's (2017) claim that HR professionals work to replace older, mainly administration-based personnel management functions so that they can identify the most

appropriate culture for their workplace. Although this was the hope expressed by women in this study, their experiences were of the opposite scenario.

❖ Stage three: Concluding female academic's perceived organisational support after return to work from maternity

The findings in stage three focused on the perceived and tangible support required in relation to physical and psychological needs. The absence of breastfeeding facilities was a compelling concern. Breastfeeding facilities were perceived as impractical, lacking privacy, and of a low standard. This strengthens the claim that women's return to work can be a significant barrier to continued breastfeeding (Wallace, 2006; Daud et al, 2017;). Employers are therefore urged to do more to support breastfeeding by implementing policies and practices that promote continued support (Weber et al., 2011; Hardy et al., 2018). Moreover, this study uncovered perceptions around the difficulty and lack of support experienced whenever children (specifically young nursery-going children) fell ill. This agrees with reports which shows that working parents suffer when their children fall ill (Phillips, 2004) and the burden of inadequate paid sick leave falls heaviest on mothers (Lovell, 2004).

This study found there was a substantial unmet need for leave to care for ill children. Furthermore, attendance at conferences and general work-related travel was also perceived as lacking organisational support and an impediment to career progression (Lipton, 2018, Calisi, 2018). This strengthens Ramirez et al.'s (2013) claim that the conference arena is a gender-neutral space where the specific needs of women as consumers are not well recognised (Fetterolf and Rudman, 2014). Childcare in general was problematic This is reflective of a widely expressed concern that childcare costs in the UK are unbelievably expensive (Ronzulli, 2014; Del Boca, 2015;de Muizon, 2018).), and that childcare is positioned as a woman's rather than a parent's issue (Savigny, 2014; Andringa et al., 2015). This study therefore contributed to the literature, particularly in an HE context, by exposing women's disappointment that childcare was not recognised as a timetabling constraint, and that on-campus childcare needed to be of a high standard and practically accessible.

Regarding the psychological aspects of women's experiences of returning to work, childbirth and motherhood have been identified as potentially vulnerable periods for women in terms of their mental health (Cust, 2016; Williams, 2013; Carter et al., 2018). These included feelings that motherhood was invisible (Bagihole,1993; Akass & Duthie, 2016) and of isolation after return to work. There was also a strong desire among women for a support network (Bagihole, 2007) to overcome such isolation. There was also a lack of support for post-natal

depression (PND) after a return to work, even though PND is identified as a major public health concern (Royal College of Midwives, 2015). Similarly, although miscarriage is recognised as a life-altering event for a mother (Hazen, 2003; Moulder, 2016), and its psychological effects are recognised as similar to the bereavement process (Conway, 1995; Hutti, 2005; Evans, 2012), there was a general lack of awareness and overall support for this issue. Winegar (2016) argued that there is societal and organisational silence on the reality of miscarriage and organisations need to do more to provide support in this area (Hazen, 2003; Winegar, 2016; Porshitz and Siler, 2017).

❖ Stage four: Concluding female academic's perceived organisational support in gradual career progression with motherhood

The fourth stage of the maternity journey revealed that motherhood inevitably influenced career progression among female academics (Cheung, 2014; Kinman, 2016). This is due to the impractical management of flexibility and the existence of a strong presentism culture (Henderson et al., 2016). Furthermore, various organisational factors also hinder academic career progression for mothers, including part-time working, publications, and workload allocation. Flexibility appeared to be 'double edged' in that, while it had the potential to be the best part of an academic's job, it also had negative connotations (Williams, 2004). Academic time is reported as being almost infinitely malleable and infinitely extensible (Crang, 2007; Sang et al, 2015); therefore, the privilege of working from home is argued instead to be a 'Trojan horse' that allows the demands of academia to impinge on private time (Crang, 2007).

The lack of female role models in senior academic positions was also a source of discouragement. This is reflective of broader HE statistics which show that the proportion of women in academic roles declines significantly as positions become more senior. Indeed, only 25% of professors are female (HESA, 2018). To address the issue of female academics' under-representation in senior positions, the Athena SWAN agenda was established to support equality and diversity among staff (ECU, 2016). There are debates as to whether such awards help the gender equality agenda or are merely a 'tick box' exercise (Cheung, 2014). Nevertheless, although there are arguments for and against the effectiveness of Athena SWAN (Dickinson, 2013; ECU, 2015), the findings of this research suggested that it does seem to encourage HE institutions to open conversations relating to gender concerns, although its impact is yet to be seen in full.

Furthermore, there is widespread recognition that an academic career is demanding (Bailyn, 2003; Henderson et al, 2016). The findings of this research revealed that the ‘biological-clock’ and the ‘career-clock’ seem to be set against each other at the same time, and that working in the evenings and weekends was problematic for mothers with childcare responsibilities. It has been argued that a system which relies on allocating work that cannot be completed within working hours may tend to facilitate inequalities in career progression with specific groups, such as women and carers, who are therefore more vulnerable as a result (Barrett and Barrett, 2011; Lillis & Curry, 2018). Furthermore, when women narrated their experiences of progressing in their academic careers, research publications were a primary concern. The general academic mind-set is one that perceives academic success as determined by the number of research papers published. However, the women in this study wished for a more balanced career where their teaching was also rewarded. There has been considerable debate about the relationship between being a successful researcher and being a successful teacher (Euwals and Ward, 2005). Research and teaching are often pitted against each other, with research emerging on top (Raey, 2000). There have been several reforms on this front, such as the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2016 (Office for Students, 2018); however, as of yet, there is limited evidence as to its impact (Gillard, 2018).

Women in this study also questioned the idea of a ‘free-willed’ choice with respect to combining an academic career with motherhood, as incompatible organisational circumstances render this anything but. This view aligns with critics of Hakim’s theory (e.g., Broadbridge, 2010; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010; Lewis and Simpson, 2015) who question its applicability and the idea that women have a completely ‘free’ choice with respect to their career life or their home life. They argued that women were unable to make real choices because they were constrained by childcare difficulties, social forces, and institutional factors (Ginn, 1996). This appeared to hold true for the women in this study.

Another organisational barrier identified in the literature is the premise that trading down hours can mean trading down status (Equal Opportunities Review, 2014; Eagan Jr, Grantham, 2015). The perceptions in this study revealed that working part-time had a substantially negative impact on academic mothers. Working part-time meant working full-time but on part-time pay. The workload was unmanageable and there was a lack of support or initiatives to support career progression when working part-time (Deianna, 2013). This is in line with Barrett and Barrett’s (2011) view that a lack of transparency in universities allows cases of—often unwitting—discrimination to go undetected through the skewed allocation of different types of work, which is strongly associated with promotion. These findings shed light

on the ‘firewall’ metaphor (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010) which presents an image of discrimination as ‘virtual flexible spaces’ whose boundaries are devised intentionally based on personal and organisational interests and managed through structural characteristics (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010). The ‘firewall’ was evident in the findings of this research.

5.3.2.1 The Research Gap addressed through objective 2

Relating this back to the research gaps identified as well as the theoretical framework that underpins the research, it emerges that the ideal worker theory remains exclusionary when it comes to mothers in academia. Whilst a motherhood penalty does indeed exist and institutions emerge as being inherently gendered, universities appear to have grossly underestimated just how much lack of support during the maternity journey, as opposed to after the birth, serve to prevent women from scaling the career ladder. The findings revealed that perceptions of support received from the moment they revealed their pregnancies, greatly went on to shape their decision to return to work as well as ease/heighten emotions associated with doing so – guilt, anxiety etc.

An examination of women’s maternity journey, revealed that experiences of return to work were contingent upon the support of colleagues and how co-workers received their news and subsequent departure. Further to this, upon returning to work, there was little evidence to indicate that organisational support was provided in helping the women get back on track with their careers. This crucial finding thus helps narrow the gap in our understanding around the crucial role of organisational actors in the return to work experience of women further highlighting the importance of improved organisational support.

Part-time work which has also tended to be positioned as a solution for new mothers further emerges as being disruptive to any one with career aspirations within academia. Academic success heavily rests on research and one’s ability to devote time to this endeavour. Working mothers are simply unable to meet these demands; the perception of working part-time means that their employers perceive them as having ample time which can be divided neatly between work and child rearing. This however is far from the case as the findings reveal. The literature also revealed a gap in research dedicated to women in senior roles within an academic setting- the research subsequently provides evidence to suggest that this is largely due to the presence of a motherhood penalty.

For those who try to circumvent the penalty, conception is planned around periods which are considered optimal in that their work is subject to minimal disruption. That said

however, this phenomenon only serves to highlight the lack of institutional support offered to women in academia as they have to resort to fitting childbirth and pregnancy around their careers. This only serves to enforce the view that academic institutions are indeed gendered, with male academics seldom having to plan their year in advance around something as natural as childbirth.

Theories such as the ideal worker appear to be intrinsically engrained into the institutional fabric of academia- part-time work is simply not supported and the gendered institution leaves new mothers feeling isolated and alienated. From this we can - conclude that actually all the foundational theories that maybe outdated are actually still prevalent. The next section outlines the findings relevant to achieving Objective 3.

5.3.3 Towards an Evaluation

Objective 3: *To evaluate collated accounts of support throughout maternity, in order to consider an alternative course of action*

One the basis of the outcomes of the first two objectives, it was possible to develop possible recommendations for organisations in line with the needs expressed by the women. In this respect, the data analysis and discussion for Objective 2 highlighted various organisational elements that women deemed essential in supporting maternity yet were lacking. The researcher then presented these findings to HR and line managers with the intent of obtaining a managerial perspective on this issue. This facilitated a thorough examination of the organisational elements that shape organisational support for female academics throughout their maternity journey This yielded ten conclusions, each of which are now presented in turn.

1. Managerial attitudes and non-verbal communications were key elements of perceived support

There was an attitude among managers that pregnancy can lead to incompetence and that the arrangement of maternity cover is not a valuable business expense. Women perceived the unfavourable attitude of pregnancy by supervisors (or colleagues) as an indication that the organisation disfavoured them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Notably, there was a strong emphasis on the disfavoured non-verbal communication or attitude of managers. Consequently, female academics experienced guilt and perceived both discrimination and a lack of organisational support at the micro-level. This aligns with POS theory, in that favourable discretionary treatment, effectively communicated support from upper management, supervisory support,

and monitored procedural justice are the main factors that contribute to perceived support. Specifically, the current research contributes to POS theory by showing that it is the attitudes towards maternity rather than procedures that have a greater impact on perceived support. Procedures may simply be the by-product of attitudes, and positive attitudes towards pregnancy and maternity leave can drive improvements in organisational support.

2. Making reasonable organisational adjustments when managing maternity was a crucial aspect of perceived support

The theoretical implications of the ‘ideal time to have a baby’ phenomenon are deeply embedded in the concept of the gendered institution (Acker, 1992). This is because something as natural as childbirth, which has existed since time immemorial, is still not a norm; in fact, it is often seen as an inconvenience to the academic calendar. Moreover, it strengthens the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990) because an academic returner wanting a phased return is not somebody who is devoting their life to work, and the experiences reported in this study showed that having family responsibilities and needing an adjustment were not generally supported. The public-private dichotomy also seemed to be at play here, as the organisational norms maintained an illusion of the workplace as asexual (Meyerson and Ely, 2000); the findings showed there was organisational silence on the requirements for reasonable adjustments post-maternity- such needs are almost non-existent in the illusion of an asexual world.

There was also a narrative around the requirement to be more involved in maternity cover arrangements. The implications of this narrative are that women wish to be involved and to negotiate choices around their individual needs during pregnancy and maternity. Moreover, workplace pregnancies are a natural occurrence that might involve temporary forms of accommodation; organisations should therefore not find themselves in opposition with feminine interests by positioning workplace pregnancies and maternity leave as abnormal events (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004).

3. The autonomous position of line managers on managing maternity exacerbated chances of unfairness

The gender, overall characteristics, and personal experiences of line managers seemed to influence the nature of the support afforded to women. For instance, there were male and female dominated departments that afforded differing levels of support to mothers, confirming the strong contribution of colleague support to POS theory.

In line with POS theory, managerial support was also a crucial factor informing the perception of organisational support among female academics. POS theory is also extended with the addition of ‘types of manager,’ who expressed different attitudes towards supporting maternity that were influenced by their gender and personal characteristics. Deem and Brehony (2003) agree and have questioned whether ‘new managerialism’ was simply a gender-specific set of practices influenced by dominant masculinities and created and implemented by male managers. They found that male managers preferred their own professional identity and self-regulation to institutional or HR policies (Winter, 2009). For these managers, their personal managerial decisions were grounded in their disciplines and their overarching biases, which often overrode the commitments of their organisation to equality of opportunity.

This discussion is relevant to Acker’s mechanism for maintaining or creating a gendered institution through interactional processes or ‘doing gender’ (Acker, 1992), which suggests that institutional settings can create gender differences and may inadvertently disadvantage one group in favour of the other. In this case, female academics returning to work after maternity leave have had an experience their male-counterparts would not have had and thus they were inadvertently disadvantaged, resulting in unfavourable (or favourable if they work in a supportive female department) treatment.

Being at ‘the mercy of line managers’ also meant that the women academics in this study experienced unfair practices when returning to work from maternity leave. Those who had supportive managers experienced an unfair advantage, and those who had unsupportive managers experienced an unfair disadvantage. The LM’s gender, personal life style choices, and characteristics were said to influence their support towards maternity management, albeit not exclusively. The research literature and interviews with HR revealed that universities are heading towards more controlled and autonomous systems of New Managerialism, although it was recognised there may be issues with this. Previous research suggests that Line Managers should be more comprehensively trained to eradicate unfair practices. By contrast, in this study Line Managers insisted that the university and HR should reconsider giving them this type of exclusive responsibility because, as academic-managers, they are unique, atypical managers and their demands are more complicated.

This finding aligns with validates and strengthens POS theory, specifically the theory of ‘justice’ (Rawls, 1999) which enshrines the belief that fairness contributes strongly to perceived support among employees. In particular, it relates to interactional justice which argues that the perceived fairness with which decisions are enacted by authority figures should be fostered by

dignified and respectful treatment. It is further added that those in positions of responsibility should ideally offer honest and adequate explanations to those around them (Bies and Moag, 1986; Bies, 2001). The current research goes some way to challenge the assumptions underlying this narrative. For instance, for some women, HR managers- the ‘authority figures’, were themselves discriminatory (by ending a fixed-term contract before the due date because of pregnancy). This raises two main concerns: 1) how (and why) can ‘authority figures’ be honest, informative, and explain their decisions when they are the ones being discriminatory? 2) When the authority figures are dishonest and discriminatory, whose role/ responsibility is it to provide dignified, respectful, and honest explanations to employees? Therefore, to increase interactional justice and, ultimately, organisational support, the system whereby authority figures hold exclusive autonomy requires reconsideration.

4. The gendered divide of departments influences perceived support

The findings align with POS theory’s assumptions that the culture and perceptions of colleagues are an important contributor to perceived support; however, this finding also goes some way to highlight the important and potential influence on perceived organisational support of the dominant gender in the department. Although this research cannot be generalised, the fact that the women in this study who belonged to a female oriented department generally experienced support while women who belonged to a male dominated department experienced a lack of support, or even discrimination, indicates that the gender of the department (or colleagues) can contribute to the level of perceived support. This suggests that female academics returning to work after maternity leave in male dominated departments may require additional support to facilitate a smoother return. This strengthens the argument that a lack of accountability within universities gives departments and individual academics a degree of autonomy that leads to a pervasive and powerful informal culture that can act against women’s interests.

5. Lack of communication and transparency between the three parties (HR/LMs/Women) leads to different expectations regarding each other’s role in managing the maternity process

Notably, women academics were disappointed with HR’s role in the maternity process. They perceived HR as reactive rather than proactive, and as both administrative and inefficient. HR viewed their role as advisory and expected LMs to manage maternity. By contrast, LMs believed it was unfair to delegate this responsibility to them because they are not as familiar with the expertise of the legal framework as HR professionals are, and they are academic managers who cannot be compared to more typical types of managers. Although they believed

that training is crucial in eradicating the impact of individual managerial differences on women's experiences of returning to work, LMs explained that it is more important to reconsider the entire delegation of responsibility as the combined workload pressures on both managers and academics prevent them from being sufficiently supportive.

However, this raises an important question in that, if HR believe it is LM's responsibility to provide support for returning academic mothers, and LMs believe they are not resourced or equipped to provide that support due to other demands- who will support the returning mothers? HE institutions therefore need to work towards decreasing gender differences by providing quality support to those who may suffer due to gendered circumstances such as motherhood. This overview therefore contributes to POS theory by showing that 'managing role expectations' and communicating clear boundaries between each party's role in the maternity process can contribute strongly to perceived support. This is a recurrent theme in the 'blame-game' that arises between the two parties and is problematic for women going through maternity. Also important was the issue of different expectations regarding the amount of communication that should take place between the manager and the woman on maternity leave.

This strengthens the previous argument that a lack of accountability within universities gives a degree of autonomy to departments and individual academics that leads to a pervasive and powerful informal culture that can act against women's interests (Bagihole, 1993). POS theory is also related to *psychological contracts* in which employees and employers have a mutual expectation of inputs and outputs. Thus, if the employee believes that their loyalty and effort towards the organisation is higher than that given by the organisation towards them, this could lead to a negative perception of the organisation that results in dissatisfaction and/or a lower level of performance (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003).

6. A high standard of physical facilities that are meaningful, practical and accessible is required after return from maternity leave

Tangible support for physical facilities includes on-campus childcare and breastfeeding facilities. This is rooted in the theoretical implications of the gendered institution with respect to an ideal worker. Gender is ever present in the process, practices, images, and ideologies of the organisation (Acker, 1992), and this finding extends POS theory by highlighting the fact that even when formal systems are in place (e.g. on-campus nursery) to support mothers, their quality and accessibility is essential for increased perceived support. The overall finding regarding women's experiences of tangible support (or physical facilities) revealed that women

not only considered it important that the university provided such facilities (e.g. for breastfeeding and childcare), but that these facilities should be practically accessible, of a high standard, and fit for purpose. Moreover, it was important that managers were aware and acknowledged women's needs for reasonable adjustments following their return from maternity leave. However, HR and LMs placed the responsibility for managing physical resources on each other, and the lack of such facilities on organisational and governmental policies.

7. Acknowledgement and awareness of psychological support following return from maternity leave was a significant element of perceived support

Support related to the psychological aspects of women's return to work was not extensively reviewed in the literature. The findings of this research revealed that there is a lack of awareness and acknowledgement from the organisation regarding the psychological aspects of support required by women after their return. Additionally, the views of HR and LMs on this issue showed the importance of formulating macro-level and meso-level policies to support women's psychological needs post return. There is also a need to instigate change in the cultural stigma attached to events during maternity that may not go to plan. This finding is deeply rooted in the gendered institution concept where women feel 'left out' because the experiences attached to their psychological needs post maternity are still not considered the norm. Moreover, it highlights the importance of addressing a returning mother's psychological needs in terms of organisational support. According to female returners, such support was either not experienced at all or experienced to a poor standard. Intangible support (or awareness of psychological needs) included experiences of post-natal depression and sadly, miscarriage, and there was an overall lack of awareness, acknowledgement, or mechanisms in place to support the vast array of mental health-related experiences related to post childbirth or a traumatic childbirth experience. Such experiences were rarely discussed or acknowledged by the organisation.

The notion of invisible motherhood is thus embedded in the gendered institution, the private-public dichotomy, and the ideal worker concept. It is a gender-specific experience and an important factor for mothers in this study. This extends POS theory by showing that an environment where women feel comfortable and confident discussing the motherhood aspect of their lives without fear of being perceived as less competent is a significant contributor to perceived organisational support. Academic mothers expressed a need for support networks to help with feelings of isolation after returning to work. This research contributes to this discussion in two ways. Firstly, it contributes theoretically by showing that, as well as the antecedents outlined by POS theory (colleague, supervisory, HR support, and fairness) having

'representation' and a *'sense of belonging'* to a group of people who have had similar experiences is an essential contributor to perceived organisational support. Secondly this research contributes *practically* because the researcher has founded and implemented a 'Women's Voice' support network in her own university which has been running successfully for over a year; this has acted as a strong agent of support for academic and professional women in the researcher's base university. (For more information, see <http://staff.salford.ac.uk/newsitem/5645>.) A practical contribution has therefore been made as a direct result of this research.

The findings of this study also showed that there was either no allocated body for women to speak to regarding post-natal depression at work or, if there was, it was unclear whom women could speak to. Furthermore, women expressed a preference for such organisations to proactively 'step-in' and check up on them. Thus, acknowledgement, awareness, and proactive support mechanisms for women returners who may have experienced miscarriage, or any other traumatic birth experience, are a crucial requirement of organisations. Findings relating to the need for psychological support have further highlighted the fact that post-natal depression (PND) is a difficult issue for returning mothers; it therefore requires additional acknowledgement and support from the organisation. The theoretical contribution this makes is that POS theory does not accommodate mental health issues, specifically PND, as an essential factor for perceived organisational support. It is vital for organisations to provide additional support for returning mothers who might be experiencing mental health issues, such as through supervisors and colleagues.

There was also a need to acknowledge the psychological support required for returning mothers who may have experienced a miscarriage. Consciously and pro-actively acknowledging and spreading awareness of the need to support such female staff members is an integral part of supporting returning mothers. The practical implication of this finding is rooted in the need to move away from two organisational assumptions; *a*) that the organisation's responsibility is only to support a working mother in balancing her work and family life, and *b*) the assumption that when a woman returns from maternity leave everything has gone smoothly and to plan. This finding has revealed that a returning mother could be suffering from a traumatic experience relating to her pregnancy, such as miscarriage, which affects her well-being at work after her return. Therefore, it is crucial for the organisation (university) to acknowledge this and have support mechanisms in place to ease the transition and gradually

settle women back into work after they return from maternity leave. This will benefit the returning mother's well-being and overall work performance.

8. A gender considerate view of influential organisational elements is required to support the balance between an academic career and motherhood

Another recurring theme was reflected in the unanimous agreement among women that specific organisational practices such as an emphasis on research publications, the unmanageable workload associated with balancing work and family, and the disadvantages attached to part-time working, all hinder the career progression of academic mothers. These findings are embedded in the theoretical constructs that formulate organisational practices as gendered and penalise women for motherhood. This study has highlighted the various organisational nuances that can impact an academic career after becoming a mother.

This not only emphasises the narrative of 'gendered institutions' in this research, it also broadens understanding of the fact that universities must pay attention to inconsistencies in formalising or informalising flexible working arrangements that inevitably lead to experiences of unfairness and discrimination. Ultimately, at the core of the flexibility discussion lies a consideration of how meaningful and practical this will be for mothers. Overall, this discussion has revealed that while flexibility in the academic profession is supposedly positive, it has negative aspects that inadvertently impact academic mothers. Whilst HR posits that it is the LM's responsibility to manage flexibility, LMs have explained that organisational structures restrict them from supporting flexibility. The implication of this is that meaningful and practical flexibility is key in supporting career progression among academic mothers.

This research has shown that motherhood inevitably impacts academic career progression. This can be attributed to the micro-level, personal attributes of female academics; however, it is mainly an amalgamation of various organisational structures and practices that hinder mothers. This is embedded in the claim that institutions are gendered, which has led to investigations into how organisational structures have discriminated against women and perpetuated a male-dominated culture (Ackers, 1990). Initiatives such as the Athena SWAN agenda are a step in the right direction in terms of supporting career progression among academic mothers; however, its long-term effects are yet to be seen.

There were also some additional issues highlighted at the micro and macro level.

9. Childcare is still seen as a ‘woman’s problem’

There were several micro-level personal issues that arose which were related to career progression, such as feeling tired all the time which made it difficult to manage, and constantly feeling working mother’s guilt. However, female academics were primarily disadvantaged by societal and organisational beliefs around motherhood. Childcare responsibilities were persistently seen as a woman’s concern. It has been extensively reported that women-mothers in particular-tend to shoulder the bulk of childcare and domestic work, and this was also the case for female academics in this study. This inevitably gives women less time to pursue full-time careers and/or gain promotion. Furthermore, maternity and parenthood provide acute productivity shocks through sleep deprivation and an increased propensity for illness in the household; these may reduce the time and mental space required for concentration. Mothers may also invest differently in household production, resulting for example in career interruptions. Additionally, there is also the influence of macro level policies.

10. Certain aspects of organisational support were dependent on broader governmental policies

It was noted that indirect pregnancy discrimination persisted despite macro-level legal policies and that HR was not a key player in this respect and admitted to having inefficient policies. At the macro level, governmental policies were described as incompatible with organisational practices, such as the adoption leave framework. Consequently, there were insufficient HR policies at the meso-level to support pregnancy discrimination claims and adoption leave.

There was discussion around the need for more precise governmental policies at a broader macro-level, such as a policy that allows women time-off to look after a sick child, unfortunate experiences of miscarriage, or policies to support those up taking adoption leave. Such policies would empower the organisation, especially HR, by providing the backing of a legal framework for improving support to returning mothers. Furthermore, there was also a recognition that the university needs to put policies in place to support mothers and enhance overall gender equality, for example by providing childcare facilities at conferences.

5.3.3.1 The Research Gap addressed through objective 3

The empirical findings reveal that much of the focus of policy has been on the period of leave and the pay/support that new mothers subsequently receive. The participants reveal that existing policy very much reflects the attitudes of line managers and HR in that they are not privy to the needs of expecting mothers during the various stages of their pregnancy from a working perspective. The lack of support is further attested to by both explicit and implicit

discrimination that women faced when they revealed their pregnancies. The ‘journey’ is thus given little to no consideration from a policy perspective. This comes as little surprise when one considers that the same phenomenon appears when examining scholarship as this has largely neglected maternity phases and organisational support.

Furthermore, the role women played in shaping the support they received during their maternity journey has seldom been addressed within the literature. An area of contribution thus emerges from the empirical findings which contribute to our knowledge in this area as it emerges that women wish to be involved and to negotiate choices around their individual needs during pregnancy and maternity. Moreover, workplace pregnancies are a natural occurrence and the onus falls upon an employer to accommodate employees as opposed to being at odds with feminine interests by positioning workplace pregnancies and maternity leave as abnormal events, or in some cases, implicitly viewing this as disruptive (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004). This therefore serves to narrow the gap in the literature around what kind of organisational support women want at this particular stage.

In addition to the above findings, the study also brought to light organisation specific issues such as a deficit in communication as well as transparency between HR, line managers and expecting academics. This adds to the previously identified gap in our knowledge on the kind of support or more aptly lack thereof is afforded to female academics. Asking this question and looking in depth at the responses has revealed this three-way communication issue.

Moreover, perceived support emerged as being crucial to perceptions of fairness and justice in the workplace as upheld by POS theory. Managerial attitudes as well as non-verbal communications played a key part in how the women perceived and judged the quality of support they received. This echoes POS theory as it upholds that perceptions of the support started from the ‘top’ with upper management. Management support is said to be key to paving the way for female academics as this trickles down to supervisory levels. Specifically, the current research contributes to POS theory by showing that it is the attitudes towards maternity rather than procedures that have a greater impact on perceived support.

Nonetheless, given the institutions emerge as being gendered and far from asexual or neutral, as per the findings of the present research, upon discovering their pregnancies, it is likely that the participants feared the worst, in terms of workloads, organisational support and the future of their careers. In many respects it could be argued that pregnancy instantly shatters the notion of the ideal worker, thus leaving women in the workplace, extremely vulnerable. If

pregnancy is considered a 'choice' (Hakim,1995) and one which illuminates their desire to place family above their career, then it could be argued that female academics may feel that they have betrayed their institutions. Failure to acknowledge the ideal worker and the gendered nature of institutions means that policy is unlikely to address these factors as they would be regarded as non-issues. That said however, the research has brought to light that organisational support at tentative periods, particularly when female academics reveal their pregnancies, are crucial to an academic's decision to continue in the pursuit of her career.

5.4 The empirical findings in relation to the theoretical framework

Mapping the findings against the dimensions of the theoretical framework, starting with *gendered institutions*, it emerged that organisational practices on the whole were not inclusive nor conscious of maternity as a journey. In keeping with legislation, maternity leave and pay were the de facto, beyond which little consideration was granted to support that expecting mothers and new mothers require to maintain the trajectory of their careers. The gendered concept was illustrated in the lack of maternity cover arrangements, as this is a female gender-specific requirement and is consequently reflected in how universities in this study saw little business or social value in investing time and money in arranging maternity cover. The inherent gendered nature of the institution was perhaps best exemplified by the fact that the quality of support received tended to be shaped at departmental level.

This was further uncovered through the empirical research when it came to light that gender specific issues such as maternity cover arrangements were on the whole lacking. Coupled with the lack of consideration given to maternity and the fact that it was viewed as a stage as opposed to a journey, sought to further support Acker's argument that institutions were created by men and for men. Key practices were therefore shaped with men in mind as opposed to women- this is a claim that consistently emerged throughout the empirical investigation. The proverbial lens through which staff needs have been identified and subsequently fed into university policy it seems, have largely tended to be from the perspective of one gender-men. The investigation reveals that female specific needs, such as maternity have not been given due concern and instead treated as a minor disruption for which the academic is ultimately responsible for. If upon return, the female academic is unable to keep up with her workload and thus fails to attain further career success, this is down to a 'choice' she made and therefore one she has to simply accept. This is also supported by the fact that the universities that partook

in this study thus saw little business or social value in investing time and money in arranging maternity cover.

Departments which were led by female academics, or overwhelmingly made-up of women who had experienced motherhood, tended to be far more accommodating to women throughout their maternity journey and the initial stages of motherhood. The gendered nature of institutions appeared to have intrinsically been accepted by the research participants, particularly those who considered themselves 'lucky' to have been part of departments which accommodated the needs of expecting and new mothers. This was very revealing of the psyches of the women and just how deeply engrained it was for them to expect limited support as women in academia. This finding also develops Acker's (1990) argument regarding gendered institutions that organisations are an arena that widely disseminate cultural images of gender that are invented and reproduced. Furthermore, not only masculinity but also 'unsupportive' female colleagues or 'Queen Bees' are products of organisational processes and pressures.

Other dimensions of the framework, including the *ideal worker and motherhood penalty* were also illuminated by means of the empirical findings. As such, mothers being perceived as being less committed and thus standing at odds with the notion of the ideal worker, became apparent in the feelings of guilt expressed by the women. The research participants inferred that they had found themselves in a double bind whereby choosing motherhood meant that they had shunned their careers and thus effectively let-down their employers. The clash against the ideal worker norms and the experience of the motherhood penalty was evidently persistent throughout all the stages of the maternity journey.

For instance, direct and indirect experiences of discrimination for being pregnant and working because this was seen as an inconvenience, lack of any arrangements for maternity cover because the ideal worker would not be taking leave due to familial priorities, having to plan an 'ideal academic baby' to give birth in summer so that the academic calendar is not disrupted, and generally having a lack of support from line managers, colleagues and the HR department throughout the maternity journey. This was attributed to the fact that the entire process was perceived as an annoyance or disruption to everyone's working schedules. Moreover, lack of any physical facilities (e.g. breastfeeding) available upon return and no awareness or acknowledgement of any type of psychological support post return from maternity further shed light on the lack of regard and consideration granted to pregnancy and the extent to which pregnancy clashed with the norms of the 'ideal worker'.

Alternatively, rushing back to work meant that they disregarded their duties to both their families and child (ren). In light of this, mothers in academia find themselves very much facing a choice with regards to family versus their careers. This in itself is regarded as alarming given that there is little evidence to suggest that their male counterparts face the same issues.

Further aspects of the framework are rooted in the *public-private dichotomy* and *approaches to gender equity and change* (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). The empirical findings showed that there were differences in access to opportunities for mothers and experiences of oppressive gendered relations reproduced in, and by social practices. For instance, a lack of opportunity to work flexibly, losing out on promotional opportunities due to being part-time and a lack of childcare support both on university campuses and on conferences. Universities seldom appeared to pay attention to their practices, this was further embalmed by line managers and their perceived inability to relate to the needs of expecting mothers in academia. These findings further strengthened the claims of Ely & Meyerson (2000) that organisations should align themselves with principles of equal opportunity whilst also look to continually assess and revise their work culture. Given the outcome of the empirical findings this would certainly be a helpful endeavour for UK universities should they wish to ultimately improve support for mother academics.

In relation to *Hakim's (1995) theory of preference*, whilst not explicit, there were again shards of the belief that motherhood was a choice and as a result, women in academia had to 'put up' with, and accept, whatever that was being offered to them. The research further revealed that career progression within academia was exclusionary and the effort and input required was not achievable by new or expecting mothers. It was very much 'do or die' within the context of motherhood and career advancement and this appeared to have been accepted by the research participants. Moreover, it appeared that in fact choosing not to pursue career was rare in the narratives that emerged, it was lack of support with career progression, for instance, on a part-time contract, with lack of role models, unmanageable workload and the sole emphasis of career progression reliant on publications and many other institutional barriers, that hindered career progression instead. The findings also portrayed that women were resentful and upset with this situation; although motherhood was a choice for them, motherhood without an academic career was simply a matter of circumstance due to a lack of organisational support. Far from being a choice, motherhood inevitably signalled the dearth of a career in academia.

Organisational barriers therefore emerged as being a consistent point of concern for both women and within scholarly work. Examining the empirical findings in line with

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory indicates that representatives of the organisation/university were largely unsupportive- this particularly was in reference to line managers and HR. For instance, fairness is deemed as the highest contributor to POS theory (Rawls, 1999) because it is generally under the discretionary control of the organisation (Deem, 2003). Therefore, women academics who experienced discriminatory and unfair treatment for being pregnant by their manager inevitably had a negative perception of organisational support.

The POS theory suggests that employees perceive their favourable or unfavourable treatment by supervisors, who are representatives of the organisation, as an indication that the organisation either favours or disfavors them. This tends to be rooted in the belief that supervisors are an extension of the organisations, and thus as ‘agents’ of their employers their favourable treatment of employees contributes to perceived organisational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). What is interesting however is the fact that members of the organisation who were perceived as being supportive, were not seen to be acting on behalf of the institution, further signalling the discord that had emerged between mothers in academia and their employers. More specifically, members of the university that did offer support and successfully facilitated the maternity journey for the ‘lucky’ few participants, were seen to be acting in line with their *own* values. Thus, female academics who identified themselves as feminists or vocalised their support for mothers in the workplace, were seen to be far more supportive compared to other members of the institution/organisation.

Interestingly, the Perceived Organisational Support theory encompasses support from colleagues however the empirical findings suggest that those who praised their colleagues for the support they extended, continued to view their institutions/employers as largely unsupportive. Reasons as to this may relate to the fact that this level of support is not addressed at institutional policy level. This further highlights the impact of an intentionally gender-specific framework of organisational policies, practices, and norms that are weighted in favour of men as opposed to being inclusive and neutral.

Though the literature addresses the issue of maternity within an organisational context, empirical studies that specifically examine the organisational support throughout the stages of maternity are both limited and discontinuous. Using the theories identified within the theoretical framework as well as narrative interviews with women who have experienced maternity within academia, brings to light the presence and persistence of phenomena such as the ideal worker, motherhood penalty and theory of preference. In addition to this, as espoused by the framework, institutions within this context (universities) emerge as being gendered.

Organisational policies and their agents continue to use the male experience as the norm- any experience that emerges alongside this is regarded as a mere disturbance and one which brings with it social and economic costs. Female academics continue to bear the cost of this penalty as support during crucial stages of their pregnancy remains contingent on the how relatable their experiences are.

5.5 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to gender and HE research more generally and specifically to research on gender and HE within the context on motherhood. It also confirms several previous research findings on female academic's career advancement in universities (Bailyn, 2003, Baker, 2012ab; Bagihole & White, 2013; Aiston and Jung, 2015; Gatrell 2013, 2006; Duxbury and Higgins, 2005; Hoskins, 2013; Baker, 2016; Bueskens and Toffoletti, 2018; Hardy *et al.*, 2018; Huopalainen and Satama, 2018).

Through one on one discussion with the main actors in an academic setting, including the women academics themselves, HR and Line Managers, the research has sought to contribute to the current gap in understanding. Prior to undertaking this research, it had emerged that there was evidence to suggest that motherhood did indeed impact women and their career progression, though information was scant in regards to the maternity phases and the extent to which this impacts on whether women do indeed return to work and subsequently progress. Unsatisfied with existing contributions which inferred that women fell behind their male counterparts due to an active 'choice' to pursue child rearing, and the numerous structural barriers identified in existing research when academics are balancing motherhood and childcare responsibilities. The researcher sought to narrow the current gap in knowledge. In doing so, maternity stages emerged as being *crucial* to women and their perceptions of the support offered during these stages meant that they would ultimately be ushered off the career ladder. In cases where they returned to work, more often than not, these women were unable to scale the heights of this ladder due to the demands placed on them by their colleagues and employers and their own parental responsibilities.

The study contributes to our understanding of female academics' experiences and perceptions of organisational support within a four-stage framework of the maternity journey that was developed by the researcher, rather than the overall impact of motherhood on career progression as seen in previous research. An analysis of each stage provides rich details of organisational elements where support was either sufficient or lacking. This provides an

overview of the organisational support required throughout the maternity journey for smoother career progression in the long term. Moreover, this study contributes to our understanding of organisational support for academic mothers by incorporating the opinions of HR and LMs, which provide perceptions of support from an organisational/ managerial angle. This offers a more holistic view of the issues involved. Moreover, while the research has mainly contributed to knowledge of organisational support through maternity at a meso-level, it has also shed light on the influential macro and micro level elements that influence perceived organisational support.

This has been done by bringing to light perceptions of the extent of support received during all four maternity stages. More importantly, the qualitative data collected reveals that for these women, the environment in which they worked played a defining role in their experiences of maternity. The levels of stress endured during such a tentative time as well as the perceived flexibility and understanding shown by the individual departments significantly shaped the maternity experience at work. In addition, the research also discovers that a number of social constructs which have trickled down to organisations, continue to impede mothers in academia. Issues such as childcare, commitments outside of work, illness and the day to day demands of rearing new life, appear to be grossly underestimated and downplayed, within the context of work.

5.6 Research Implications

5.6.1 Implications for Theory

Acker's (1990) concept of gendered institutions explains how gender is present in the processes, practices, images, and ideologies of organisations. This study found that, despite advancements towards gender equality in organisations in recent years, there were evident signs that female academics continue to experience working in a gendered institution. This is reflected in the lack of organisational acknowledgement of their gender specific needs as working mothers. Moreover, it became apparent that the academic profession is based upon norms of the ideal worker which includes the expectation to work out of hours and to be fully committed to the work without any family or childcare responsibilities. The ideal worker norms have made every step of the maternity journey harder for female academics because the process of becoming a mother clashes with everything an ideal worker should be. A public-private dichotomy was apparent in women's experiences, for instance, feelings of isolation and invisible motherhood,

inconvenience to the academic calendar and colleagues when taking time off to give birth, and a lack of provisions for breastfeeding and childcare.

In their classification of gender and the ‘gender problem’ in organisations, Ely and Meyerson (2000) found that, although some organisations have introduced policies to reduce structural biases, an unchanged organisational culture means that the work-family balance remains a ‘woman’s problem’. However, there have been attempts to revise the working culture through various forms of experimentation - but these have faced resistance making it difficult for change to occur. Thus, although the primary responsibility for family/ childcare needs were still perceived as a woman’s problem, there were indications in the managerial perspectives (e.g. HR/LMs) that they recognised organisational inequities and desired change. However, they highlighted organisational and national level policies that restricted and prevented real change from materialising. Nonetheless, there was optimism around the Athena SWAN agenda and its potential for instigating positive changes in gender equality in universities across the UK in the future.

Importantly, the findings extend Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory. Previous studies incorporating POS theory (Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010; Little, Hinosa and Lynch, 2017; Casademunt *et al.*, 2018; Meintjes and Hofmeyr, 2018) have utilised quantitative methods to investigate perceived support, but this study adopted qualitative methods. As such, a deeper understanding of the issue under consideration has made a significant contribution in the field of knowledge around women academics and the impact of motherhood on an academic career. POS theory posits that employees develop a general perception of the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), especially in relation to the major hypothesised elements: *fairness, human resource (HR) practices, and supervisor support*. This study found that each of these organisational elements were individually influential in shaping perceived support.

For instance, the role of HR and LMs in the management of the maternity process. This research contributes to POS theory by drawing attention to the importance of transparency and open communication between these organisational actors who are influential in providing support throughout maternity. It became apparent that, due to a lack of communication between the three parties; (HR, LMs and women), there were different expectations regarding each other’s roles in the maternity process which often led to disappointment. This relates to *psychological contracts* which imply that employees and employers have a mutual expectation of inputs and outputs (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003). This research highlights the importance

of openly communicating these expectations with each other, perhaps at the start of the maternity journey. Open lines of communication between management and employees are therefore critical. This study also added another important layer of communication from management-non-verbal communication and the portrayal of managerial attitudes. These were deemed highly influential on women's level of perceived support.

This study also contributes to POS theory by highlighting the importance of embedding and incorporating a 'gendered-view' of organisational elements that influence perceived support. The findings show that supervisors act as organisational agents and their favourable treatment of employees contribute to perceived support (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698). However, the gender of line managers, their personal characteristics, and their views on familial responsibilities can all influence how supportive they are towards maternity. Similarly, colleague support also influences perceived support, but there were differences in relation to the gender-split of departments. This is not conclusive or generalisable, but it is an influential element that needs attention as it can shape favourable or unfavourable support. Furthermore, a gender focused view of organisational elements that influence academic careers while balancing work and motherhood is also required. These include research publications, the unmanageable workload associated with balancing work and family, and the disadvantages attached to part-time working. It was essential to recognise, at a micro-level, the conflicting demands of the ideal worker and the mother, both of which are time consuming and demanding; therefore, additional support for returning mothers is required. This repudiates Acker's (1990) criticism that gender roles and women are not issues that can simply be appended to existing theory. While it is undeniably not simply an 'add on', it is beneficial for existing theories to evolve, grow, and develop into more gender considerate constructs.

Additionally, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) suggested that POS theory provides an assurance that the organisation will provide financial and emotional support to employees when needed so that they can face the challenges presented by their job. This study extends this suggestion to the organisational support required for psychological needs, not only in terms of the challenges presented by the job but also in terms of challenges experienced after return to work that may impact an employee's well-being and work performance. Moreover, this study has also offered a supplementary explanation for the inefficiency with which certain organisational elements support female academics throughout their maternity journey, primarily by elucidating inadequacies in wider governmental policies that are vitally important in providing a legal framework for the developmental of organisational policies.

5.6.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have several implications for universities and key organisational actors regarding improvements in support for the management of maternity. Firstly, at the macro-level, it is important that policies must support the maternity needs of working women. This includes understanding the national framework in which the adoption system operates, and how nurseries respond towards casual sickness in children. It is important that policies are written with an understanding of the contexts in which they are to be implemented to allow for adoption leave or sickness in nursery-going children at a local level.

Universities and other organisations should also proactively and consciously make necessary and reasonable adjustments when managing maternity throughout each of the four stages. This includes providing a high standard of physical facilities for specific needs such as on-campus childcare and breastfeeding, and to ensure these facilities are practically accessible. A large-scale campaign is also needed to raise awareness and organisational acknowledgement of the potential psychological needs of returning mothers. Overall, universities should prioritise gender considerations when creating and implementing policies and practices so that women's, especially mother's, specific needs are accommodated, thus advancing their academic careers. As a direct implication of the findings from this study, a women's voice support network group has been founded and successfully set up by the researcher in her own university.

Another implication for universities is that they should also consider implementing a practice of continued three-way communication between the female academic who has announced her pregnancy, a delegated HR representative, and the line manager. A three-way meeting at the beginning of the maternity journey (when a woman announces her pregnancy) should be held which will provide an opportunity for open communication and questioning regarding each parties' role in the maternity management process. This will be beneficial in numerous ways; first, it clarifies what each party can expect from each other throughout the maternity journey, it shows the woman going on maternity leave that she is receiving both care and attention from the organisation, it curtails any concerns she may have, and she will feel that she can more readily contact the line manager or HR representative for any further assistance required. Additionally, universities should ensure that a HR representative is continually involved in the maternity process with the line manager and the woman going on maternity, even if this is simply in the form of a "light touch". For instance, the delegated HR representative can check in with the line manager and the woman fortnightly via phone or email. This will help reduce the risk of unfairness and will ensure that policies are implemented.

5.7 Limitations of the study

This study, however, is not without its limitations. Firstly, the findings discussed in this study are mainly from women academics in one university (University A, Middle-Tariff), most of whom are lecturers. However, as a qualitative study, the purpose of this research was not to generalise, but to use the data from these participants as an exemplar to extend understanding of the issue under investigation. Furthermore, narratives collected from female academics in four other universities provided different perspectives.

Similarly, HR professionals, and line managers were a significantly smaller group and were also based in the same university (University A) as most of the female academics. However, this was also a positive aspect in that it permitted deeper connections between women's narratives and the views of HR professional and line managers. However, the line managers who volunteered/or agreed to partake in this study were unavoidably from departments that were more commonly viewed as empathetic towards women and their family friendly requirements. Therefore, the data may be biased to a limited extent. Nevertheless, the data provided authentic and enlightening perspectives.

Furthermore, the researcher recognises that all the women in this study were interviewed after they had returned and settled back into work and were therefore narrating a 'past' experience of which they could potentially have had a blurred or distorted memory. However, because their narration was given in hindsight, it allowed them time to reflect and deeply question what forms of support (or a lack of) were most important to them when they were going through their maternity journey.

The insights that have emerged at each stage of the discussions with each of the participant groups are likely to be of interest to the concerned stakeholders, mainly universities, professional bodies and institutions. The findings from the individual maternity stages highlight current gaps in practice and conduct. These are likely to be of special interest to professional bodies and universities in general given that the professionals involved in this study (HR, line managers) themselves bemoaned the lack of training offered and rigidity of current policies. The tangible support issues highlighted such as childcare, breastfeeding and transport between campuses for heavily pregnant staff should also be points of consideration for universities. A special point of interest for policy makers, professional bodies and universities is the issue of 'relatability' and the barrier this continues to present working

mothers. This issue has also been recognised by HR who admit that the unique needs of expecting women and new mothers are yet to be appreciated across the board.

5.8 Opportunities for future research

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge by establishing a basis for further research on women in academia, and on perceived organisational support for female academics' maternity journeys and career advancement in UK universities. Further research could therefore be conducted to examine the effect of differences in perceived organisational support at different types of universities, for example, High, Medium, or Low Tariff universities. Differences between gender distinct departments and between academic positions could also be usefully explored to expand the scope of this research.

Future research would also benefit from investigations into non-traditional maternity circumstances. For example, perceived organisational support for academic mothers who have adopted a child(ren), or who have had a disabled child, experienced a miscarriage, or are suffering from post-natal depression. Of vital importance is an investigation into the impact of the Athena SWAN agenda on maternity experiences in universities. Research could focus on specific universities, or departments within universities, that hold a gold, silver, or bronze award and explore perceptions of support for maternity across the different levels of award-winning departments. Future research could also focus solely on perceived organisational support throughout the maternity journey for academics who are single mothers, as their organisational support needs may differ from those who receive additional support from a partner.

5.9 Summary

This thesis has made a valuable contribution to an area of knowledge in the field of gender and employment. Through applying a narrative approach to data collection across a number of university sites in the UK, and including HR employers and managers in the sample, the study explored women's experiences of organisational support throughout their maternity journeys in academia. The key findings that emerged related to the lack of understanding and support of the needs of expecting and new mothers. It further came to the researcher's attention that this was crucial given that *understanding* sat at the crux of any support offered. This highlights the importance of understanding and how organisational support can contribute to a more pleasant and less traumatic maternity experience as well as increase perceived support for women in academia. Women who felt understood, subsequently felt supported; this would then mean that

they perceived the organisation as supportive, and it shaped a better experience to continue to progress along the career ladder.

As well as the need for an overall awareness and acknowledgement of women's organisational support needs throughout the maternity journey, the findings also shed light on the various organisational elements that require further attention to improve perceived organisational support at different stages of the maternity journey. Moreover, this study has highlighted policy and practice-related implications which can equip UK universities to strengthen their support for mothers in academia. In so doing, this thesis makes an inevitable contribution to theory, practice, and overall academic knowledge.

5.10 Personal Reflection

Working as an academic woman over the last four years, researching, writing, teaching, absorbing and observing, my opinions have catapulted on the topic of motherhood, maternity, the work-life balance and the lasting effects on the careers of many. Some things resonate with me, which I have agreed on, and some things have challenged me leaving me conflicted. However, during this enveloping process, the issues that have come to light are ones related to the organisational and the structural systems in place in regards to almost every step of the maternity journey for mother academics. I have found these to hinder and disrupt the academic experiences of these women who are wanting to progress, but are left to fall behind owing to the lack of organisational and structural support available. Through this research process, it has been my privilege to contribute to what is an endless buffet of discourse on the topic of working mothers; especially for mothers like Laura, with whom an initial conversation ignited my interest (see prologue), and women alike who experience more struggles than support.

Through this research, I have learnt the organisational and structural issues and the nature of support that needs to/should be in place in order to uplift, reward and aid the progress and success of these women. Overall, I can say with confidence that I have been enlightened – though may seem ironic considering I am an academic woman working in the field – but a lot of issues affecting women have been brought to my attention. Therefore, I am delighted to have been a part of contributing to this discourse. This experience has not only taught as well as challenged me, but has forced me to contemplate on my own future as I endeavour to continue contributing to research – with or without family planning in my own future, I am compelled to consider the timing of family planning and where it fits in my career.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Research information pack and consent form

Research information pack & Consent form

Research information Pack

Exploring women academics experiences of motherhood

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Below are further details regarding the purpose of the study and also information regarding the ethical process of the interviews. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on the following:

Name: Anna Joel	
Tel No.	0161 295 5537
Mobile No.	07565279738
E-Mail:	a.a.joel1@edu.salford.ac.uk
Address: Salford Business School, Maxwell Building, Room 205, Salford, M5 4WT	

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that you read the following explanation of this study. This statement describes the purpose, procedures, benefits, risks, discomforts, and precautions of the research. Also described are the alternative procedures available to you, as well as your right to withdraw from the study at any time. No guarantees or assurances can be made as to the results of the study.

Explanation of Procedures

The intention of this study is to explore women academics experiences of return to work after time off for childcare responsibilities (such as childbirth, maternity leave and/or adoption), specifically their perceptions on organisational support during this period, and their perceptions on the impact having children has had on their academic career.

Anna Joel, a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and PhD researcher at Salford Business School, University of Salford, is conducting this study to provide narrative insight into the experiences of women academics in managing time off from childbirth, and its potential impact on their long-term academic career, in order to identify women academic's perceptions of workplace barriers and efficiency/ inefficiency in organisational support.

This research aims to carry out a 'Narrative Inquiry' meaning participation in the study involves the participant narrating their experience of taking time off, returning to work, and settling back into their academic position after becoming a mother. This involves undertaking a semi-structured interview, which will last for approximately one hour. If agreed beforehand the interview will be audio-taped by the interviewer and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The interview will be conducted at a setting that is mutually agreeable to the participant and the researcher. Only the interviewer will access to the audiotape which will be stored securely in a locked office and destroyed once transcribed.

Risks and Discomforts

Potential risks or discomforts include possible emotional feelings when asked questions during the interview. The interview may be stopped at anytime, and if requested terminated.

Benefits

The anticipated benefit of participation is the opportunity to discuss feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to the experience of managing childbearing and an academic career, and having access to the finding of the study.

Confidentiality

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential in a locked filing system during this project. Only the interviewer will have access to the study data and information. There will not be any identifying of names on the tapes, and participant's names will not be available to anyone. The tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The only information that will be used is the academic position held by the participant (i.e. post-doctoral/lecturer/senior lecturer/professor etc.) The participant can choose whether she wishes to reveal the name of her institute or not, the participant's view will be respected and adhered to either way. The results of the research may be published in a professional journal or presented at professional meetings. The information will help understand how women academics perceive organisational support when taking time off for child caring responsibilities and their perceived impact of motherhood on their academic career.

Withdrawal without Prejudice

Participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice from this institution and would be understood fully by the interviewer.

Purpose of the study

Through exploring experiences of women academics on returning to work after having children, establish their perceptions of organisational support.

Recent (2013) Higher Education (HE) staff data in Britain revealed that whilst majority of professional and support staff were women (62.6%). Majority of academic staff were men with 44.5% women, but most notably the majority of all professors were men at 78.3% whilst women professors accounted for only 21.7%. Literature surrounding this area identifies various factors for women's underrepresentation in high academic positions, however specifically in HE the decision to have children is considered a predominant challenge for women's academic careers. This study will explore this issue through the lens of the 'motherhood penalty' which posits that in the workplace, working mothers encounter systematic disadvantages in pay, perceived competence, and benefits relative to childless women. As well as the concept of the 'ideal-worker' which asserts a worker's clear, relentless commitment to paid work, working long hours and not allowing distractions outside the paid work environment to interfere with the job, including family, children and other personal facets of life.

Interview Design

Interview Type	Narrative (Semi-Structured)
Length of Interview	1 hour
Interview subject areas	
Narrative experience of academic women on: Taking time off for child bearing responsibilities (i.e. childbirth, adoption etc.) Returning back into the workplace Managing motherhood and an academic career Perceptions on: Organisational Support Workplace barriers Impact of motherhood on academic career Ideal worker concept The motherhood penalty	

Confidentiality

Due to the confidential nature of the subject area, all participant comments will remain anonymised. The factual names of the cases will NOT be listed within the study; a coding mechanism will be used for the reader's purpose.

New Findings

Any significant new findings that develop during the course of the study, which may affect a participant's willingness to continue in the research, will be provided to each participant by the interviewer.

Cost and / or Payment to Subject for Participation in Research

There will be no cost for participation in the research. Also, participants will not be paid to participate in this research project.

Payment for Research Related Injuries

The University of Salford has made no provision for monetary compensation in the event of injury resulting from the research. In the event of such injury, assistance will be provided to access health care services.

Questions

Any questions concerning the study can contact:

Research & Graduate College

The University of Salford

Faraday House

Salford

Greater Manchester

M5 4WT

+ 44 (0)161 295 5000

Complaints

If you have any concerns regarding this study please contact the following person at the University of Salford:

Matthew Stephenson

Head of Information Governance

Information & Learning Services

Clifford Whitworth Building

University of Salford
 Salford
 M5 4WT
 Tel: 0161 295 3152
 Email: m.stephenson@salford.ac.uk

If you have exhausted the university complaints procedure and you are still not satisfied with the outcome, you have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner, the independent body who oversees the Freedom of Information and Data Protection in the UK.

To complain to the Information Commissioner, please write to:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire

SK9 5AF

Tel: 01625 545 700

<http://www.ico.gov.uk>

Agreement

This agreement states that you have received a copy of this informed consent. The completion of the consent form below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.



Authorisation Form

Full Name		
Organisation		
I am willing to be interviewed regarding my experience of taking time off for child caring responsibilities and returning and settling into my academic position, and I am aware that my views and opinions may be made available in the public arena.		Yes
I understand that all comments will be anonymised and that no personal details will be released as part of this study.		Yes
Signature		

I WILL COLLECT THE FORM ON THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Many thanks

NAME
 ADDRESS

Appendix B- Ethical Approval letter



Research Centres Team
G.03 Joule House
Acton Square
The Crescent
Salford
M5 4WT
Tel: 0161 295 7012
AMC-Research@salford.ac.uk

15 September 2015

Anna Joel
University of Salford

Dear Anna

Re: Ethical Approval Application – Women face difficulty in returning to work after childbirth: Is HRM adapting best practice to support them

I am pleased to inform you that based on the information provided, the Research Ethics Panel have no objections on ethical grounds to your project.

Yours sincerely

Julie Connett

Julie Connett
On Behalf of the Research Ethics Panel

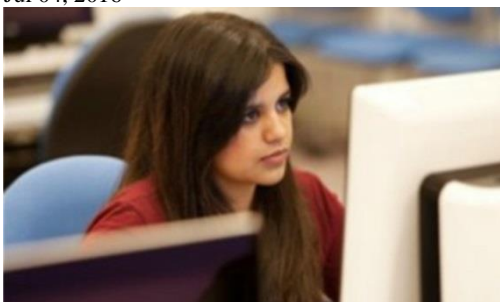
Appendix C- Participant recruitment advert

Participant Recruitment

News

Researchers to investigate female academics experiences of motherhood

Jul 04, 2016



Women are underrepresented in senior HE positions

Researchers are looking for volunteers to take part in new research that looks deeper into the reasoning behind why women are underrepresented in senior positions in the higher education (HE) sector.

Whilst a majority of professional and support staff in the UK's HE sector are women (62.6 per cent), the largest proportion of academic staff are in fact male (44.5 per cent female). Additionally, the majority of all professors are also male, with female professors accounting for only 21.7 per cent.

Previous research has identified a variety of factors as to why women are underrepresented in high academic positions, however it seems the decision to have children, specifically in HE, is considered as a predominant challenge for the academic careers of women.

To investigate this further, researchers from Salford are aiming to explore the experiences that female academics have when returning to work post-maternity, as this will help to establish the perceptions of two areas; organisational support, and the impact of motherhood on a woman's career.

Exploration into the 'motherhood penalty' will form part of the research, as this is a term coined by sociologists who argue that working mothers encounter systematic disadvantages in pay, perceived competence, and benefits relative to childless women, within the workplace.

Investigations will also take place into the concept of the 'ideal-worker', which asserts a worker's clear, relentless commitment to paid work, working long hours and not allowing distractions outside the paid work environment to interfere with his/her job. This includes family, children and other personal facets of life.

Any mothering academics, who have previously returned to work following their maternity leave, can provide an invaluable insight into this research as they are sharing their experiences and perceptions on motherhood in an academic profession. This research has the potential to have a positive impact not only on women academics, but HE sector as a whole.

If you are a mother who has previously returned to an academic position at the University post-maternity leave, and you are willing to participate in this study please contact: Anna Joel at a.a.joel2@salford.ac.uk or on 0756*****.

Appendix D- Initial codes from women academics narrative transcripts

Initial codes

1. Fixed term Contract redundancy due to maternity

Emma	<p>Research fellow on Fixed term contract, went on maternity leave & made redundant even though project hadn't finished.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On Fixed-term contract have consultations when nearing end date, this was unhelpful, formal process, just a tick box exercise. - Also made redundant because if went over three year period would become full-time staff and be eligible for staff benefits. - Took back on project but hourly paid so didn't get any benefits - Because hourly paid, had no integration back into the workplace/ not informed of any of the policies or anything.
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When pregnant research fellow, as a researcher had flexibility of working from home - Didn't want to get pregnant on a fixed-term contract - Reached a level of seniority now for him to trust me to work from anywhere and get the job done/ university= level of trust people work flexibly - Work hard & flexibility = reward -
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pregnancy in 2year research associate position due date October contract supposed to finish September. Line manager helped to get contract extended so then could take Maternity leave/ BUT Had to hide from HR (pg. 1)
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 ½ years, money comes from research council, technically should've covered maternity. They said they cant cover, I can take 6months mat leave but they won't extend contract- so to take 6months mat leave means 6 months less of work and pay for me. (pg 1) - ESRC would take away 6months of my work/ jeopardise my job- just for being pregnant! (pg 2) - Line man/ boss funded- so staying in university for 4years, 3 ½ years contract and 6months paid mat leave (pg2) - Uncertainty & temporal nature of fixed-term contracts= huge problem for mothers (pg 6) - Lack of financial stability/ lack of security/ uncertainty of contracts= really problematic for mothers (7) - Post-docs usually 1 or 2 years/ some other fellowships sometimes 6months/ but 1 year for post doc is really uncertain!! (pg 7)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because on post-doc fixed-term contract, strategically planned pregnancy to get mat pay (1) - Fearful from uncertainty of job (1) - Strategically planned for another child whilst in contract (1)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post-docs feel invisible & easily replaceable (3)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When got pregnant on a post-doc contract had to leave because it was 3 years only and if I told I'm pregnant boss would've gone mad! Also because I knew I couldn't work on those projects full-time after baby.. (8)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was on a pure research contract which was being renewed every few months for 4 whole years, BUT it finished JUST after being on maternity for 2 weeks! (1) So made unemployed because on maternity leave [really bad] (1) They re-introduced same job again/ I applied & gave interview and got it (1) - Positive of post-doc- I could work from home. (1) - Attitudes towards post-docs:- As soon as your fixed-term contract ends you're on your own! (2) This is a major problem because not enough women in academia because they just can't jump through that period of uncertainty & have a family (2) Existence of a fixed-term contract = major problem. Really need stability when starting a family (3) - Post-docs are not seen as individuals, they're just viewed as either productive or non-productive workers (4) - They could/ should think of us as an investment/ but we are viewed as disposals (4) - Structurally both university and funding council don't care about you (6) Money comes from research council but you're actually employed by the university (6) - University says can't help you because money ran out and funding council says we don't employ you. So no one takes ownership of you (6) - Obviously if a post-doc goes on maternity leave it delays the project, but with careful thought they can make it work for everyone. (4) - So maybe work in teams/ collaborative teams assigning small tasks for everyone instead of leaving all the work on one person / should have people with complimentary skills working together/ so that if naturally one needs to go on maternity or paternity leave then its not such a huge problem! On both parts (4) - Fixing this problem requires doing things completely differently (4) - Basically made me unemployed/ no resources/ really shit! (2) - Totally left alone (2) - They could've easily extended contract (2) Basically I was just taken off the system because I got pregnant (2) - I felt like I was at fault for becoming pregnant & that's why they weren't going to look out for me in any way anymore! (2) - Taking maternity leave here is just a burden on others. You feel it. Because all your load goes on someone else, all the time you are away others are struggling lot. It fills you up with guilt because you are the reason that it has become so hard on everyone (5)
Aaliyah	<p>2 Year temporary contract</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - So really worried about implications of being pregnant (1)

2. HR Rubbish

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR unsupportive + Insufficient, money questions unanswered - Even when Union representative asked questions, HR unable to answer sufficiently - Teaching in a niche subject, knew it would be difficult for them to outsource, they tried to outsource initially, but went on maternity leave for 8 months and nothing was done. - HR hated me because I was on 4 different hourly paid contracts - It is a conscious decision not to have another child, because team will be supportive but because of the way HR has been I don't want to - Not aware of any formal support for maternity apart from maternity pay
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR purely administrative/ difficult/ bureaucratic / cover their asses/ legality/ not warm friendly/ lukewarm feeling towards them thought they are there to help me, realise now that they are there to help the organisation.
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR fine- mainly form-filling! Rest of arrangement with line manager - One major ISSUE the policy says you can work compressed hours BUT HR says you are the only department doing it so can't. It's an anomaly. (Pg.03) - Ironic because recently got Athena SWAN bronze award- it's patchy!
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies sometimes good but not seen in organisational culture. Or the policies not in place but culture maybe proactive - Shared Parental leave policy questionable, not sure about shared parental leave/ I had done the birthing etc. I needed that time off/ if the government or organisation also wants to give the man time off that's great but it shouldn't be the fraction of a woman's. the early days will be a time for mother to take off that's it
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From HR perspective not suppose to ask questions regarding children the way my supervisor did but it really helped (pg.1) - 'Dark heart of coming back' - Have to ask a lot of questions - Lots of admin - Terrible - People in HR making policies for women without a gender bone in their body - Trying to be like UCL, but giving sabbaticals only to women in science! Because others can apparently work during mat - HR should never assume that a woman can/should work during maternity she should be with her baby (ALL pg. 3)
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pregnancy in 2year research associate position due date October contract suppose to finish September. Line manager helped to get contract extended so then could take Maternity leave/ BUT Had to hide from HR (pg. 1)
Sally L M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No support (pg. 3) - Hardly any role (pg.3) - No support advertised or made known to me

Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fieldwork in Prison- found out pregnant - Thought they would take my access from prison because I'm pregnant and its risky (pg 2) - But HR dealt with all sorts of disclaimers/ risk assessments - HR- really awesome/ very patient (pg 2) found a way for me to fieldwork as planned - HR were very proactive sent me personal email to say have you thought about Returner's carer funds? (pg 4)
Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delayed things/ weren't on top of things/ had to chase re-chase all the time/ no role just admin/ Not efficient/ Not personal/ non-friendly procedure/ never proactively tried to look out or help me/ Policy clear but not worded well - No communication with them upon return/ nothing to help cope/ if off on long-term sickness would check but return from maternity no check up whatsoever (pg 2)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Messed up/ didn't keep track of return/ insufficient/ not smooth/ not much of a role/ no risk assessment procedure/ I sent documents to Athena SWAN because nothing to support pregnant women here/ Not proactive/ not made aware of policies
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple/ straightforward/ Not hugely included/ but aware/ available/ accessible (2)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not proactive/ didn't really have a role/ just handled paperwork/ Everything that needed to be arranged I self-arranged/ just lip service from HR/ HR could organise support networks?? (7)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't do very much/ not much role/ just admin/ dates (3)/ Procedural not supportive(3)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies to support mother's are broad, so hard to implement (5) - No one understands how to implement these policies (5) - Need more firmer more practical policies (5) - Policies are meaningless/ no substance to them/ couldn't find 5 people to speak positively of them! (7) - Need to be more transparent/ more involved! (7)
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They didn't make it clear that I needed to let them know before coming back to get paid- this caused me a lot of tension
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't expect that much support (3) Knew from the culture beforehand that even if I did get some support from HR It would be very minimal (3) - Insufficient, no one made contract on return (3)
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They weren't completely insignificant (2) - Smooth (2) - They are just very very administrative (2) - HR does make the the policy but it's the day-to-day dealing of life in practice with your line manager that shapes your experience not policies (3)

Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No contact (2) - Don't remember being aware of any policies (2)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because on research contract really worried about getting full/ or half maternity pay because of contract ending- I had to inquire from HR A LOT! Constant running after them. Very annoying/ like they have never dealt with this situation before (1) [in the end did get mat pay because at university for 4 years] (1) - Quite ironic how they suddenly couldn't renew my contract because I was pregnant/ where as they had happily renewed it for 4 years before that! (2) - No support/ I fell through cracks/ so much confusion on their part/ no clear direct communication (3) - Never made it clear if childcare is a timetabling constraint or not in the institution- still confused! (5)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies only work on paper, in practice they absolutely DON'T! (1) - Bringing in new policies in line with Athena SWAN and they're all just on paper (1) - Every time I needed a change in something, I had to do it myself (2) Nothing coming from the top (3) All throughout maternity I was looking for relevant information on what to do etc. Someone in university/ HR should've given me the information instead of me looking for it (6) - Universities have policies for caring responsibilities but they should really look into whether any of them are actually implemented in any of the departments (4) Wouldn't be here - complaining if the university just followed it's own policies! (5) - HR doesn't recognise flexibility or childcare constraints/ timetabling doesn't/ colleagues don't. In the commercial sector you couldn't get away with it! (4) - So much admin- they don't make it easy to arrange things (6) - Basically any intended support coming from HR is meaningless because effectively you are just self-managing and working for yourself. HR can only create policy it can't implement it. . Policies need to be made locally effective within school/ department (6) - HR has a very one fits all policy= not good! It needs more catered support with individuals and department (7) A little gesture of just asking...are you okay? Can we help? Do you need a catch up? Can go really far (7)
Victoria.B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal role (3) - Mainly all dealing with manager (3)
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3. Motherhood is Invisible

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being a mother not talked about, no interaction with any one regarding this
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In fact motherhood= invisible/ not mentioned

Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did a talk mentioned children, got emails from students saying wow so inspired, the fact that it's a big thing that someone even talked about it is outrageous! (pf 2)
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No one talks about it. Ever (pg 6) Children are invisible at the university (pg 6) - People don't realise how much work you've done before you get here (pg 6) - We are invisible but the key to us being more equal is men taking time (pg 7) - A male colleague looking after sick child= great example (pg 7)
Maya	<p>Different perspective on invisible motherhood to what previous women have said</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if was man wouldn't have to show that kind of weakness (unable to drive forward phd) because could be seen as excuses even though genuinely difficult (5) - In front of students can talk about being mum..but in meetings WOULD never mention it because they'd think you're mother and can't commit 100% (don't know if their perception or mine) and its not a lie because my son is my 100% priority but I wouldn't mention because it shows inability to commit to work related things (5)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motherhood= invisible to them (4)
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone around me here is really nice- but motherhood is just NOT discussed! - The atmosphere is such that no one talks about it (3) Till date I don't know if some of my colleagues have kids or not (3) Nervous to ask (3) - Any aspect of your motherhood has to stay at home (4)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have to forget and never talk about children here. There is no place for that in this world! (4)
Victoria B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing number of senior women now, but no clue if any of them have children. They haven't made it common knowledge! It's just not something that's openly discussed in my institution or academia for that matter (4)
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4. Sick Child

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daughter once fell ill with chickenpox had to take 3 days off, no other choice but it was fine because supportive line manager and team.
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If/when child ill= super difficult especially because no family around, but as academics we move around a lot so don't tend to near family
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When child ill line manger totally out of order behaviour/ totally non-supportive (p. 8) - Had to take few days off due to child's illness- told to follow strict HR procedures for return whilst another acting manager himself said don't bother (pg. 8) just harsh

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Even when really really ill myself- she was just super mean about it (pg. 8)
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When child ill sometimes only option to bring them to work- really difficult when that's not supported in the organisation - Had to bring in sick child- colleagues supportive of it but institution not supportive of it! (pg.5)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [Place of 1st pregnancy] Thought couldn't possibly have another child here, wonder how they would respond if my child got sick!! (2) - [Place of 2nd pregnancy] Were actually supportive when child ill (pg 3) - Super supportive/ cover for each other when child ill/ equipped for family baby-emergencies (5)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When child ill very difficult to negotiate with a conference commitment (2)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If child falls ill= a major problem! Need to take careers leave (2)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Even when child is ill it takes at least an hour and a half to finish and go to pick up child (5) - When child is sick= HUGE problem! Children with allergies etc. must be a nightmare (6)
Hailey.K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People care if your child is ill. They are fine and supportive with it (2) - `If child ill, unless teaching quite easy to move things around (3)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very difficult (4)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When you first put your child in nursery they get ill a lot, because catching bugs from kids etc. And they are not allowed in nursery so then I have to be with him that's ALL my working time gone! (3)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No leeway for you or your child to be ill (3) If off ill you're breaking the consumer act because students are now consumers (3) - When child ill even nursery doesn't keep them (3) no leeway to take time off for that time (3) I have his primary responsibility because husband's work not sympathetic to fathers' (3)

5. Part-time work issues

Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wanted to go to compressed hours (4 days) post return and felt like really needed to make a proper case for it! - Really touchy about this because lost a day's salary, its compressed 30hours instead of proper part-time and it NEVER works out that way. End up working on off day and weekends and evenings! Get paid part-time, work full time!
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part-time work issue because on part-time contract and getting paid part-time but actually working full-time (pg.04), eventually went full-time to get the pay I deserve Everything suffers fomo/ can't research/ out of loop/ no momentum
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obviously part-time hours/ reduced hours= slowed career progression. Is that right? Or wrong?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big issue about workload pro rata and part-time working. They don't quite add up, asked to produce the same amount of work in less time. Still doing full-time phd and now a part-time lecturer so my phd time allocation has halved too! ?! why I still have the same deadline. - When working part-time hardly any opportunities for career progression (pg.4) - Even as part-time expected to publish as much as the full-time person - But positive aspect of part-time work is that you get the same benefits as a full-time worker that's good (pg. 9)
Sally L.M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreed negotiation of return three consecutive days, part-time. Part-time really important to have consecutive days- otherwise= problematic. - Even when day off due to part-time work, colleagues everyone still emails and expects responses (pg.4)
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workload= problematic, it's 0.6 so should be 60% but I actually work 95% (pg 2) - Unmanageable workload (pg 3) - Contract doesn't clarify no. of hours (3) Set days but not set hours - Feel that even my part-timeness is invisible (pg 7), people don't remember that I'm part-time even a super close colleague didn't know I was part-time (pg 7) - A lot of thinking time required outside of work - Had to constantly remind people that I get paid less than them (pg 8) - Sometimes jealousy from colleagues that I 'get-away' with things (pg 8) because part-time and mother - Blatantly get told to research in "own-time" (pg 4) - Pressure to teach but no time allocation (pg 4) 'Good quote 1st paragraph' - Motherhood has an impact on career but it doesn't have to! - Part time work impacts career massively - Wrote on promotion application "remember I am part-time" - Is it fair that part-time people are judged with same criteria as full time? (pg.4) - They look at research from past 4years, is that fair if you're part-time? Part-timers are generally women, generally mother's..is there a discriminatory element? (pg. 4)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instead of part-time did compressed hours
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Really struggled with full-time work, but no point going part-time knew It would just mean part-time pay but full-time work.
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Returned on a 0.5 contract, Do a lot more than what you get paid for (1) - Impossible to get promoted (1) Freeze on promotion (5) University has stopped ever thinking that I could ever apply for promotion (5) - Even in full-time contract didn't have time for research in part-time completely non-existent(4) - When you're part-time you don't feel like part of the culture anymore (5) Don't feel part of the team (5) Don't feel part of the 'institutional career' (5) - Part-time working means freeze on promotion (5) - "They are just not interested. That is absolutely unfair because if you're on a fractional contract you might as well not exist" (6) - When allocating workload they half everything but when asking for promotion application they want same as full-time staff! (6) - Even on a fractional contract one should be able to be both academic and mother. One shouldn't have to feel that just because I'm a mother now I can't be a successful academic -(7) - University is getting a great deal, I do slightly less than a full-timer, but I get paid half as much!! (8)

	<p>Lack of colleague/ network support/ no one to encourage- leads to lack of confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because not part of the culture/ team when part-time, no one to encourage when not part of a team (6) - This leads to feeling under confident (6) -
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advised my own management not to go part-time because will end up working full-time but only get paid part-time (1)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anyone that is part-time can't be a manager that automatically rules out all mothers (3) - I have worked 4 Saturdays a year- so it would be fair to take loo days – but it doesn't happen! (4)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lecturer contract at university- Child still quite young and started lecturer job as part-time- working - part-time is really pointless! I was working pretty much 6 days a week! (3)
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I wanted to go part-time on my return but my line manager talked me out of it, said you will get paid for PT hours but you will end up working FT! No point. He talked me out of it, so then I said I will go on a fractional contract (2) So 4 days a week
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -

6. Maternity Leave/ Maternity Cover poorly handled

Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proper maternity cover appointed externally - Involved in arranging maternity cover - When on maternity didn't really have KIT days, line manager said this is precious time for you enjoy, but also precious projects to me and wanted to keep eye on them! - They didn't want like-to-like cover, it was a grade lower than mine, but I was worried they might think why we paying her grade 8 when someone else is working this job on grade 7?! So double checked, wasn't doing all projects. Didn't want someone to come in and take all the glory for all my hard work just keep things ticking off. They still needed me. All fine! - Promoted to reader whilst on maternity
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part-time work issue because on part-time contract and getting paid part-time but actually working full-time (pg.04), eventually went full-time to get the pay I deserve Everything suffers fomo/ can't research/ out of loop/ no momentum

Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure to return because small self-contained team, worried about who would take over my teaching. Because of this only took part of mat leave (v.short time), regret this
Sally L.M.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When on maternity its last cause to get over or hourly paid otherwise they do all they can to spread workload amongst colleagues (pg.2) - No effort to find someone in my absence (pg.3) - Took two maternity leaves, so away from work for 2 year, and it was all just patch work to make up for my absence, that makes me feel really unimportant (pg.3) - Frustrated on my maternity because colleagues had to do extra work (pg.3) - A previous PhD student covered my maternity work- had to coach/ support her all the way throughout! Shouldn't have to should've been allowed to enjoy my maternity (pg.3) Go too much for me - As senior directorate wanted KIT days but never materialised- they didn't need me (pg.3)
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work got passed to long suffering colleagues (pg. 2)- Unfair - It's norm to always be one person down illness/ maternity (pg. 2) - Short staffed- over working
Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Maternity cover so others really having to stretch when I'm away that added to guilt (pg 2) - Pressure to come back/ pressure on colleagues to over work (3) - Changes made to office/ PC- added to stress on return (3) Colleagues having to work above and beyond (3) - When worked in hospital people always covered! (3) In fact used it as career progression (3)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negotiated working double the amount in 2nd semester, just so that they wouldn't get cover and I wont be under threat of replacement. - 2nd pregnancy- Immediately emailed from the hospital! (pg 1, 3rd para from below) - Maternity: Not long enough/ not paid enough
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Even in announcing pregnancy felt really bad/ awkward/ self-inflicted/ knew colleagues would have an increased workload/ not fair/ worried about them when I leave (pg1) - I teach very specific module/ so knew others couldn't teach it (1) - Sabbatical issues - They didn't inform me of sabbatical applications, when on maternity leave so I missed deadline- I had to then wait a full year- not good! (3) - I was due sabbatical but no one was talking about it so I had to raise this issue a few times (3) - Maternity cover really badly handled! Colleagues over working- not good! (3) - feel more guilty if colleagues my friends, but feel they understand more (4) - I have good colleagues so fine for me, but what about those without good colleagues? - 2nd pregnancy/ didn't feel guilty BECAUSE already done my bit for covering for colleagues who were on maternity leave when I covered for them (4) - Also feel less guilty about my pregnancy if going away in summer because less impact of my absence because less teaching time etc. (4)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before going on maternity leave felt responsible for doing a lot more work to ease colleagues (1) - Wanted to keep in touch with colleagues/ and work so arranged my own KIT days/ no help from department in arranging (1) - (1st pregnancy) Knew we don't get cover- they would be one person down- as always (1)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (2nd pregnancy) because programme leader and almost impossible to run without me/ they got cover
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Couldn't take full maternity available because of the impact I knew it would have on my career (1) and wanted full pay- tactical. One full year= too much in an academic career. Sabbatical / not given= not right - They deferred my sabbatical that year because I had a baby that year- not good to take away sabbatical from a female! (1) -
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had two toddlers and new born whilst on maternity and kept being bugged from university t say.. do this help with this that and the other so I had to outright just say- you should not be bugging me. Im not free. (2)
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this career not feasible to take a couple of years off (1) - I myself filled myself in on updates by speaking to colleagues (3)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not updated on any changes during my adoption leave (1) Didn't feel involved with university in anyway (1) - They got cover for my teaching but none for my managerial role/ so it all just drifted! (1)
Holly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not updated on any changes during my adoption leave (1) Didn't feel involved with university in anyway (1)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No leeway to take time off to have a child (3) - I knew it would effect career (1) It's the norm to take minimum amount of time off because not only would it impact career you know you are being a burden on everyone else (2) Enormous burden (3) - <u>You can be easily replacable or not replacable. If easily replacable= pressure to come back faster because scared about them getting cover because because they might not want you back. If not easily replacable pressure to come back earlier because too much burden on colleagues and department suffers! So either way issues.</u> - You also don't want to be a hassle on them because to get cover it costs them and everyone says yes to everything they require..my yes comes with a 'but' (2) - Effectively working from home when on Maternity leave (2) Presumption that I was off, had PhD students to supervise/ had to research/ all emails answered/ all phone calls made (2) - Nobody to officially do all the duties I was supposed to do (2) - No support when away to say this or that will be taken care of...you go on mat leave but just continue with everything (2) - Because I am expert in subject area didn't think could get maternity cover (3)
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only took 6months off because knew absence would be problematic (1) - Because I was course leader, my role was perceived as 'significant' 1 year maternity cover arranged- unheard of! Other colleagues always had to cover for each other (1) - However, no smooth transition between and Maternity cover! Really stressed before going on maternity leave in the end I just had to leave information without knowing who it would go to! (1)

Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asked to be CC'ed in, but they themselves thought it would be too much for me so stopped cc'ing me in just so I could just fully enjoy my maternity and they didn't want to overwhelm me (pg 3) real nice) - Colleagues made it comfortable for me to be contribute in joint chapter despite being on maternity leave (pg 3) - No formal requests from the department- told to just enjoy maternity leave (3)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I arranged external and internal cover before going on maternity (2) - Looked after everything before leaving (2) - Lots of re-organisation took place when away from university and it wasn't communicated (2) - So much uncertainty and concern during maternity leave/ they Called me a few times to say I am at risk of redundancy –really adds to mental stress (3)

7. Flexibility issues/ Presentism

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always at work but have to leave 4 sharp to pick up child from nursery, university requires us to be available 9-6 publically got an email to justify/prove why I can't be available till 6pm, this felt intrusive (pg.05)
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility good but can mean working 24/7 - Some people like to show working all the time outside of work/ I end up working all evenings - More pressure increasing because sector getting competitive - New requirement to teach till 6pm (can't need to pick up children) - Jobs tailored around school times are admin focused and lower pay!
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best thing = the uni's flexibility with me (pg.3) (pg.4) - But because of flexible working we can do everything! Heard it said too many times and pressured to feel that I can do everything!
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email culture= crazy even students should be taught some sort of email etiquette - Before timetabling done on negotiating discretion with line manager but the department said no, all academics have to now work 9-6 if can't justify why not! Now have to put in a form. Discretion was good for both parties no discretion is actually more problematic! (pg. 5)
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of flexibility/ presentism problem (pg. 3) - Now on a lecturer contract, not going frustrated/ upset, weight's been lifted off (pg.9) Much better work-life balance - Now manager/ flexible/ not micro managing/ fine to even take day off if/when child= ill (pg.10) - Wouldn't even think of having a baby on a temporary contract ever. Only if on permanent
Sally L.M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility was very positive
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very strong email communication with colleagues- constant and daily so they didn't mind me working from home (pg. 2)
Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constant emails= problem (pg 3)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know at least one person that left because of having to teach evening classes- real struggle for mothers (4) HAVE to HAVE family support to work evenings! (pg 4) - Causes tension between colleagues if one gets evening off and other doesn't (4) - Fairness important/ not fair if one gets off and other doesn't ! & what about academics without children? Shouldn't be unfair on them (4) so flexi great but also a hindrance! (4) - Have no time to work on PhD (5) consciously trying to drive it forward/ never want to be seen as slacker/ - No time allocated to research- only thing that really leads to career progression (5) - Always limited by time/energy – shattered tired exhausted all the time (5) - Have to enterprise/ teach/ research/ attend conferences...no time in workload for all this! (5) - For research they only look at outputs- so nothing to show for it – THE ONLY way you get more time allocated to research in your workload is IF you have more outputs to show...so VICIOUS CYCLE! (5) - Workload hours not made clear in contract..this is +ve but not when wanting to say no to something. (6) - +ve because beauty of the job - -ve because rigidity in workload/ deadlines can't change (pg 4) - Some times/ things are flexible and some absolutely not questionable! (4)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility is Super supportive
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - +ve if can manage it is very good BUT.. - -ve can suffer/ working at home with kids/ working evenings/ weekends/ - It also sometimes doesn't add up because I work a lot of weekends but then I have to take annual days to go to kids nursery graduation (4)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very flexible/ autonomy over my diary (1) HOWEVER- As I've gone up the career ladder I've had less control over timetable (9) - Teaching is inflexible (9) - Positive (3) - No fixed hours (6) - Boundaries between work and home blurred (6) - Mothers can never compete with overworking people (6) - Work never goes away/ always always more and more to do (6) - People boast about working till late (6) - Our department 9-5= Unusual! (6) - Definitely felt pressure to be here till certain time (6) - Most women that leave early end up feeling like they have no social life at work (7) Not good for team building feeling belonging etc. (7)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility is great BUT quite a lot of expectation to be available outside of core hours (3) - Lots on family- unfriendly meeting times 8.15 or 6pm! Feel left out/ can't make them (3)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good/supportive (1) - Big benefit (2) - Told friends if want to be a mother and have career be an academic (2) - Positive when baby little/ no responsibility just turn up to lecture (3)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There should be some human rights policy to allow women to pick/drop children
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When called for an 8:30 meeting I don't even try to negotiate I just do it! I don't tell them that 1st I need to arrange childcare. because I know how that is perceived. (5) - Line manager, makes it all formal, wouldn't even arrange a meeting between us (5) So pressured- have to say yes! (5) - Need meaningful actual practical flexibility (6) - We need them to be considerate of my restrictive hours (6) - When couldn't do 9am lecture told to go from one person to another to another and in the end it wasn't approved (6)
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was positive, but it is eroding over time ! (4) - No pressure for presenteeism (4) - I wanted to start teaching at 10 and not 9 for childcare purposes, I was told no. A male senior colleague asked for a late start to walk the dog and his was approved!! (3)
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academia is flexible until it clashes with something you can't do- so, they say we'll do an evening that is convenient for you- BUT I don't have any that is convenient for me! Because I don't have childcare. - Very practical things are so inflexible e.g. room bookings/ venue changes (4) - Had to teach evening courses- not even asked if I can. There was a 'pressured vibe' (4) Department's decision to have an evening programme because we need revenue, if we don't agree to work on evening programme, we will not get that revenue and we won't have money to continue our programme, therefore we are at the risk of losing our job because we have no money now to continue it. So, in this way we are all made to believe that it is in the best interest of all of us that I agree to work in evening! (4) - Expected to be available from 8am-8pm (4) If no family support can't do this job. - Now there is a major push to be on Social Media a lot/ all the time/ that eats up time (5) - They can try to make teaching timetables more individualised/ especially the timings of when everyone needs to know by, they expect people to give availability months in advance most don't even know which school their kid will be going to! So it doesn't work! That flexibility doesn't work in practice (6)
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our university has a principal of having meetings at core times only 10am-4pm- this makes it a lot easier on parents (4)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because returned on a 0.5 part-time contract, wanted to work 3 consecutive days, told to work days spread out... makes it really awkward/ more difficult to get into 'work', Told need more availability for students (3) - When others able to help shift/ swap teaching times, but looks like a FAVOUR when I physically can't do a certain time! (6) - Unfair for University to have meetings at 8am on parents who need to drop kids off (4) Institutions should be mindful of the fact that earliest childcare starts at 7:30am can't make meetings at 8am! (4) Not inclusive of parents - Networking/ collaborations/ growth opportunities all happen at 4:30pm (5) This all delays and neglects promotion (5)
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lots of flexibility/ no presentism culture (1) - Autonomy over diary makes a huge difference (4)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I have the ability to say don't give me such and such a hours however, I don't use use that ability, I accept responsibility for being a full-time worker (4) - I'm 'lucky' I manage my own workload (5) - Big positive that can manage own workload/ no pressure of presentism/ can manage own time (6) - Since ours is the IT department- we have a lot more flexibility here in academia than there is in IT industry (2)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainly for senior people/ the lower down you go the less flexibility you see! (3) - I know I had some flexibility because I was in a managerial role (3) - GUILT- that not doing a full day (3) - Flexibility is only really a positive if you are in a 'power position' (4) - The perception is that the later you stay- the harder you are working! (4) But is that really true? (4) - HE really needs to allow for meaningful flexibility (5) - We should only be available to students at a/ for a particular time! (5) - If we are not teaching we shouldn't be expected to be on the desk (5) - Would like fewer teaching hours/ flexibility to leave at 3 without guilt (6)
Holly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This shows mother's that the organisation cares (2) - Although it is tricky because I can't start a lecture at 9am! In order to do that have to be at university 8.15 and nursery doesn't open till 8 (2)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I had to leave at 3:30pm for child pick up from nursery and heard comments about how I should move to live closer to university instead of leaving at 3:30pm for my long motorway commute (3) - As a lecturer now- there is a lot more autonomy over workload and therefore more flexibility (4) However, there is absolutely no flexibility with teaching times. No say! (4)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meetings outside of "core hours" = really problematic for mothers (1) Even if research centre tries to keep meetings in core times, senior staff push meetings to end of the day because inconsiderate to parents (1) end up missing further leads to colleague perception that you're not there! (1) - Childcare not a timetabling constraint (1) - FORMALISING flexible working arrangements= really quite problematic (1) Line manager 'informally' agreed 9am-3pm- told not to 'formalise' it..then the following semester put on teaching from 4pm-6pm! How can I do that? Who will pick up my child from nursery? Now I have no grounds to to properly dispute because it was never 'formalised' (1) - Rescheduling is impossible – moving a slot= impossible! (3) - Had to fight people's perceptions of my flexibility leaving at 3pm looked upon as if you're not working hard enough, but no one sees you starting work at 7am (3) - Meetings= outside of core hours always have to leave midday (3) - "Rather than pure sexism..there are no structures in place to allow people to have a better work-life balance" (4) - "People get no sympathy that traffic is a disaster- if you're not on your 9am lecture you're in trouble" (4)
Presentism	

Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doesn't happen/ no pressure/ not strict/ In fact encouraged to work away (4) - Upset from assumption of department that I CAN work from home ! (5) I can't work from home because of my children (5)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure to be present/ have to prove as a mother I am here and actually even when I am not here I am still being productive! (3) - Not fair- other colleagues without children come in less! (3)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Now there is a major culture of presentism/ manager checks up on you to see if you are in the office or not (4) Can't hang coats in the door (4) - Presentism really effects promotional aspects because if your face doesn't fit with the right people it really effects your career prospects (4) - Even when not teaching expected to be in! (4) Not allowed to work from home unless permission is attained from the line manager (4)
Holly F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure to be here (2) - As a mother specifically you feel the need to be more visible, so they don't forget all about you (2)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trying to convince people hard that if not physically in, still working from home (1) - No one sees you coming in at 7am but everyone sees you going home at 3pm and therefore perceive you as a slacker (1) - Unless highly visible and glued to your desk you're not working (4) This culture is a total failure (4)
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No pressure for presentism in our work culture (1) - General trust (3) - Academics in most HE institutions have a higher autonomy over their timetable- can work from home. (4) don't have to be in office 9-5 not many other jobs where you can do that (4)

8. Workload Issues

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple carers at home- can't work evening! Can't work any evenings because have disabled mother at home plus child home in the evening. - With PhD to do, lecturing workload totally unmanageable - In academia you never go home thinking I'm now done for the day, there is always more and more to do
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not just a 40hour week but an 80hours week! Publishing/ writing/ admin etc. (pg 6) - Constant struggle/ don't feel like a good mother or a good academic (pg 6) Constant guilt (pg 7) - Competitive nature of work- never enough (pg 7)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People boast about writing papers when breastfeeding/ not good! (2)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On return asked to cover workload for colleague on mat leave/ major responsibility just after return and not good for me or her (3) - Lack of uniformity (3) - Because of over-workload from colleagues maternity, even less time now to do research- impacts career majorly (3) - Actually should be given lighter workload on return (4) Or at least n additional responsibilities on top of usual workload - Workload is taken up by admin work! (5) Which doesn't get counted for anything! (5)

Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Already everyone struggling/ its very high/ and then on top of that having to work one person down due to maternity really frustrating and overwhelming (2)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A lot of pressure to publish! (5) But hardly any time! (5) - Your status as a lecturer is only justified through research outputs not all your hours of teaching/ admin/ student support (5) Really stressful job (5) - The organisations point of view is that in order to make a fair judgement on career progression of a person, they need quantifiable measures and one way to get that is to ask for research outputs (6) - Your request for more time to research is based on existing research/ therefore it's a VICIOUS cycle! We can't catch up (6)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insane! Have to work above and beyond contracted hours to get everything done! (3) - Workload on return Significant increase in workload post return felt penalised for being good and for having a baby (4) Pressured to do a role (4) - Worked/ pushed SUPER hard for them to give me less teaching to me so I can research instead! Really had to push – no support from them (4)
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basically unmanageable – not enough time on workload to do everything that needs to get done (2) - Especially research= problematic no time to do it. How to time to do publish/ get funding/ and work on PhD. (2) - We can say don't want to publish/ do bidding etc. But there is an unsaid rule here that we all have to. We know we have to do it to be successful. Constant battle- it's a strange environment (5) - They want you to go to conferences- but there I literally no time allocation in workload to arrange for that! So I had to take two annual days off from my leave just to prepare a presentation for a conference I am going to! (3) - I should be/ I want to go to more conferences BUT how? No time allocation! (4) - HUGE expectation to work outside hours (4) - Have to work every evening to get everything that needs doing done (4) - The constant email culture raises expectation from you to be available at all times (4) - Even holidays..If I did book Easter/ Christmas off- who will do all my marking?
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need a cultural change of work-life balance
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long hour culture (4) - University rewards those who have no work-life balance (7)
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Researching post return is the most challenging thing (4) basically don't have a research career/ very hard targets to meet (4). Find it very hard to get research going (4) The more responsibility/ managerial roles you take on the more difficult it becomes to do research (4) - In role now totally given up on research now- it not possible (5) - Even in research only 4* Journals matter- so no point doing anything else (5) How research is measured is a big problem! (5) - I wish for a more 'balanced' career (5) - Clear career trajectory if you want that you must no to everything else! (5)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crazy high! (5) - No understanding of our needs (5) - NO time allocated for research (5) Also no financial reward for research (5)

	- Major discrepancy in workload on what's written on paper and what's actually worked (5)
Zara	- No crazy amount of pressure to publish because not a research-heavy university (8)
Holly F	- It is insane! Have to work weekends! (2) Workload explodes with senior position (3) - There is a "so-called" "research day" on Friday but never able to take it because workload is crazy (2) No time for research (3) - No switch off time (2) - The HE game is how much can you do? (3) Majority of people working so much more in reality than what is on paper (3) - Actually have to take holidays to catch up on work! (3) - Its crazy we're all working extra for no pay! (4) - The constant culture of emails drives one mad! No limit to it/ no timing of it/ it's out of control/ I get in bed and answer emails for 2 hours before sleeping and then wake up at 6am to answer emails before starting my day (4)
Amy	- No time to do research but such a push for it! I see it as a burden now! (5)
Harriett	- No time for research (3) Research= career success (3) research is really career limiting (5) - Couple of senior women in my department work from eyes open to eyes shut- don't want that life (4) - Child= Career altering decision (5) - University pits teaching and research against each other/ why? If both things are in your job description than why only one rewarded? (6)

9. Breastfeeding / Open plan offices

Georgia	- Have an open plan office so very difficult to work from office. Better at home, work uninterrupted, can put washing in when downstairs
Grace	- Move towards shared offices= really troublesome for breastfeeding mothers - Needed breastfeeding space/ they covered office window said do it here, this is against health safety
Elena	- I had to quit breastfeeding for work because there was just no support at all (3)
Molly	- No baby- changing facilities (not even for students) (5) - High chairs removed from the canteen (5) - Breastfeeding rooms don't exist for students or academics! University provides a horrible room we tell our students to come to our office because more pleasant if they need to pump. (5) - Maybe none of this is deliberate but its not welcoming! (pg 5) - Was allowed to take shorter day to breastfeed baby because he wouldn't take the bottle (pg 2)
Maya	- Struggling to breastfeed but HR didn't support at all although I believe they should've. (pg 1) Never mind a discussion they didn't even ask me (pg 1) - Breastfeed= Nightmare! (pg 4)
Hannah	- Move from Private offices to shared offices not good for working especially for research or breastfeeding mothers (4)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very difficult to work here (5)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't breastfeed because I knew university wouldn't allow it (7) - No support with breastfeeding/ n comfortable place allocated (7) - On campus nursery said just pop by whenever he needs a feed really?! That is not easy! The system is not built for it!
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knew wouldn't be supported - My colleague had to express milk in university, in what was a lunch staff room for colleagues. So she had to put up an 'expressing milk' sign on- quite uncomfortable- They as an organisation have an obligation to give/ provide space to be a room without a mirrored door. I knew I would've really struggled (2)
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biggest challenge! Required a lot of pumping/ organising/ hardly any room available or time allocated (2)
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very difficult/ had to take pumps in/no place/ I wouldn't repeat this (2) - Frequently slept on desk/ sick bucket under desk/ because not a shared office it was very useful! (1)
Holly F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Really there should be room/ space available but isn't unfortunately (2)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male colleague on return: "We were wondering if you're going to be breastfeeding or not" In other words Are you going to get your boobs out or not?! Not funny! Really derogatory (1) - Especially for breastfeeding / but also research and writing grants (7) - Left previous university because it became an open plan office environment- they have innovative/ creative people working like they are in a factory (7)

10. Isolation & Need for a support network

Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big challenge felt really isolated. In an alone office for a long period of time/ common in academia/ teach alone, research alone, phd alone especially PART-TIME, can't attend all the meetings. Needed more support/ someone to check up on me/ making sure I was integrating well (pg.02) - Even colleagues had left- so no social support network- feeling further isolation - Stronger staff networks should be encouraged because that is a major support for returning mothers - Need for a woman's support network - Best thing has been speaking to senior staff (from own accord) to make the experience more relatable/ or even male staff that talk about it (pg. 2) - Main thing is to be supported to not lose confidence and to not lose touch with others. (pg 3)
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Isolated working with Phds/ post-docs/ research fellows, not part of a team (pg. 6) - Also, because manager not friendly with anyone it became harder to make friends with anyone (pg. 7)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Really would've been nice to have that on return (5) - When took longer off (3rd pregnancy) found it really hard to pick up on colleague interactions etc. (5) much harder to settle in - Support network is so so important (7)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The best thing University could do for me is give me a women's support group (6) - Formality not support - All the paper work was done BUT felt really unsupported, was struggling with so much by myself/ clear that work didn't care about me (5) - HR should do this! Put mums in contact with each other! (7)
Holly F Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a woman's support network would've really helped (4) - Can't be part of the pub culture (3) evening dinners (3) - Networking outside of work is really problematic (3) - University should have a formal support network when mother's return to work- women can choose to opt out of it if they wish (5) - Looked for a woman's/ parent's group- none here! (5) That would be really helpful- critical mass of people lobbying for a change would be really good (5) - There needs to be a women's support group AND a mother's network group (5)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Really could be supported through a women's group (8)

11. Post-natal depression/ anxiety/ depression

Katie	- Always very worried/ emotional/ depression/ no support at all- don't know who to tell even (2)
Faith	- Feel really vulnerable/ stressed/ lost weight/ depressed/ no support (4)
Zara	- Serious lack of support for women that have traumatic birth experiences or post-natal depression (pg. 7)
Elena	- Experienced severe anxiety/ depression/ post-natal depression referred to cognitive behavioural therapy- NO SUPPORT say I understand but show no sensitivity (pg.3) - But did get counselling at work- very helpful
Jasmine	- This was most difficult thing after return (pg 5) - Started having post-natal depression and depression generally accelerating because working in prisons/ managing all this/ coming back . (pg 5) - Had to take anti -depressants/ do therapy/ - Have a system of mentors- my mentor super supportive/ mentor huge help when going through depression/ she had gone through same thing (pg 5)
Harriett	- I was mentally really struggling! I really needed someone to step in and ask if I needed anything (3)

12. Return Issues

Zara	- Most of return to work experience is dependent on 'luck' whether you return in semester time or off semester time - Return/ professor left/ closing down module/ new mother/ part-time at work/ work-life balance/ taking on new subject (lot of prep needed)/ bullying incident at work- ALL TOO MUCH. Too stressful. - Lot of change happened when away- no one really discuss this with. Need to return to work meeting - After return told can't teach PGR's because block delivery and I'm part-time . didn't explain any real reason why..was it some type of a manipulation? Really gutted and disappointed with this (pg.3) - Really needed support with the 'uncertainty' of role when coming back! (pg.3)
Molly	- No problems, but no support, no phased return nothing (pg 1)
Jasmine	- (pg 4) Fund to help get returning mother's on track with their careers, so attend conferences/ research etc. Fund can go upto £5000 I asked for £1800- hired a research assistant (Google faculty of law university of Oxford)
Maya	- Most women plan their own phased-return through accrued annual leave (2) because they don't - KIT days- used but not integrated, no one at the time was around so I didn't see anyone or 'KEEP IN TOUCH' with anyone but just came in and did the job (2)

Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The university doesn't recognise the impact of time off .e.g. research/ teaching (3) - No acknowledgement or recognition of difficulty of getting back on track after return (3) - Need recognition of difficulty upon return (3)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Returned to much bigger workload after maternity leave- felt penalised for having a baby (1) - Because programme leader when went on 2nd pregnancy/ expected to return as programme leader BUT told that person covering should continue (2) Legally wrong/ caused a fuss/ line manager very unhappy/ but illegal had to fight! (2) - No gentle transition/ no phased return (2) - Planned own phased return/ organisation didn't (4)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biggest issue=research upon return (2) - Timing matters a lot- if return in September= manic! If in December= real quite! (4)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literally all my return is self-managed (6) <p>Created own phased return</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used annual leave with mat leave (1)
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No return to work scheme/ no help on return (1) - Don't remember any integration- don't know if expected any (2) - When you're ill you get a staggered return back, but with maternity straight back in! (3) - If you comeback in summer= laid back (I did so gently eased in)(1) - If you comeback in mid-semester= really full on! (1)
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception on return is that I have reduced competency and reduced professionalism (1)
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First worked from home (1) really good transition, Then Workload reduced upon return which was very helpful, so instead of teaching on 2 courses on my return I taught on 1 course only (1) I really benefited from reduced workload on return (2)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had to fight A LOT to have my roles on return (1) - The reason they gave me to to leave my role is because there is not enough time available for students, and mainly because childcare responsibilities= Me being unreliable (2) - Took this to the union/ to fight this discrimination/ (2) - No return back to work meeting (3) It's usually the programme leader that does that meeting because programme leader myself no one else to do that meeting (3) - Perception changes post return- get seen differently (9) - The perception is reduced competency but in fact it's actually the opposite! I am more productive now than before the kids. I no longer procrastinate. There is no time to! (9)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had to fight A LOT to have my roles on return (1)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The reason they gave me to to leave my role is because there is not enough time available for students, and mainly because childcare responsibilities= Me being unreliable (2) - Took this to the union/ to fight this discrimination/ (2) - No return back to work meeting (3) It's usually the programme leader that does that meeting because programme leader myself no one else to do that meeting (3) - Perception changes post return- get seen differently (9) - The perception is reduced competency but in fact it's actually the opposite! I am more productive now than before the kids. I no longer procrastinate. There is no time to! (9)
Holly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nobody asks you how you're coping and it would be nice for some one to check up (2) -
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No transition on return(2) - Asked head of school for meeting myself (2) - The only welcome back I got was..if you want to go part-time do it! (2) - Organisational support - Everything is informally handled and that's what really adds to the uncertainty for women all the time (5) - Unsympathetic system we work in (5) - Institutional issue- because they don't outright say they won't support you. Its just that they say they would and then they don't (5) - Universities should a fantastic employer- they have all the potential- in fact universities should be ahead of the curve (5) It really needs to start doing what it says it would
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I actually lost a managerial role on my return and I was happy about it! (2) - Generally a positive experience of return- know in the minority (4)
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't loose confidence felt respected having worked so hard pre-baby (pg. 2)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used annual leave to stagger own return (1) - No formal updates/ transition procedures

13. Role Models

Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Felt that I was role model for other mother aademics
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important for academic working mothers to have role models (7) - There was an assumption that a senior academic with kids was my role model, but she wasn't because she had no worklife balance! She worked too much and spent too little time with family- need role models who have managed a balance (7)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Its really important for women at bottom to have representation at the top - Or just be aligned with a mentor/ a support system to push/ help (5)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Someone to push you/ to keep trying/ have empathy (5) - Don't want sympathy/ want empathy/ want to be RECOGNISED. (6)
Holly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In our department only one female professor this is not okay. I want to be a professor but no role models- I want to change that (3)
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am proud that I am a positive role model for my children
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In our IT department here, we have more role models in academic IT department than there is in the IT industry (2)

14. Athena SWAN

Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big impact/ raised awareness/ high on agenda in our school because I pushed it (8)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expectations changing a little bit.. masculine approach of meetings/ changing a little bit in terms of meeting times etc. (5)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At the time applying for Athena SWAN awards but not realising/ caring at all about the MAJOR DISCRIMINATION happening to me at the time! (2) - Athena SWAN not around for too long/ the only way to bring in quick change is to have quotas (6)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "People pretend here that children don't hinder your career and we're bringing in policies to further support you but that's all just on paper" (1)

15. Line Manager issues

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive line manager, pushed higher authorities to keep her - Because good friends with line manager had no problems. - In academia as long as you put things in your diary and people know where you are especially when you are friends with your line manager it's all good. - Don't know if I would've liked any more support from the university because already had a supportive line manager and colleagues
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could tell line manager earlier then needed to because already good friends - Previous line manager v. diff if him would've been different experience (Previous didn't have children he made it clear he didn't like them, he was anti-maternity and anti-children) (pg.01) - Not long after 1st return was pregnant again, line manger okay he also had 2 children, I told him no more. - Friends with line manger= good experience for me
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st time pregnancy line manager= close/ near office/ knew well. 2nd pregnancy different line manager/ didn't know so well/ far away office- makes a difference - Sometimes their view- if home can't work, they don't realise you can! - Feel like the more transparent you are the more you get penalised (Issue- major..this can be a strong theme)

Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Really important to have someone to speak to, someone to have a meaningful dialogue with! - Need more dialogue about what can/can't miss - This will make professional meetings more meaningful - Not encouraged to use timetabling constraints - Learnt now tat here for myself no one checks/cares (pg. 7) - Supervisors can show acknowledgement that you are returning post maternity that even makes you feel supported (pg. 8) - Feedback from supervisor is really important- need to hear from supervisor, also need to hear that even though you are part-time you are valued (pg. 9) - Need continued support/ over time/ contract/ communication/ check up (pg. 9) Need supervisor to keep in contact (pg. 9) - Organisation need to support formally and informally (pg. 9- red underline)
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manager- micro managed- horrible! She was also under pressure to deliver objectives - Always set unrealistic deadlines (pg. 5) This added to anxiety because couldn't reach - Criticised work but didn't give constructive feedback (pg. 5) - She had power- I was scared of her giving me a bad reference - Never formally complaint because didn't want a bad reference (pg.9) - Like Jykell & Hyde- not supportive and helpful, just high expectations for me to be a certain way and produce certain results - Her project/ I am research fellow/ so I don't have that autonomy - Lack of trust from line manager- always thought I'm lying (pg. 8) - Started actually lying because knew she would distrust (pg.9) - Would've really appreciated support on return (pg.10)
Sally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My experience positive because friends with line manager, might be really different otherwise -
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manager communicated well with me regarding childcare etc. - So it was very supportive (pg 2) - Supportive but doesn't have children so assumes I can easily go full-time and work from home all the time (pg 6) - Bad experience with some female line managers who have made it despite having children- they are not empathetic (pg 8)
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Said enjoy pregnancy- don't worry about anything (pg 1) - She fought for me with university with gender equality arguments (pg 1) - Line manager and boss said whatever happens, worse comes to worse we'll give you maternity pay from the departments budget (pg 2) - They said if this was a man it wouldn't be an issue! Not fair (pg 2) - They funded 6months of mat leave (pg 2), If had asked for more sure would've got it - Manager never tried to micro-manage- lotsof trust (pg2)
Lily	<p>1st pregnancy (Different place) Line manager/ not sympathetic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Said it's a shame, had a career here. Didn't care about anything (1) - He disliked me just for having a family- if single he would've loved me (2) <p>1st pregnancy awful experiences/ pregnancy discrimination/ they didn't care about me/ not allowed to go conference</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stopped caring about me/ stopped training me when pregnant (2) - Not allowed to go to conference in in 'pregnant state' (2) - Working under horrible conditions in lab wen pregnant (2) 2nd pregnancy department/ supportive/ family friendly - Super supportive/ cover for each other when child ill/ Equipped for family baby- emergencies (5)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had all three different line managers for three pregnancies/ experienced both good and bad/ so important to have supportive line manager/ a negative line manager puts doubt in you (7)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem is my point of contact is my line manager and my line manager is the one being unfair- so don't know who to go to or who to speak to really (2)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited within his capacity because can't do much to implement practically the broad policy in place! (6) -
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Line manager told me I shouldn't take part in training because I have a child (2) -
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Line manager perception believes wanting to have children= choosing not to have a career! (2) - He is gay guy- can't relate (2) - Universities have a very strong managerial culture (4) -
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was a die hard feminist obviously makes a difference/ she also a mother researched women in IT very supportive (2) - In other professions as well, but in academia you are always at the mercy of your line managers- I've been lucky to have good ones (6) -
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extreme lack of support by manager when I was put in the redundancy pot. She didn't see any value in what I did (2) - Waste of space (3)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visibly shocked at pregnancy news! Like why the hell are you getting pregnant at this stage?! (2) - Made comments about how I should move closer to university instead of leaving at 3:30pm (3) Implying I should be focusing on and prioritise my job not my family (3)

16. No institutional command/ Organisational Support/ What organisation should do

Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Virtually zero organisational support. - Would be good for a woman to have longer off after children/ be fully supported on return perhaps 0.6 or 07 and then upwards. - Organisation should support with growth opportunities/ same job role as before (pg.8) - Needed support with growth opportunities/ wanted same job role as before/ at least supervisors can show acknowledgement that you are coming back that will make most academics feel supported
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Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always uncertainty of redundancy (pg 1) - Threat of redundancy= Institutional bullying! (pg6) - Biggest problem= no institutional command! That this is how we will be treating mothers here. It just happens as & how it fits with each mother's immediate context. Is that okay? (pg.8)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There could be more formal support measures/ instead of just them talking about it/ more tangible (4) E.g. Money on return to attend conferences/ field work/ etc. (4) -
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very supportive/ daughter went to it makes travel easy/ peace of mind (4) - Vouchers/ less tax- some discount/ good service(5)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tick box exercise (3) - Huge hypocrisy, not honest & open, they pull rank and then:" / traditionalist/ profs just want to research/ not teach! (3) - Support only on the surface! (6) In reality no practical meaningful support! (6) Informally no one cares (6) - It's been three years since I've had my child institution has Not gotten any better at supporting me (7) - It's a game/ women must learn to play/ I learnt to say no and really become ruthless! (4) <p>Power should be taken from In-house 'Line managers'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arranged with HR not Line manager! (6) - Certain care giving responsibilities can be arranged "in-house"...they don't always care! (7) - HR left it to 'in house' to cover their backs (7) - This leaves you feeling that No one is looking out Not HR (7) Not line manager (7)No colleagues (7) Horrible feeling- institution just does not care! (7) -
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Now working in universities is a lot more pressure than before (2) - Previously long thin modules so easier to teach, now everything semesterised- sure dealing with this is a lot harder as a mother now than before (2) - Before negotiation of working arrangements was more 'in-house' then centralised. Now have to put requests in have deadlines to put requests in (3) -
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The system doesn't acknowledge that you can be a parent and an academic (5) It is just not set up to be Family-friendly (5) - It doesn't actively discourage us but the immediate department etc. can't change the policy! It's a computer says no situation (5) - It can't support what it doesn't acknowledge! (5) - Nothing here supports the motherhood aspect of my life (5) - It's not inclusive of mothers (5) - To enhance family-friendly culture they could do 'family-days' (5) - They could do family- summer parties/ Easter egg hunt/ xmas parties/ family stuff (5) This would really enhance the environment (5) -
Leah	Organisation should...

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have more women on interview boards - understand problems facing women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognise that sometimes being a mother has a positive impact on you (2) - Get more women on committee for appointments of promotions - Universities should think about 'Split jobs' meaning senior roles can be split into two so that they can be given to someone as a half time responsibility- this will work GREAT for part-time mothers who really want promotion too! Women with kids can be professors in few years (4) - Life becomes emotionally and physically really draining so need work to a at least be smooth (3)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I had no expectation- knew I would have to self-manage (5) - Wasn't aware of any support available to me (5) - Trapped in job! Can't leave because they are paying for my PhD (5)
Holly F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't think there was going to be any and there wasn't (2) "I am not that kind of person, I don't expect anyone in the organisation to support me" (2) Need to prove the culture wrong (2) - My promotion to senior lecturer was transparent and I appreciated that (2) - The system in general is geared towards men succeeding (2) - Motherhood biggest impact on research (3) which basically equals promotion (3) - Pressure- you are only as good as your last research (3) - The research culture is also very much a man's thing! (5) - Issues of inequality across the board (4) - As a senior lecturer I go to a lot of high up meetings where the only other woman is the one taking the notes! (4) - There are definitely pressures on academic mother's that aren't on academic father's necessarily! (4) This is why the new Athena SWAN agenda is so important... we need to change the culture/ the conversation in academia (4) - Experience 'Manslaying' all the time (5) Say an idea as a woman and no one listens, a man repeats it and everyone is like yesss!!! (5) Get 'Manslammed' all the time (5)

17. Childcare

Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In schools no spaces for after school clubs this makes working till a set time a lot harder (3) In son's school 700 children and 15 spaces in after school club! Problem
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After school clubs/ hardly any places/ very unreliable (4) - Childcare X3 times our mortgage (4)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If late for nursery pick up it costs £5 for every 5minutes that I'm late! Insane! (5)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is on-campus nursery which is good (7)
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nursery on campus= really supportive (1) - Had to speak about childcare issues up front (4) - They couldn't care less about my childcare difficulty (4) - Anything outside of work is our own problem! (4) - Couldn't teach till 6pm one time, missed deadline to put in request, then tried and tried but they made it exceptionally difficult for me, learnt from this that they don't care! We're just machines to them! (4)
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As an academic you are expected to have all your childcare sorted before you come to work (5) - There are absolutely no concessions made for the childcare going wrong (5) - Also voicing childcare constraints impacts career! So you are scared to voice it (5) -
Kirst F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Childcare is crippling me- it's more than the mortgage (4)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you choose wrap around care at school that means your child in school from 7am to 7pm! What that means = someone else raising your child, so you can work what's the point? (1) - Child care constraint not accepted by timetabling (1) - Super expensive- cripples me (4)

18. Societal primary caring responsibility issue

Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For women- primary responsibility, for husband a bit of an irritant. Therefore, harder for women (pg.04) - My perception easier for men because their mind set= my wife/partner will look after kids. - It's a wider issue than organisation, it's a cultural issue...we can say we have equality but when it comes to the children women have primary responsibility.
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My colleague fathers no way near as stressed as mothers (pg 6) - Everything including mobility etc more difficult for mothers because that's just the way it is (pg 6)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic father doesn't get as impacted by being a parent as an academic mother does (my husband didn't) (4) - I have primary responsibility- he doesn't (4)
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In universities people that have no work-life balance and people that are just selfish and just think about their own careers instead of thinking about the team are the people that are rewarded! (4) -
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jealous of my husband, because he is man- he has both! Career + Fatherhood! (7)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who should or who does have primary responsibility at home? Because I feel at mine its completely me (3) Men feel its their role to be the successful one, and mine to stay at home and look after children. (3)

19. Family-Friendly (Or not)

Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always uncertainty of redundancy (pg 1) - Threat of redundancy= Institutional bullying! (pg6) - Miss out majorly as a mother/ breakfast meetings (pg 5)/ talks in evening in pub (pg 5) Not inclusive of mothers - Not inclusive/ Very exclusive (pg. 5) - +ve= Nursery available on campus to drop kids - -ve= Expected to teach till 6/ nursery shuts at 6! Thoughtless things like this make you think not supported as mother (pg. 5)
Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On-campus nurseries= really supportive - Money taken from salary to pay for childcare vouchers- really good because have to pay less tax- good supportive (6)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On campus nursery= very supportive!
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their support= very important! (4) -
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't think having children effects career progression - Never heard children imparting anyone's academic career
Leah	University had crèche- really helpful (1)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "System is so unfair and stacked against me" [as a mother] (6) - The organisation is very imbalanced/ Either they are too regulated or not regulated enough! (7)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive that there is a nursery on campus but it doesn't have a good rating- so really reluctant to put child in it (4)

20. Miscarriage badly handled

Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No support on a late miscarriage (1) - Worst handled miscarriage! "Abmismally handled" – not one little bit of support. (2) People still asking when I came back if I was still pregnant (1) Very difficult to comeback (2) - Had to tell everyone myself/ no support/ (2)
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21. Adoption Leave difficult

Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University policy says that we don't have to tell them anything until adoption decision made. However, out of the goodness of my heart told them about "thinking" of adopting. And was told by line manager that I needed to give up all my roles now. (1) - Line manager's poor reaction effected rest of communication with university (2) - Adoption not taken/ understood as if normal pregnancy- not quite understanding on why I need time off post having children
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22. Career

Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motherhood puts you back/ even in a supportive environment it impacts you / part-time definitely impacts - Taking time out outside of your career which shows on your CV really puts you behind someone who hasn't done that! (WHYYYY? Do we need some positive discrimination here..to allow women to have that time off on their CV, because the baby is not going to feed and look after itself is it ?!) - Publications count for everything. Really puts you down. - Want promotion but shouldn't have to/ wouldn't sacrifice time with children
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't believe can do everything- finite amount of time for a few years have to prioritise family and that should be okay! (pg. 8)
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a female academic have to be highly strategic (chose a male mentor for this reason) - With male supervisor strategically planned to be promoted before children (pg. 1) - Know so many other female academics who are trying to be promoted before having a child- putting that off till then - Without mentor support and communication and strategy would've really struggled!
Elena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Couldn't work evenings anymore- that really hindered (pg. 6) - For career constant requirement to be feeding CV with outputs
Sally L. M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department/ line manager/ colleagues/ how long been there/ relationships with colleagues (pg.4) -
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't get my promotion because of lack of research (pg 4) Institution doesn't get its money from research it gets it from teaching- so it wasn't you to do that massively! (pg4) Apparently now trying to change promotional aspects to look at teaching responsibilities as well not just research outputs (pg 4) - University doesn't want to promote because why promote when someone on a lecturer level already doing job for less money, because not much additional responsibility as a senior lecturer (pg 4) - Women of a certain age whose kids have grown up and moved out- they the ones progressing in their careers (pg 8)
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm really really well supported in my department but would still say motherhood does effect your academic career- no denying (pg 5) - Because your mind is now full of TOO many other things (pg 5) - Tiredness effects productivity (pg 6)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't think motherhood effected career progression at all (5) - Motherhood does effect productivity- tired all the time ! (5)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choice..what is success in a career? Most men see success as being at the top but women see success as having a balance and being happy (5) - I don't want to be a professor! Don't want extra admin (Is tis why she thinks motherhood doesn't effect her career progression) (5)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking time off has a detrimental effect- mainly because time-away from publication (2) - Career suffers because no account taken for time off (5) - If promotion application rejected have to wait another 2 years.. which adds further time to career span (5) - Time is of essence- promotion cycles only happen twice a year RAF happens 5-6 years- so clocks ticking! (5) - Serious help is needed in speeding up the process of catching up (5) - In promotion application need to show leadership- BUT also NEED that opportunity! (5)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only about research outputs- nothing else (1) - Actually promoted on Maternity leave (3) - BUT motherhood definitely slows the process (3) - Got more opportunities than a man would have (3) - Poor in HE- as if can't work as hard as before (5) - General perception in HE not to take women with children that seriously (6)
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I choose not to apply for a promotion because not right time family wise even though right time career wise! (4) - I work in a female dominated department but it's still men at the top! (5) All the professors are men in a female dominating department! (5) - Chances of women going higher are very low- I just got lucky! (5)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You career trajectory depends on you (2) how you organise it (3) - What can organisation do? It's up to you! (4) - Majorly reduces because of childcare activities (4) - Always tired/ exhausted (4)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is what make it harder for returning mothers because "I don't just have a job I have a career and then some" (2) - It's draining (3) - Taught self to cut it out at work! No point (6) - Lie being an Academic robot (no feelings) or emotions! (7) -
Leah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In universities people that have no work-life balance and people that are just selfish and just think about their own careers instead of thinking about the team are the people that are rewarded! (4) - In universities people that have no work-life balance and people that are just selfish and just think about their own careers instead of thinking about the team are the people that are rewarded! (4)
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My mum in 1960's made a choice and I've also had to make a choice between career and motherhood.. how have we progressed? (7)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People with ace research careers don't generally have children (5) - In order to be promoted academics move around and mother's find that very difficult to do (5) - Un inclusivity/ lack of networking and growth opportunities all lead to promotion/ all limited to mothers (4) - Criteria for promotion is ALL for full-timers (6) It shouldn't be same as someone who works HALF as much (6) Nothing on the application which says for a fractional contract show this...! (6) Same research output required from part-timers as full-timers (6) - We are made to feel like research is for individual self but career is ONLY a career within the institution..so..! (8) -
Hailey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very very helpful for career advice/ support/ how to do things/ my assigned mentor= super helpful even after he retired (3)
Holly F.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Really anxious about impact on career (1) - Adamant to prove to society that motherhood will not stop me reaching career goals (1) - Constantly tired/ exhausted though
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a family life outside of a research career feels impossible to me (1) - Academia mind set tells me that I am not successful based on lack of research papers (5) - When thinking of getting pregnant looked up and down corridor= no faculty that was female! (5) Apart from a PA everyone else was a man! (5) - Two ideas in mind= 1) Why are there no women and I'm thinking of having a baby? 2) My baby decision could be really really damaging to my career. (5) - I thought the reason why there are no women is because they couldn't make it and I probably can't either! (5) - A lot of snobiness about where you work/ whether you measure up to be successful? University of where? Academia put me off research! More drawn to management now (5) - Research culture is geared towards the network of a boys club!(5) - In academia I need to take a step back and only really re-enter it properly after my children are older. That's bad here in academia because the time when you should be putting in absolutely everything and establish your research profile is the time that you are actually having to step back! (6) -
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Went down to 3 ½ days- got given the leadership role back. Had reservations that wouldn't be able to manage it on reduced hours- I was right! (When had programme leadership on FT contract ALWAYS worked evenings/ weekends.. Too much admin/ not enough weighting. It got too much had to take 2months off work due to related anxiety and stress! (2) the workload of course leadership role was just not feasible on fractional contract (2) Don't believe that supervisory role is feasible on fractional contract (2) - No time for research (3) Can't progress academically (3) - Unless someone drastically takes away my admin workload- progression won't happen!- the stuff that really takes so much time and doesn't count towards anything! (4) - Not impossible to become senior but it would require a HUGE sacrifice to my family life (4)

23. Travel/ Conferences

Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better job opportunities in academia require more travelling- easier for men! - Really difficult to attend conferences- childcare impossible!
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travelling- now issue. Previously did loads (pg. 5)
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conferences= issue because of travelling and mainly because no childcare at conferences! - Our department now finally has a crèche but for so long I didn't care - UK far behind Scandinavia- they ask if your family is coming for lunch. USA is worst
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - V difficult for mothers to travel/ no childcare - Even for this have to go above and beyond contract time, everything assumes that you can do a 40hour week (pg 7)
Ines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problematic because no childcare at conferences (pg 6) - Come back on the day presenting- can't stay to network really problematic (pg.6)
Lily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can't- need to take family- problematic (5)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More geographically mobile you are- the higher the chances of your promotion (5) This is obviously especially more difficult for mothers (5) - From all my colleagues that have moved around can't think of a single woman- all been men! (5)
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't like to do it anymore/ hassle/ & personally don't want to be away from kids (3)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Networking issue most of it happens there..can't go! (5) - Networking happens at conferences- harder for women to attend- unfair. (6) Unfair also because easier for man to travel (e.g. my husband) does it without thinking twice (6) - Cannot attend conference because no childcare there and daughter cannot stay night without me (5) -
Priya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to be at conferences to network and collaborate, but can't attend conferences because have childcare constraints and because conferences don't provide childcare (5) - Sometimes conferences in term-time (5) -
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not possible to manage! Academically disadvantaged (5)
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Require travel/ no childcare/ problematic for mothers/ that's where all the networking happens/ all the networking leads to research collaboration/ publications! (5) - Success in this job requires a lot of it and for mother's very difficult (3)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harder to attend (5)

24. 'Academic' baby

Grace	- Strategically planned babies timing too, gave birth to an 'academic baby'. Had him in September was off in heavy semester time and returned in less heavy summer time
Olivia	- Planned baby time to get out of teaching and do research (1) - Planned all three pregnancies to miss teaching time (1)
Katie	- At a later stage of pregnancy- people make jokes about pregnancy (1)
Hailey	- "Fortunate" timing of baby (1)
Harriett	- Really "lucky to have a term time baby- returned in summer really helped (6)
Victoria	- Because baby born during term time- I had lighter load on return- not because of an agreed arrangement (1)

25. Child talk in interview & Definitely not another child now

Grace	- At an interview straight up told them I have had a hysterectomy- so that they know not to worry about my maternity leave. Silver lining- wanted more children but know now have a stronger career path
Elena	- Started new job researcher, daughter only 3months - Purposely didn't disclose that had young baby at interview
Faith	- "Don't get me wrong, I'm not going to have another one of course, can you imagine that would be the end of my academic career! (1)

26. Would quit

Amy	1. Short contracts 2. Not knowing how to deal with child 3. Didn't want to be left again without knowing where to go next 4. Need to be so geographically mobile- didn't want to do that (3)
Harriett	- If single parent would've most definitely quit this job! Not doable without a lot of family support (2)
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27. Colleagues perception effect/ Department

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During mat leave taught as a favour and had very supportive colleagues, brought in my 2 month old and they babysat my child whilst I taught - Very small team, only 4 people, all female, supportive therefore. - Lost quite a few staff to illness so became even closer to each other, most don't have family nearby, so baby-sit for each other
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am "fortunate" I have been supported well! Shouldn't that be the norm?! - MALE colleagues mainly- often say can write a bid over the weekend- no feel bad enough not spending enough week day evenings with children never mind loosing whole weekend too. (When majority male colleagues they have a higher expectation for you to work weekends because they can because their wives looking after their kids!)
Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male dominated department previously hated it - Experienced discrimination in that department, a man would always get the promotion {Important story pg. 4} he himself admitted it, boys club, more control over destiny, pub culture, project opportunities arise (pg. 5) - Time out means can't produce what a man can (pg.4) - Always 'side-kick' of male colleague (pg.05) - Experienced pregnancy discrimination/ 'it's a pain when women go on maternity'
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive team/ mainly women/ mainly feminists – head of dept. being a feminist makes a really big difference - Privileged to be in this department (sad that people who have supportive teams always think it's a privilege also implying that others of course don't have this privilege !)
Sally L.M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive strong staff network= really important literally someone down the corridor could have a really bad experience (pg 4) - And supportive line manager obviously (pg 4) - Department/ line manager/ colleagues/ how long been there/ relationships with colleagues (pg.4) -
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How supportive/ un supportive you feel depends on who you work with/ in my experience male colleagues were more supportive than female
Ines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone in department= parents/ understand how little productive you are with little baby (pg 2), no pressure to work in full mode (pg 3) - Very small department (pg 3) 10-15 people - Lots of women- all feminists- successful & career oriented (pg 3) Really into gender equality - -ve side of having females in department= raised expectations-makes me feel inadequate (pg 6)
Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Didn't feel nervous about announcing pregnancy because it's a female oriented department - Team super supportive because subject area mainly female dominated- don't like to admit about motherhood outside of of this immediate team because less supportive - Before going on maternity team really supportive/ didn't let me put name down for re-sits in case pre-mature baby (1)
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Few female colleagues with youngish children/ not adding to particular support but comfortable having a baby here (2)

Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very nervous about announcing 1st pregnancy because of what colleagues would think/ & how they'd view me as someone who takes my job less seriously (2) - Totally male dominated/ 9 out of 45 academics are female and out of 9, only 3 have families (2) - Not common in our engineering department to a- be a woman b- have a baby! (2) - Make comments on going home early (1) Taunting comments (3) Some people resent that I finish early (3) - Other people benchmark you- mothers taken less seriously (6) -
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male dominated/ everything geared towards men even the graduation gowns are massive because for men! (4) -
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience totally dependent on immediate environment of organisation and colleagues that you work with (4)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male dominated/ male white professors/ white man middle class dominant culture in HE in general. Especially, in my department (Criminology) (3) - They view or have made comments to suggest that all this childcare/discussion is an 'excuse' - Pressure to volunteer on weekends heard people say "oh she has kids so can't do it" - Colleagues in power do what they want! (6) - Male dominated department (7) -
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serious Academic- the assumption is that to be an academic you can only be an academic and nothing else. - There was a student buffet that I really wanted to come to but no childcare so would have to bring son- and instead of showing any understanding that it really would be too much hassle for me. They were just like..yeah yeah go get him (felt like it just didn't mean anything to them) (3) -
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not considered favourably by colleagues/ almost thought I didn't need time off (3) - People said we don't understand why you need to be off/ you've not given birth (3) - Resentment in their eyes that I didn't actually need time off (3) - Male dominated department- makes experience harder I think (3) - Adoption perceived quite differently to normal childbirth (3) because not visibly pregnant (3) - They felt resentment because it caused them inconvenience me not being there (3) - The perception is that the later you stay- the harder you are working! (4) But is that really true?
Holly F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women oriented department - male colleagues quite patronising- they think I should be able to work all the time I am home (3) - All of my research collaborations are with men! They find my working pattern annoying because they go home and be an academic where as I go home and be a mother! (3) Men colleagues just do not understand my struggles they have no idea! (5) - But at the same time there are some female colleagues who judge me for saying yes to things- like why are you not spending time with your family (4) [can't win!] - A lot of people ask you've been successful but at what cost? (4)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hardly any woman on my corridor- no one to confide in (2)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Massive perception issue (1) - Culture- large group of middle aged men! (1) - “Pub culture” very few opportunities to socialise outside of the pub (3) - Men really unsympathetic towards women, if you say ‘I’m tired’ oh I’m always tired! If you say I’m sleep deprived..’oh I’m always sleep deprived’ (6) Very unsympathetic - Comments on clothes/ shoes ..why do you always wear black? (6) -
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28. Intersectionality

Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes I feel like I am doing less than I use to before but then I realise that it’s a life choice I’ve made and its ok - I will not feel guilty for having a work-life balance
Molly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women of a certain age whose kids have grown up and moved out- they the ones progressing in their careers (pg 8)
Jasmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They tell me that women doing great career-wise have now gt older children not babies like mine (career= women’s age related/ children’s age related) (pg.7)
Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People in their late 40s tend to get senior positions because their children have grown up and they can look after themselves (6)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsympathetic senior academic women- if I’ve done it you should too! (4) one example- senior woman just paid for a nanny so should you
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Won’t be spending weekends/ evenings writing papers like some other colleagues- so my rate of publication/ progression will be slower, this is the phase of life I am in. That’s okay. There isn’t really a lot of value in killing myself (4)

29. Guilt

Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guilt: felt antagonism between children and work - Childcare responsibility is also an emotional thing, men don’t feel as guilty as we do. (pg.5) Men are more compartmentalised. Even the kids ask for the “mum”! - Feel not good mother or good worker
Maya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motherhood should be named guilhood! (4) - Feel like not doing either motherhood or academia well. (5)
Justine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confident that even though I go home early I work a lot more than my male colleagues! (5)

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Aaliyah	- Think I do all things badly (5)
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Holly F	- Horrendous guilt of leaving child (3)

30. Family Support

Zara	- Family support= massive! Purposely not told the organisation about the Fam support I have so that they don't assume full flexibility- needed to protect that place - Don't know if childcare is even discussed or not! No one has ever asked me, whether I would want to be open about it or not not sure
Grace	- Supportive partner= super important
Elena	- Really lucky to have family support
Katie	- Super important (5)
Justine	- Could have not down without it (1)
Aaliyah	- My mother literally quit her job to look after our baby and I still pay her. - If I didn't have family support I couldn't do this job for sure (4) -
Holly F	- Could not do without it (4)
Amy	- Would've been super difficult without my parents (4)

31. Unequal Pay

Lily	2 nd pregnancy Unequal pay/ non-permanent contract - Getting £10,000 less than other lecturers/ spoke to manger/ made permanent/ increased pay (2) - Then.. newer lecturer paid £8000 more than me! Spoke again manager listened- felt I had a VOICE (2) - Even when made permanent still conscious about being replaced (3)
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32. Pregnancy & other discrimination

Katie	- 1 st time just lecturer without major responsibilities other than teaching, news taken quite well - 1 nd time pregnant/ by now taken on leadership responsibilities/ news not taken well at all/ got the feeling like..' oh noo not again!' (2)
Faith	- Felt like token at an interview panel! (3) BME woman (Made to feel that way) - Know that I am a source of exploitation (4) - Global issue- women= undesirable (5) - There's underlying sexism/ Racism/ Classicism / but mostly you see it with motherhood.. because there is no choice (6) - Faced discrimination for being BME & a woman but lot more for being a mother- it's most personal/ hurts most (6)

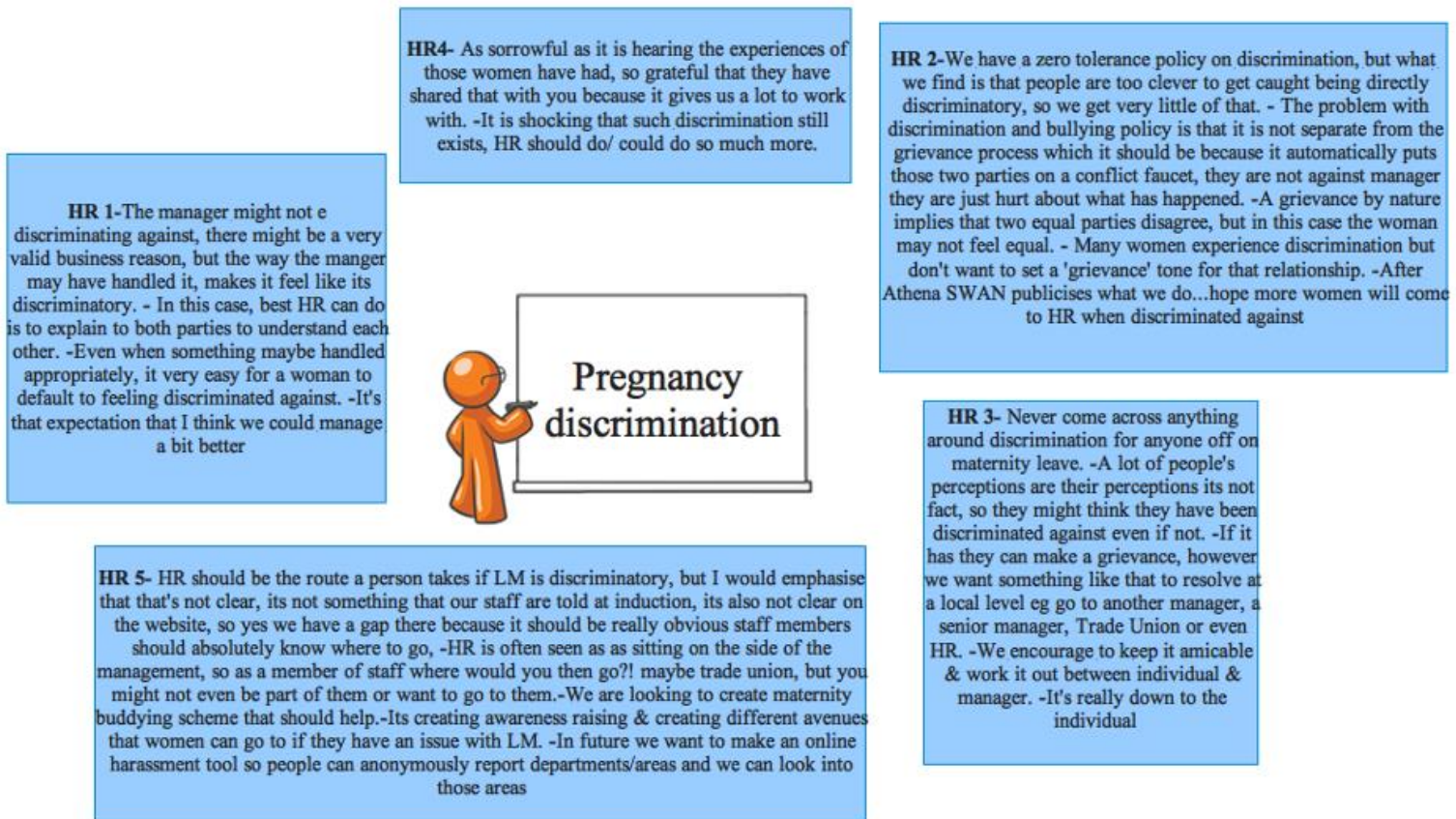
Ava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Felt Unique/ different as if not normal (1) - 6-8months pregnant/ had to walk from one campus to another in a really short space of time= really really difficult. Tried really hard to get this changed but couldn't because timetabling is all 'Centralised' so they couldn't help me! (2) -
Aaliyah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Line manager told me I shouldn't take part in training because I have a child (2)
Harriett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Made to feel incompetent when pregnant and working in the lab. Lab instructor often said..."Oooh in your condition"! (4)

33. Redundancy threat

Rosie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This really adds to stress and causes trauma for new mothers (2)
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Appendix E- Summaries of interviews with HR professionals

Stage 1- HR Professionals views on pregnancy discrimination



Stage 1- HR Professionals views on Maternity/Adoption leave

HR 2- There are finance issues with maternity cover that is why it is difficult to find it. Also, if it is a particular field of research then difficult to find cover for that person also if it is a niche area it might be difficult -Adoption leave is flawed there is a gap between the governmental legislation and system on how it happens, it does not coincide with the way an organisation operates.

-University does not view adoption same as maternity leave definitely not.
- Flabbergasted at hearing stories like academics writing papers & books during maternity leave

HR 3- Maternity leave in general is difficult because you don't know how long someone is going off. Maternity cover is within the gift of the LM it is purely down to service. -It is important to think about saving money on maternity cover the more we can save the better. -KIT days policy is that it is off the individual's own back they are optional but we encourage them. -adoption leave is rare should be respected, but because of the adoption leave legislation it is harder for manager.



Maternity & Adoption leave

HR 1- seen people not be given the same opportunities because they are pregnant it might be for practical reasons because the person won't be there to finish the piece of work. -It is difficult to get around that because if somebody is not going to be there, but then they loose out on the opportunity to get involved.. Very few people go on adoption leave because of that there is a lack of understanding around that in general. - We have spoken to people that have gone through adoption leave to learn from their experience we've used that information to put into the guide so that managers have some kind of understanding. -It would be very difficult to get a widespread understanding of adoption leave to every staff member because it is an infrequent activity & it's unreasonable for people to know what to do if it doesn't effect them. -For maternity leave the manager should ask lots of questions before the woman goes off on leave

HR 4- Our LM's may not be equipped because they might not have personal experience which might help them here, or because they have not properly engaged with the materials on offer by HR. - It is a shame that there is still misunderstanding & miscommunication around where the LM's responsibilities start & finish & where the responsibility of the woman starts & finishes. -It is outrageous that work is giving to others when a woman is on leave maternity cover should be norm. -Most complaints raised & contents to employment tribunals relate to communication or a complete lack of it. -It should be a reciprocal communication relationship people don't realise that. -In our HR guide we have written massively about what women can & can't ask the manager to empower the woman

Stage 2- HR Professionals views on the 'Ideal academic baby'

HR 5- Never heard of this phenomena before
-The fact that women feel this is the only way to get the adjustments they need is shocking. -If they feel that pressure ten its awful from our part - Policy and support should mean that people can have a baby whenever they want to have a. -I think we certainly need to do some development on our policies

HR 1 - Line managers are not educated on the positives phased return would bring - It is LM's gift to accommodate phased return it is existent in the 'guide book' but they don't use it - More awareness raising and development activities need to take place to inform line managers -lack of phased return heavily impacts retention

HR 3- You can't really take annual leave for phased return, however it is down to the LM. -If there is a business case and LM supports it then woman can take annual leave for phased return, there is an element of flexibility but it is not a 'whish list'. - what happens when somebody returns is really down to the team and and their business area.



HR 4- This phenomena is shocking news to me hearing that is really breaking my heart -The power is in the experience of our people if it can get that in right space the impact would be astronomical-we are not at our optimum in the phased return area and academics are falling by the way side in comparison to professional staff. -On a local level we are all over the place, depends on the manager if they agree to mother taking annual leave it can be arranged, but LM's can be great or awful and we can't really rest our laurels

HR 2- Have only heard about this phenomena from Athena SWAN- Haven't noticed academics at university going off in May, it must be even harder for Hourly paid staff. -Would like to think that regardless of when the baby is born the same supportive measures are put in place. However, have got experience of cases where that didn't happen.-There is no policy on phased return for maternity we only offer phased return for sickness leave. - For maternity or any otherelongated family leave we offer KIT days, however it is good idea to have phased return for maternity too. - There are issues like whether to pay same salary during transition, however, if those issues can be ironed out for sickness leave they can be for maternity too. -HR not involved in operational planning, only technicality of Maternity starts and ends

Stage 2- HR Professionals views on Line managers

HR 2- LM training is better since the Athena SWAN agenda - We assume that LM's are good people and they will do the basic right thing. -Sometimes we can be too naive in the skills that managers have. -HR definitely needs to do more at this front.



Line managers

HR 3- It's all down to the LM. - All the arrangements & negotiations are down to how te women speak to their LM & what their LM is willing to do based on what the demands are

HR4- All the organisations are going towards a managerial control system. However, I have experienced more problems with it then positives. -It's not supposed to be smoke & mirrors shielding of this wonderful LM layer because actually they are some of the most accountable people we have at the university. - We are failing to equip our LM's & hold them to account appropriately

HR5- We are working on a handbook so that people know what their rights are. -we have a policy and we then present the manager with the policy & say, right, get on & do it. Actually, there's an awful lot more support & training that needs to be wrapped around that policy to give that manager the confidence as well. It needs development & time. - LM's have pressure too, they have a team of people they are trying to keep happy. -We should do more awareness raising of resources that managers can go to straight away & know what to do there's an awful more we should be doing. -we can't be at everyone's shoulder but we should be offering e.g. unconscious bias training, it needs to be embeded training and culture that we're all working in and we're not there yet.

HR1- LM's need emotional & cultural intelligence & awareness that its their job to support the maternity process in a human way. - It's all very well to have policies, but it's the managers job to bring them to life, and almost make those things invisible because the manager is the face of the organisation to an employee. -There needs to be a conversational approach to management rather than a process one. -we know that people don't leave their organisations they leave their managers. -we can't really train a manager to be nice & have a human connection. - There is a lot of disparity in the way line managers treat women. - There needs to be additional support system for when relationship with LM is not working. Right now there isn't really much support/training for LM's but there will be in the future under the Athena SWAN agenda. - we have to think if a LM is not able to support then how can we encourage other people to support women. -It's on our list to put in place a maternity mentoring process.

Stage 2- HR Professionals views on the role of HR

HR 5- HR needs to change its approach & almost go back in time. to personnel rather than the hard line, tough stance & we're sitting on the side of the managers whilst the staff member can go find a colleague/ trade union etc. that's bad. -There's a big piece of work here to get staff to trust HR again. -HR is clear with their approach that it is the LM's responsibility & we are here to advise the LM. -If a staff member comes to HR they shouldn't be told that we'll deal with their manager but not them, because actually we should be here for all staff, not just management. -women's expectation should be that HR will have my back, but HR would say we are such advisory.

HR 4- The division is aware that HR policy is unclear & it is not working. -we are also aware that we are letting women down. -Mainly because follow the practice of others for professional services staff & for academics we just don't know what to do with them. -Now however, HR has made a policy guide to help women specifically in the influence of Athena SWAN

HR 3- HR is not heavily administrative at all its just that the process takes a while. Its more of a fact finding mission for the woman that is expecting.

HR 2- The job of HR is to make sure that HR isn't needed anymore. Its to facilitate managers so much that they can eventually do it themselves, but maternity for some reason is the most challenging aspect of that. -Traditionally HR has been seen as a management function, we have very little direct contact with employees. -They are more likely to go to their union than HR.



The role of HR

HR 1- HR sends policy to pregnant woman & the policy is also available online, so when a woman is pregnant she is not an inert agent within the process, she has a responsibility as a member of the university community to find out what is available to her. HR will provide her with the information if she asks for it. It's not one way. There are provisions already there. -women can't just rely on organisations & LM's there has to be individual accountability, but maternity support generally would benefit from additional attention. -HR provide support mechanisms for managers & staff HR is in a position to advise not instruct, they can't do the LM's job. - Ultimately HR is there to support the business to operate & that involves LM's managing their people. -Our structures, mechanisms, & processes (e.g. communications) stop us from supporting returning mothers in the way we should. -HR has shifted from the personnel welfare stuff to the transactional policy driven approach, & now moving back to the human within Human Resources. -HR relies on a shared service model you loose a baby you go into a pot, that does not work! HR needs a face an actual person a woman can see & speak to, not just a name you contact, but somebody you can have a rship with. -Women's perception that HR is very administrative is fair because that is pretty much what it is right now, we're trying to shift from that to being more supportive. -We need to change our language & have an open door so women can feel that HR is a supportive partner rather than somebody that writes the policies & tells them what to do.

Stage 3- HR Professionals views on Physical support

HR 1- For a young male manager to ask a professional colleague whether they're breastfeeding they can see it as quite an inappropriate conversation to have, actually we need to get over that. - They're in a line management role, its their job to make sure that the well being, & all the emotional, & physical needs of a returning mother are dealt with.

HR 3- We have facilities for breastfeeding, estates have certain buildings & rooms which are allocated for that purpose. -I would probably challenge anybody that would stand in the way of a mother trying to breastfeed.



Physical support

HR 2- Childcare is not considered a protected characteristic but here at the university we take the stance that it is. -If someone's child is sick we offer unpaid emergency leave, but we encourage parents to have a backup because its not always possible.

Stage 3- HR Professional views on Psychological support

HR 3-We have no reason to contact the woman until the end of the maternity, so we would rely on the individual they would need to contact us. So, we wouldn't necessarily know is something had happened. we are literally at the end of the chain. -We do have a counselling service we can refer people to. It's the LM ultimately that has to have those conversations, so it's really down to the LM & the individual, but certainly there is support for them.

HR 4- Its a two way relationship depends on both the LM & the woman its a shared responsibility. Miscarriage & adoption are all grey areas they are under different protected characteristics & under the equality legislation, but no big dog shouting about it in society, there is no support from local government, local bodies to educate organisations on how to deal with it. We have champions in HR particularly relating to miscarriage & how to support women & LM's . -The lack of awareness of the mental health impact & post-natal depression etc. all need a massive campaign in the future. - For now in our guide we put post-natal depression under 'baby blues'.



Psychological support

HR 5- We need more communication, more awareness raising, training & more communication just making it part of what we do will change things, a cultural shift which will make people feel more comfortable when talking about all this. -Its about breaking down that initial barrier of conversation. -If there are women that feel that they can't talk about their children at work that is just awful.

HR1- There isn't much we can do as an organisation for psychological support because that woman might need to not be in work, & she might need additional support from her GP. -We've got counselling services but its about tapping them into those other support mechanisms, but very difficult. -we have a guide to help women identify who they can speak to at certain times. -A disparity does exist in terms of having a good or bad LM, so we're trying to create a mentoring scheme to support women with feelings of isolation. -However, there are many structural issues e.g. who coordinates & arranges it all. -At the university simple plans turn into quite an unfeasible bureaucratic problem. -It's about prioritising things & these type of additional things are not necessarily at the top of the list. -We're working on communications overall what we want to front load & be known for. -There is nothing stopping the LM from mentoring though.

HR 2- We would normally manage postnatal depression as any other depression, don't necessarily know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing. -we're increasing our services everyday for staff with mental health issues, so we're definitely on the right lines. -There's a lot of misunderstanding around postnatal depression people think after a year or two everything is done & dusted when it's not. -we have an employee assistant programme so you can have telephone counselling 24hours a day. -we do all sorts of things e.g. mindfulness, laughter yoga etc. -LM's struggle with little things that can have a psychological impact on women. I don't know what the answer is other than to say that we'll keep working on it. -Legislation isn't enough on its own right. No legal backing for psychological support that restricts what we can offer . -If the LM is generally difficult & then on top of that these difficult conversations are even harder for them to have which is a bad situation really. -We can be too naive about our expectation from LM's, so it's something we need to keep working on. -we almost need to be able to look at it from a layman's perspective, which we do struggle to do sometimes because some of these things we ask people to do are very basic. -The emphasis is on the manager & that is the case for a lot of HR.

Stage 4-HR Professionals views on flexibility

HR 5- HR has this dilemma; if we write down point by point what you can & can't do, the managers sometimes will stick to that so rigidly that it makes it worse for the staff members. - HR department is working on a change in attitude for management style, so managers can be as flexible as possible & get results. -Some departments are definitely more flexible than others.-At the end of the day we have to deliver the business. - LM's are restricted in how they deliver flexibility. -It's about culture, it's about training & confidence building for our managers.

HR 4- Some academic schools have a culture where business always comes first, & it's forgetting that actually it's the people that are creating the business. - I think the labs are always the sticklet Lord knows that the answer is for that one its ad hoc. -However, it shouldn't be like that every woman should be able to have a positive experience it shouldn't be luck of the draw

HR 1- Younger people, Generation Z coming into work now have different expectations of what it means to be in work. -If we don't enable them a good work life balance & flexibility we simply won't attract or retain staff. -Rather than just being a good way to manage people on maternity leave it's actually a very smart business model.



HR 3- Flexibility upon return to work is down to the LM & HR's job is just to amend the contract. -There maybe cases where flexi working request has to be refused & the manager will have to provide reasons, & it would be purely down to business reasons. -That's why flexibility will be different in different departments. -It's not a wish list -It's about the needs of our business which is dictated by students. -our work is our main concern

HR 2- The academic roles within the university don't lend themselves to having that flexibility. -From HR's perspective there's no reason why a professor couldn't job share teaching with a senior lecturer, but because everybody is very title conscious in the university we find it difficult to break down those barriers with our academic colleagues. -If a female professor had a child in her 40s & wanted to return part-time or do job share, I honestly don't know what we would do because there's no precedent for that.

Stage 4- HR Professionals views on career progression after motherhood

HR 5- Women being passed over for promotion might be conscious or unconscious bias on behalf of the manager. - We need to raise that awareness with manager before they go into those promotion rounds so they recognise the element of unconscious bias before getting into the process. -It's absolutely recognised that we can't carry on like this where a big portion of our staff are not getting the time or the support to return under REF because they have caring to do. -Does that mean they will never get a chance?! to travel/ research/ excel? -It's just ridiculous & thankfully now there's lots of work going on with it e.g. ATHENA SWAN because they've cleverly attached funding with it.

HR 2- Promotion in part-time work is a 'lucky dip', & you have to plan your career around that lucky dip. - This is generally the case in most organisations, but even worse in academia. -We can almost get complacent that the university is a meritocracy & it's great, & HE is a meritocracy & it's not as simple as that. It's genuinely not.



Career

HR 4- We are thinking of implementing a new programme where schools will ring fence an amount of money to cover the cost funding research assistant that can carry on in the academic absence which works to perfection at other institutions e.g. Russell group. -People will say they have the finances to do it but actually we need to look at some of our budgets & move a couple of things around because a small budget for a small amount of time will not break the bank & it will give a big amount of return on that investment. -Senior leaders need to be aware of the benefits of this -Maternity cover is not explored in our guidance booklet as much as it should be actually something I will think about now. -We are very professional services focused when it comes to things like this...not good really. we need to recognise the difference between equality & equity because equality dictates that we do the same for everybody, but if somebody's starting block is already further ahead than somebody else than we are just perpetuating inequality. - So it should be equity in experience & in opportunity. -Those whose starting block is way back need some positive action & supportive implementation of different activities. - As a university we are a creative institution about growing & stretching, & if we can't have these conversations then who can?

Appendix F- Summaries of interviews with line managers

Stage 1- Line Manager's view on managing maternity leave

LM 1- Easier to find maternity cover for a woman on a predominantly research role because of external funding coming in. Much harder to find cover for the woman researcher on a predominantly administrative role because of perception that that work could be absorbed in existing workloads, which isn't the case.

LM 2- Mainly it is a cost saving exercise. - Tend to cover the teaching side with external hourly paid associate lecturers, but not the administrative side of that person's workload. Maternity cover is definitely more evident in professional services staff. - Minimal contact could be because managers are reflecting that legal framework. We need more guidance from HR on what is appropriate. Adoption leave much different, not enough awareness knowledge about it.

LM 3- -Have to make a strong argument for a maternity cover, & the financial factor is a crucial part of it, so is arguing that existing staff are fully stretched with workload. -No maternity cover impacts rest of the team. -The norm in HE is that maternity cover is not found-The amount of communication during maternity leave is mutually agreed before woman goes off on maternity. -The policy on adoption leave says not to discuss with the line manager before making that decision, but would want them to tell me because it would be helpful to know.

Stage 2- Line manager's views on 'Ideal academic baby' phenomena

LM 1- We need to try to be as flexible as possible to make it easier for women to return whenever

LM 2- We should be much more proactive with phased returns. - Academic calendar is difficult but it is not solely driven by teaching alone. -Completely understand why this phenomena exists because no one would ever want to return in September. It is very hard, not only because of the teaching, but also the additional pastoral role of students. -We need some structure of phased return as an organisation otherwise it is always down to the manager which causes disparity across departments.

LM 3- This phenomena is sad and should not need to exist. A woman can have a baby whenever she wants to, it is our job to accommodate her, not her job to accommodate birth timing with us.

Stage 2- Line manager's views on the role of Line managers

LM 1- Had children so aware of demands on wife know that flexibility is important. –Took paternity leave always talked about children made it easier for people to talk to me. –Don't think would've been as sympathetic or aware of the needs if didn't have children. It definitely makes a difference. Major problem with all the responsibility on me. –In HE, like myself there are some line managers by default because of the nature of work not because line management is a significant part of my job role. Not happy that HR all the work to me.

LM 2- Inevitably my responses to women I manage have been coloured by my own experiences. – The law & the organisation is not favorable enough to returning mothers therefore it's luck of the draw as to who your line manager is. –I try to make it as family friendly as possible but fear that its very much about each individual line manager. –Line managers have a huge responsibility to 'keep things going' & have 'happy people' in their team which creates a lot of pressure. –Line managers here are not your typical business model, they have come through the academic route & they are all academics still, whilst being line managers. –The typical business model in universities doesn't work for line managers, when the product is education it's a different set of circumstances.

LM 3- As a line manager my responsibility is to 'get on' with staff to have open & supportive conversations, and it's a mutual two-way process. We keep a good relationship with each other we just sit and talk things through, we need a culture where people can do that.

Stage 2- Line manager's views on the role of HR

LM 1- No real support from HR. –Frustrated that HR contracts all the work & responsibility to me & I am a manager by default not by choice. –HR should seriously play a stronger role because giving us managers all the responsibility leads to chances of unfairness. –HR should not just provide untimely training we cannot retain, but provide a key worker when we are managing maternity whom we can check in with fortnightly to ensure legality is looked after. –Manager could be missing things from the legal framework. HR needs to interpret policies to me in that point of time so I don't get it wrong, I would happily enact them. – HR needs to help manage the process in a more involved engaged light touch way. – HR can ensure fairness.

LM 2- we need institutional awareness of prioritising work for returning mothers, how we manage it etc. –No training from HR. –No formal support from HR to managers we're just expected to 'pick it up as we go along'. –There needs to be appointed member of HR for communication throughout the process, it is better to have two people on this than one. –Rigid policies are not useful because we can't be more empathetic or generous. –Don't know what HR actually do! They expect line managers to do all the dirty work. –HR is failing because it is reactive rather than proactive. – Role of HR has changed over the years, when 'personnel' it used to be supportive. –HR off loads its work on us, they are not operational at all. If they say they are 'advisory' clearly that doesn't work. –HR's & line managers perceptions don't match at all.

LM 3- HR policies are available online & we can contact them for more information if need be. –The online policies are helpful. –I didn't need face to face meeting with them because there was online training. –There is no 'watchdog' on line managers per se, but you have to complete some forms & send to HR perhaps it assists them to know that we're doing the right thing. –Don't really need HR to be more proactive.

Stage 3- Line manager's views on 'Physical support'

LM 1- The manager is the broker and the enforcer of all the different options should someone need it because HR has subcontracted all the actual adjustments to us. So in terms of the role that we can play, it's kind of lobbying on behalf of the individual. When adaptations are irrefutable and reasons why needed are clear, in my experience, people take those seriously.

LM 2- At the university physical support for returning mothers is not well adapted, breastfeeding is not thought through. – Physical resources operate at a local level rather than university wide therefore there are major differences across the university. – Have to bend the rule quite a bit to get physical support arranged for women.

LM 3- Physical support is available. -We have a breastfeeding room. -We have a crèche for childcare however, it is not comprehensive. –If a mother at work has a sick child we will make it work. –We have a culture of being as supportive as possible, we are the school of health & society we are about these things!

Stage 3- Line manager's views on 'Psychological support'

LM 1- A number of things; ensure the space for them to talk to me about anything, at least raise anything with me we have to break the capture that's just good practice. –Ensure they are aware of where to go, provide information they can access and seek. –We have a HR team, we have occupational health. We have a counselling clinic as well at the university. It's being able to say there are a sweet of options and ensuring people realise where they can go.

LM 2- -We do have a return to work training but it is just a tick box exercise. There is no specific training in psychological support arena. –The best psychological support we can offer is to let the returner understand that we are willing to be as flexible as possible. –Motherhood can be seen as a weakness, so sometimes women pretend to be okay when they are not. –We have a counselling service but it is the same one for students & staff & there are thousands of students & the service is in demand, so not sure how comprehensive it is for staff.

LM 3- It will be treated as a well-being issue, so we would provide the support we would for anyone else who has been experiencing those types of feelings. –we have occupational health, we have counselling service we would encourage people to explore that. –I see psychological support as tangible support, it's not a chair, but we are providing emotional support.

Stage 4- Line Manager's views on flexibility & career progression

LM 1- Compressing one day down doesn't have a huge impact on work, but make a huge difference for the person away family. However, emails are hugely problematic – The working culture here is crazy, workload is immense and everyone works evenings & weekends. –There's a lot of emotional labour people invest in this job. –I tell staff to blank days out on their calendar because it is important for them to not feel subjected by their right to flexibility. However, the working culture is so strong that people might not take you seriously if you don't respond to emails on certain days. –They try to look at RAF by looking at part-time & full-time staff differently. Career progression is definitely difficult for mothers.

LM 2- If every woman decided not to have a child. The world would end! Without babies there would be no universities. – At each stage women dip slightly, so when the time comes women think their achievements are not great enough to warrant application for promotion of professorship because they just won't get it, which is the truth of it in a way. –It's very convenient to say that prioritising family only & not wanting to succeeding in careers is a 'choice'. It clearly is not when you track the trajectory of people's careers.

LM 3- We have a business to deliver, it makes flexibility quite difficult. - Timetabling is rigid it is difficult to negotiate with them. –As a team we are flexible but the university structures e.g. timetabling don't allow that. –Being out of work on maternity leave definitely impacts women's research profiles. –Mothers do find it difficult to keep up with research, especially when on maternity leave, but that is hard to manage and it is out of our control. –Flexibility means different things to different people and it is difficult, it's easier to return part-time than to return full-time flexibly.

Appendix G- Details of the narrative interview process

In *stage 1*, the researcher emailed a consent form (see Appendix A) to willing participants to explain the ethical standards, anonymity, and confidentiality to which the research adheres. The form also requested consent for audio-recording of the interview. At the beginning of the interview participants were informed that it would be carried out in two parts; first, their narrative, and second, semi-structured interviews around the basic area of interest. In *stage 2*, because the first physical interaction with the participant occurred during the interview, approximately ten to fifteen minutes of casual conversation took place to develop a comfortable and friendly environment before starting the interview. The participant was then asked to begin their 'story' by stating how long they had worked at the university before getting pregnant and in what academic position. This provided an immediate context for their story, from when they discussed announcing their pregnancy all the way through to returning to work.

Stage 3 used personalised questions based on what the participants had said. These helped ensure that the researcher had clearly understood their stories through double-checking with the participant. Bauer (1996, p. 7) emphasised that, at this stage, only questions concerning events such as 'what happened before/after/then...?' should be asked rather than any requests for opinions, attitudes or causes (no why-questions). Also, when asking questions, the interviewer should only use words the informant has used, and questions should only relate to events mentioned in the story. At times during this stage, the participants re-told an event or talked about a new event in their story. In such cases, stage 2 was repeated and then questions were asked to clarify and cross-check this was fully understood. In *stage 4*, conversational semi-structured questions were asked to probe deeper into the meaning of the story and establish inter-connections between the events described. At times this involved going back and forth with the story to make sense of the experience. Bauer (1996) highlighted a very interesting point regarding 'small talk' after the tape recorder is switched off, in that this was the time in which the most interesting and relaxed conversations took place. The researcher therefore kept a notebook to record a memory protocol immediately after the interview because this provided an important context to the participant's account, often it was advice academics gave to the researcher who aspires to be both an academic and a mother one day. Such advice was therefore invaluable.

Finally, in *stage 5*, the audio-taped narrative and the questions that followed were transcribed and typed up verbatim by the interviewer (researcher) and then analysed.

Appendix H- Women's narrative summaries

UNIVERSITY A

Grace

[Grace, Reader, Geography, Medium Tariff university]

Grace progressed from completing her PhD to the British Academy post-doc, to lectureship and becoming a senior lecturer. Her quick progression made her reader by age 35, although she feels that not a great deal changes after promotion, except getting slightly more money and a better job title. She was happy to have a baby before getting a promotion as she feels she would have suffered otherwise and that it takes longer after having children.

During post-doc, she specifically chose a male mentor because she wanted a different point of view in a majority female area. He wanted to have an open conversation (potentially illegal) about Grace planning a family life. They worked out logistics on how to secure a higher position in the ranks to make promotion easier and plan accordingly. She was ultimately glad to have this discussion as she feels she would have found it difficult otherwise. She even spoke to other male academics with families and planned her pregnancy with her husband strategically: she was pregnant during the summer, gave birth in September and took 6 months maternity leave during which she worked flexibly from home (and towards her promotion). She found this time was sufficient enough for her.

During her leave she gave talks and inspired many students with being forward about her pregnancy. She feels it's outrageous to hide this aspect of family life and felt like a role model to other academic mothers. Grace felt well respected in her position and did not lose confidence upon returning to work. She found it be cathartic to return to work. Unfortunately, she went on medical leave in April due to cancer, but returned the following September. In her experience, she has learned how to be strategic with work, in publications, organising time, avoiding emotional labour in job as well as manipulative seniors, etc.

For Grace, her supportive husband was key in her experience. She also found her department to be incredibly supportive of her pregnancy, given that a lot of males had families and the head of department was a female feminist, which helped her a lot. She felt very privileged. However, her experience with HR was generally terrible and she found some policies ridiculous i.e. women in science being allowed sabbatical after maternity leave – this option not being available to women in other faculties. Grace feels that some people in HR do not recognise the greater inequality being created between women because of such policies i.e. assuming all women work during maternity leave, policies not being applicable for women in arts, etc. In addition, the university put pressure on timetabling for academics (9-6) or they would have to justify otherwise. Grace put in a flexible working form in order to collect her son from nursery every day, which was approved, but it caused the department more problems when there was no discretion over this.

Other difficulties faced have included: flexibility fluctuating throughout the year, recruitment, open days, field trips, etc. On the other hand, the gender feminist geography committee now has a crèche, which is a positive outcome for Grace.

Overall, she feels that in her experience, in recent years, more women are being promoted and more women are in higher positions, and male professors are quite open in a sense that she feels there is no gender discrimination as such. Given her hysterectomy, during her medical absence, she potentially feels could tell a future employer to hire her without fear of maternity leave as she is now unable to have children. Grace generally thinks that not having any more children would be good for her career.

Georgia

[Reader, Nursing, Medium-Tariff]

Georgia was a research fellow when she was pregnant and did not want to work on a fixed term contract during this period. She had reached a level of seniority where trust was built for her to complete her work flexibly and remotely from the office. She found it difficult to work in an open plan office any way; the flexibility was her reward which had paid off.

She had a lot of support from her line manager who was also her friend, and had even announced her pregnancy earlier than planned. She also explained that her relationship with her previous manager would have been very different – he had a very anti-children and anti-maternity attitude. Not long after returning to work, Georgia fell pregnant again – her current manager was very supportive and understanding, Georgia explained this was because the manager also had children.

During this period she felt that HR played a purely administrative/bureaucratic role to cover themselves legally. She said that they were difficult, not friendly, and felt that they were only there to help the university as opposed to helping her. On return, she got in a complicated situation in terms of working hours: she was working full-time hours on a part-time contract i.e. compressed hours but worked on off-days, etc., which she really had to make a case for. She claims that you can never be on a proper part-time contract.

The department is mostly male dominated, which she previously hated, and always felt like a ‘side-kick’ of male colleagues. She claims that there was an existing boy’s club culture through which she experienced discrimination: where male colleagues would always get the promotion – something admitted by a male colleague, and where time off meant you could not produce the same work a male colleague could, as well as pregnancy discrimination.

Ava

[Lecturer, Law, Medium- Tariff]

Ava has three older children between ages 12-16. At the time of her first Pregnancy Ava was younger than her colleagues and pregnancy/motherhood was never discussed, so she felt like it was a unique or ‘not normal’ experience. She decided not to tell anyone for a while that she was pregnant because she was applying for a particular role at the time and knew it would be affected if they knew. In the end Ava didn’t get this role because of lacking the right skills. This was the first time the organisation had to deal with someone on a fractional contract like Ava who was taking maternity leave, so they really struggled. It was a “summer baby” so it was laid back although, she was marking exams on her maternity leave up until she went into labour. She returned after 6months and doesn’t remember any support or scheme to support her return. Ava’s second pregnancy was a shock to her. Her second child was born just 18months after the first time. She took 6months off this time as well, and it was a “Christmas baby” so she returned in summer which meant she could gently ease in.

During both of her pregnancies at work Ava struggled the most with having to cover a lot of walking distance and flights of stairs between campuses for her classes that were one after the other, giving her a very short space of time. This was a major physical struggle for her due to her pregnancy, but the university said it was non- negotiable and timetabling is centralised so they can’t do anything about it. This meant she rushed as much as she could but was 20minutes late every time to her lesson. A couple of years later Ava got pregnant for the third time and since she knew this was her last time she took a full year off. This time her baby was a “semester baby”- born in the middle of semester time and she recalls being pestered a lot from the organisation during her maternity to help them out.

Eventually she told them they shouldn’t be contacting her on her maternity leave because she is entitled that time completely off and has her hands full with two toddlers and a new born. Ava says flexibility was quite a positive aspect generally. However, she recalls a time when she requested not to have a 9am lecture start to drop her children to nursery but was

refused, and a colleague requested late starting lectures to walk the dog and got approved. This upset her a lot and her only understanding for why this happened is because he was male and senior. She also struggled with a 6pm finish because it meant she couldn't pick her children up till 7pm even though nursery closes at 6pm, and the organisation was very difficult to negotiate with. This made Ava feel that they do not view her as a human being with problems but just a machine that they use and anything outside of here is her problem and they can't negotiate anything because of her motherly duties. Overall however she described her experiences as "fairly okay".

Molly

[Lecturer, Sciences, Medium-Tariff university]

Molly enjoys flexibility in her job but it does come with over working which tends to happen from home. There is also an underlying uncertainty and threat of redundancy, also catered by institutional bullying.

She finds that HR did exactly what they said they would – no more and no less. On the other hand, she had a supportive line manager with whom she had good communication, but found that he lacked understanding given that he was not a parent himself. Her previous poor experiences have included female managers who were not empathetic despite being mothers themselves, and found her male colleagues to be more supportive. Molly also found that there was no additional support available for parents and feels that the university does not care about that aspect, and does not offer anything (including good will) to accommodate or involve that lifestyle into work life. She thinks that the system is not discriminatory on purpose but that it is competitive, therefore cannot give parents what might be considered leeway. In addition to this, she thinks that the university is generally not a welcoming environment for children or parents, with no baby changing facilities, or highchairs, or breastfeeding rooms, etc. – motherhood is invisible and not a topic of discussion.

During her maternity, there was no proper cover arranged, which meant that her work was unfairly passed on to suffering colleagues. She also highlighted that her team are also short-staffed and over worked, which has become a norm. On her return, there were no problems as such, but also no support or transition in to work offered. She worked on a part-time basis, even though her contract was unclear about her working hours, she suffered many problems including: unmanageable workload, getting told to work in her 'own time', feeling pressured to teach with no time allocation available, less pay, experiencing tensions as she was seen to be 'getting away' with certain things because she was a mother working part-time, and being judged with the same criteria as a full-time colleague. She also found that generally women (including mothers) were on part-time contracts – she questioned the potential discriminatory element in this.

Molly feels that motherhood has impacted her career massively. She did not get a promotion owing to her lack of research which came about her part-time hours. She feels that the university does not want to promote – why promote someone on a lecturer level already working on less money? She pointed out that the institution does not make money from research, but from teaching, and now they are looking to change promotional aspects by considering teaching responsibilities as well as research output. Along with promotional issues she feels that she majorly missed out on networking, and found it difficult to attend conferences etc. owing to travel and arranging childcare. She also pointed out that the mothers progressing in their careers are those whose children have grown up and moved out. The biggest problem Molly feels she has faced is the lack of institutional command – which makes it okay to treat working mothers the same way she was treated, and she is not okay with this.

Elena

[Lecturer, Humanities, Medium-Tariff university]

Elena became pregnant during her second year as a research associate, with her due date close to her contract end date. Her line manager helped to extend her contract in order for her to take maternity leave, however this was hidden from HR. When she started her new job as a researcher, her daughter was three months old and she purposefully did not disclose her child status during her interview. She was also fortunate to have family support during this time.

After giving birth, Elena suffered from severe anxiety and post-natal depression, and found that there was a lack of awareness and support/sensitivity at work. However, she did get counselling which she found very helpful.

She suffered many issues owing to her manager and the lack of support, which included: micro-managing, unrealistic deadlines, added anxiety, criticism which was not constructive feedback, lack of trust, lack of autonomy as a research follow, a harsh manager who was powerful which made Elena conscious about a bad reference and therefore did not formally complain against her. As a whole there was a culture of presentism at work along with lack of flexibility. Elena also felt that being unable to work evenings had hindered her progress. In her career she feels the pressure of the constant requirement to be feeding her CV with outputs, which were hindered by her lack of over-worked hours. She also felt isolated at work by not being part of a team and instead working with PhDs, post-docs and research fellows; and an unapproachable manager only made it harder.

Elena is now working on a permanent lecturer contract and is much happier at work. She feels happier – like a weight has been lifted, less frustrated, has more autonomy than before, and a much better work-life balance in general. Her new manager is also flexible, does not micromanage and is empathetic (whenever her daughter is ill, etc.). Overall, Elena would now never consider having a baby on a temporary contract.

Hailey

[Senior lecturer, Business, Medium-Tariff University]

During Hailey's pregnancy she said that HR was very administrative, but overall found the process to be smooth. She mentioned that although HR makes the policies, it is actually the day-to-day dealing with life with her line manager that shaped her experience, not the policies in particular. She had her individual office which useful, but post pregnancy she found breastfeeding to be problematic and wouldn't repeat this.

She claims that in academia employees are at the mercy of their line managers and considers herself lucky to have had a supportive line manager. Her manager is a feminist and mother too hence the supportive and understanding nature. She advised Hailey not to work part-time as she'll end up working full-time hours on less pay. Hailey also had a very supportive mentor for career advice which she found helpful. Along with this, she had lots of flexibility at work with no presentism culture which meant that taking time off for an ill child etc., was an easy process. She said that she was surrounded by good role models and flexibility unlike what you might find in the industry.

However, whilst she was away on maternity leave there was no communication and she was not updated on work, she had to do this herself by speaking to colleagues. She also mentioned that in her field it is not feasible to take a few years off. On her return, she found the most challenging aspect to be research. She thinks that how research is measured is a big problem: one must say no to other opportunities when pursuing a career in research i.e. the more managerial responsibilities you take the more difficult it becomes to research. She has currently given up on research but does wish for a more balanced career.

Harriett

[Lecturer in Science, Medium-Tariff University]

During Harriett's first pregnancy, she was made to feel incompetent owing to comments on her physical 'condition' whilst working in the lab. She had a miscarriage with her first baby and said that it was the worst handled miscarriage on the university's part. There was no support offered which made it difficult to return to work; with colleagues still asking questions – she had to announce the news of miscarriage herself. During this time, her mental health suffered and she was struggling and needed support.

In her next pregnancy, she had a 'term-time' baby and returned to work in the summer which she found helpful timing wise. During her maternity leave of this pregnancy she came across a few issues: there was no leeway to take time off and it was considered the norm to take minimal time off. There was also the issue of her value at the workplace: if considered replaceable then a cover would be arranged which would put pressure on her to return in case the department no longer needed her; or if considered non-replaceable then there would be added pressure to return so that colleagues are not burdened and the department doesn't suffer. Effectively, Harriett worked from home during her leave with the presumption that she was off from work. In addition, there was no support whilst she was away and no one to officially do her duties. As she is an expert in her subject, the department didn't think they could arrange for a cover.

Moreover, HR mostly played an administrative role, which also meant arranging for things was more difficult. She claims that the policies do not work in practice and even the new Athena Swan policies are only on paper. She thinks that there needs to be catered support for individuals and departments with policies being locally effective within departments. Harriett also struggled with managing childcare with an unsympathetic HR that did not recognise childcare as a constraint on timetabling. She felt that this would not be the case in the commercial sector.

On her return to work there was no transition or support offered and she arranged a meeting with the head of school herself. She claims that everything was informally handled which added to the uncertainty of returning to work (especially for women). She called the system unsympathetic and pointed out an institutional issue, where universities have all the potential to be great employers, they don't out rightly say that they will or will not support you. Along with this, flexibility on her return became problematic, for example: conferences become harder to attend, and senior staff pushes meetings out of the 'core hours' till the end of the day which is inconsiderate to her and gives off the perception that she is not present. She found that she was fighting this perception - she is in fact working hard, even if she leaves work at 3 pm. Harriett also touched on the presentism culture which she said is a total failure – where you are considered not to be working unless seen at your desk at all times. In addition to this, she explained that you cannot dispute changes made to working arrangements if your arrangements have not been formalised – this is problematic when you make informal arrangements with your line manager and makes rescheduling impossible. She claims that there is no structure in place to allow for a better work-life balance.

Harriett also mentioned that her department was very male-dominated with hardly any women she felt that she could confide in. She said that there was largely a pub-culture amongst her male colleagues with few opportunities to socialise outside of a pub. She also had to deal with unsympathetic and derogatory comments on appearance and breastfeeding. She felt that culture also made networking problematic, and feels that there should be a formal support group for new mothers returning to work and for women. She mentioned that she did try looking for groups but found none. She came across unsympathetic senior academic women as well, so people lobbying for this change to start groups would be good.

Harriett also explained that research is in direct correlation to career success, but she has no time for it, and she does not want to be constantly working. She did point out that having

a child is a career altering decision and that her ability to work would not be possible without family support.

Holly

[Senior lecturer, Arts, Medium- Tariff]

Holly currently works as a senior lecturer and is adamant to subvert certain views and norms surrounding working mothers and women in her field. When she was on her leave, she was not consulted before the leadership programme was given to someone else. During this, her line manager was not very understanding of her ambitions and she became anxious about the impact of motherhood on her career. Along with this, she has low expectations of organisational support –nobody checked up on her or provided support on her return, and she feels that having a woman's support network would have helped.

Holly feels that flexibility acts as an indicator showing that the organisation cares. However, this was problematic for her; she had no time for research and was over worked – more than what is shown on paper – where the extra hours were worked without pay. In addition to this was the endless email culture which proved to be disruptive, along with the culture of presentism at work which added pressure as a mother to not be completely invisible.

Her promotion to senior lecturer was transparent, which she appreciated, but also feels that the system generally favours men to succeed in their careers. She feels that the biggest impact of motherhood is on research, and the research culture is seen as 'man's thing'. Moreover, she feels that there is a lack of female role models i.e. professor positions, and wants to change that. She also finds the men in her department very patronising and not understanding of her time away from work i.e. expected to be academic at home as well.

Holly has managed thus far with family support and feels like she could not survive without it. Over all, she found that there was inequality across the board against women. She felt that there are added pressures on academic mothers than there are on academic fathers, therefore emphasising the importance of Athena Swan in the field.

Rosie

[Lecturer, Languages, Medium-Tariff]

Rosie is a mother of two children through an adoption process. When she was away on her adoption leave, she was not updated on any changes being made, and did not feel involved with the university. There was no proper cover arranged for her role- only for teaching, but not the managerial role. Also, HR neither contacted nor offered any support or information on policies that may have been helpful.

On her return, she had no expectation of support and knew that she had to self-manage her transition. This was difficult as everything had changed and moved, along with demanding children at home. She felt trapped in her job. Moreover, her manager showed extreme lack of support by not recognising the value of her work when she was put in a redundancy pot. This is also another added stress, i.e. redundancy, for working mothers.

Her colleagues too were not supportive, and instead showed resentment as her time off became an inconvenience to them. They did not think she needed time off as she did not give birth. She found it difficult in the male dominated department. In addition to this was the limited flexibility – which was mainly available for senior positions and came with guilt. She thinks that high education needs to allow for meaningful flexibility where there are fewer teaching hours and you can leave early without guilt. She also mentioned the presentism culture at work (which also affects promotion aspects), where she are expected to be in even if she is not teaching, and that she is not allowed to work from home unless with the permission of the line manager.

In regards to her work, she feels that is it an unmanageable workload and that the organisation has no understanding of the worker's needs. She feels that there is no time for research, and there is no financial reward for research either, along with the major discrepancy

between what's on paper and the time spent working. Generally, Rosie feels academically disadvantaged as a mother by trying hard to not be invisible, not being able to manage conferences, etc. She finds that older women are more successful in academia – ones whose children are older and can look after themselves.

Priya

[Lecturer, Languages, Medium-Tariff]

During Priya's adoption process, she self-arranged for her external and internal cover and looked after her work before leaving. She found that universities have a very strong managerial culture, and found her line manager to be lacking support and understanding – his view in having children meant that you had to sacrifice your career. When she announced her decision to adopt, her manager said that she needed to give up all her roles. She feels that owing to her manager's poor reaction, it also affected communication with the rest of the university. She found that adoption was not understood the same way as a normal pregnancy would be understood, which affected the reaction to her decision to take time off – she finds the system very imbalanced.

During her time off, the university underwent re-organisation which was not communicated back to Priya, which caused a lot of concern and uncertainty. The university did call her to let her know she is at risk of redundancy, which added to her stresses. She found HR to have played a minimal role in this process – she did not have any expectations owing to the culture previously experienced. No one made contact on her return either and there was no transition back into work.

On her return, she worked part time hours but feels she worked a lot more on less pay, and it also meant she did not have the time for research. She also commented that owing to her part time contract it was impossible to apply for a promotion, especially when the requirements were the same as a full time contract i.e. the same research output. She also did not feel part of a team as a part time employee, which led to her feeling under confident. Priya also suffered some issues in regards to limited flexibility; she found her working pattern awkward and was told to have more availability for students.

Also on her return, she claims that she had to fight to have her roles returned to her – this is because she was seen as unreliable under time constraints with childcare responsibilities etc. – she then took this to the union in order to challenge this. Generally, she found that perceptions had changed, to Priya being less competent, whereas Priya said that she was more competent than before – with a child she no longer had the time to procrastinate. In addition, she claims that the university reward those with no work-life balance i.e. the long hours culture is promoted.

In her career she finds networking, moving around, attending conferences all very difficult to do, which means that opportunities for promotion are limited for mothers. She claims that individuals with successful research careers don't generally have children. In her experience, networking and growth opportunities tend to happen at 4.30 pm and meetings tend to take place at 8 am – when she has to arrange for childcare which limits opportunities for her as an academic mother.

Overall in her experience, Priya feels that in hindsight she could have been supported through a women's group, especially on her return. She also questions if we have progressed at all from the previous generation when it comes to women having to choose between having a career or children – in which case she envies her husband who can have both.

Sue

[Lecturer, Science, Medium-Tariff University]

Sue has two children. During her first pregnancy, she was good friends with her line manager as their offices were close together and found the experience easier however, during her second pregnancy; she wasn't as friendly with her managers as their offices were further apart and this

made a difference. She also realised that the more transparent she was with her manager the more she was penalised. In addition, her experience with HR highlighted inconsistencies with Athena Swan policies, but HR mostly played an administrative role and the other arrangements were handled with her line manager.

Sue had issues with her part time contract where she found that she was actually working full time hours. During her part time work, she felt that she missed out, had no momentum or time for research. She eventually went on to work full time hours to get a more deserving pay.

She mentions that she had a very supportive team (of all women) and says that should be the norm. On the other hand, she found that her male colleagues had higher expectations to work and were judgemental about motherhood and work-life balance i.e. if they can work evenings and weekends then why can't mothers? She also mentioned that men are more compartmentalised when it comes to children – whereas she felt guilty and conflicted with children and work as she explained that childcare is an emotional aspect of a working mother's life. Sue went on to explain that childcare is a primary responsibility for women and therefore work-life balance is harder. She feels that this is a wider issue than organisation – it is a cultural issue.

In her experience, flexibility is a good thing but can also mean that you're constantly working – which she finds that she does end up doing in her field. She pointed out the competitive nature of the sector, along with the teaching requirement, which adds more pressure on the job. Another aspect of the job that she had issues with was travel – academics tend to move around i.e. away from family support, which becomes problematic when you have an ill child and no support. This also makes childcare difficult to arrange which means she has to miss out on conferences and other opportunities affecting her career.

Overall, Sue has found that even in a supportive environment, motherhood impacts you and sets you back. She feels that time with children should not be sacrificed for wanting a promotion – where opportunities are limited for mothers unlike men. She also pointed out the discrimination behind justifying time off during pregnancy on a CV, all which impact a career in academia.

Zara

[Lecturer, Business, Medium-Tariff University]

Zara had planned her pregnancies strategically to have a 'term-time' baby and be off in the heavy semester period to return during summer. She had a male supervisor and strategically planned to be promoted before having children and going on leave. She claims that she would have struggled to do this without the support and communication of her mentor which was very helpful. Moreover, she felt respected for having worked so hard before having children and felt like a role model to other academic mothers. Even students felt inspired when Zara mentioned motherhood in a talk, which highlighted the invisibility of motherhood at university and she found this to be outrageous.

During this time, she had a poor experience with HR who were mainly administrative and left Zara asking a lot of questions. She felt that they made without consideration towards gender i.e. only giving sabbaticals to women in science and assuming that women can/should work during maternity leave. Other issues faced included a move to an open office space, which became problematic for breastfeeding mothers and also created a health and safety issue. As well as this was a discretion issue between academics and managers in regards to timetabling and negotiating – this became formalised and more problematic for both parties she explained.

In her experience, attending conferences also became problematic in regards to arranging childcare, and explained that having a supportive partner was very important. She feels that the UK is far behind other countries, namely Scandinavian, who take family life in to consideration with your career – unlike judgment faced during an interview for considering

children later in life. To avoid this, she stated that she had a hysterectomy so the organisation doesn't have to worry about maternity leave.

On the other hand, Zara had a supportive team at work of mostly women and feminists, and she found that having a feminist head of department made a big difference. She felt privileged to be a part of the department.

UNIVERSITY B

Olivia

[Professor, Engineering, High-Tariff University]

Olivia has 3 children and has worked right up until her due date for all of them. She did this because she wanted the extra time after giving birth. She prefers research and wanted to focus on that over teaching. The pregnancies were generally planned around the research cycle which was more convenient for her; she works quite flexibly and has had informal arrangements with work to allow this. She says that the structure is more formal now than before. During her maternity leave, Olivia would come in to work with her baby, but this occurred less and less after with her other children. Her work was all very independent and she was not asked by the university to come in for work during maternity – it was out of her own interest and she felt like it would help/be easier for her return after maternity.

Her general interactions with her manager were positive (even though her managers changed). Her manager did advise her to return full-time and see how things worked out for her before considering part-time. Given the long hours culture in her field, she did experience some comments from colleagues about not coming in early and leaving early – this is something she built up the confidence to ignore. She claims that the general perception of working mothers is that they don't take work as seriously, or are taken less seriously as professionals. She claims that this is changing, but very slowly. Initially, she was nervous to share news of her first pregnancy. She also thinks that people generally expected the news as it is common for women in her department to have families. She also built trust amongst close colleagues, showing that she is able to deliver and is conscientious.

For Olivia, returning to work after her first maternity felt natural because she worked mostly from home and would bring her baby into work at times. However, she found this increasingly difficult after her third maternity because she spent more time at home. Something she would have liked upon returning is a support group for mothers as she feels it is important for returning mothers to have a role model and to have that discourse about dual career/partnership. Generally, her role did not change after returning; but she has been less in control of timetabling as she has moved forward in her career.

Olivia was promoted as she went on maternity leave with her third child. She claims that motherhood has slowed down career progression and travel aspects in her job – compared to her husband, also an academic and travels a lot more. She thinks her workload is less than what it could've been without any children. Her general view is that children slow career progression for women more than men owing to organisation duties at home, etc. She thinks that the lines between home and work are very blurred in academia, as you can always work more and do more, and work is not necessarily considered to be 9 – 5. Although it is unusual, but her department usually works around a 9 -5 pattern, but the long hours culture still exists which is part of the positives and negatives about flexibility at work. For her, work-life balance has been a slow change and has meant sacrificing some aspects, for example: no social lunches at work, etc.

During her pregnancies, she claims that HR did not really have a significant role apart from paperwork. There was no proactivity to integrate returning mothers back into work, etc. Olivia was already aware of policies and flexibilities because she was aware of other women in academia – but there was no support or information offered by HR. This did not affect her too

much as she always independently managed herself and was aware of policies owing to her heavy involvement in Athena SWAN. She believes that this has changed people awareness in her field, and her flexibility would not be as well received without this.

Amy

[Lecturer, science, High-Tariff university]

Amy is currently working as a lecturer – a higher position than her previous one, with flexibility to be able to work from home. However, there is no flexibility with the teaching times. Amy was previously working on a research based post-doc contract when she became pregnant. This contract was constantly being renewed for the 4 years that she worked at the university, however, it ended after her maternity leave. Amy claims that the university could have extended her contract but they did not. This made her feel at fault for becoming pregnant, and the reason for her contract ending, leaving her unemployed with no resources. The university then reintroduced the same job, for which she applied and then successfully got.

Amy feels that post-docs are seen as disposable and not as individuals. Where structurally, nor the university or research council takes ownership of post-docs, she feels that post-docs should be more invested in. With the nature of uncertainty in post-doc contracts, she feels that this is especially problematic for women, as contracts ending creates a prolonged period of uncertainty and women cannot move on during this period to have a family. For her, having a family requires stability, whereas fixed term contracts are just problematic.

When she announced her pregnancy to her line manager, they were visibly shocked and wanted her to ideally prioritise work – this was insinuated through comments at work. She also feels that maternity leave is seen as a burden on others in terms of workload, creating guilt, and even questions having another child. She claims that maternity leave causes delays on research projects – which can be fixed, if researchers work in teams and utilise skills effectively, making it easier and guilt-free to take leave. She has added that HR was not at all supportive, with no communication, leaving her to chase them. She was concerned about maternity pay (with her contract coming to an end) which she did end up getting. However, she is still unsure about childcare causing a timetabling constraint.

In addition, she points out snobbiness experienced at work, where success is measured, etc. She feels that the general mind set in academia makes her feel inadequate/unsuccessful, based on her lack of research papers. Her workload in general felt like a burden as there was no time for research. Along with this, the job required travel which she points out is essential for success in the field. As a mother, she was restricted to travel with no childcare in place and missed out on networking/publication prospects. Moreover, whilst her child was still young, she was working on part-time contract, but doing longer hours.

She feels that having a baby could potentially be damaging to her career, and added that women probably cannot secure higher positions at work, hence the absence of women in her faculty – except for PA position. Owing to this, along with uncertainty of contracts, not knowing how to deal with work-home balance, and not wanting to be geographically mobile, she wants to take a break from academia and return to it when her children are older. She also pointed out that this is still a bad option for her because she could use this time to build her profile, but instead feels inclined to take a break.

Amy feels that she is the primary carer at home, and generally feels that men position themselves as having the role to work and become the successful ones. Regardless, she cannot imagine handling home life without support from her parents.

Emma

[Lecturer, Health Sciences, Medium Tariff]

Emma was a research fellow at university, holding a fixed term contract of employment of 3 ½ (extended from 3 years), working on a rather complex project. She informed her manager of her pregnancy, knowing her contract was coming to an end in the following year. Her line manager was very supportive, unlike the HR department.

Emma was made redundant on 31st December 2011, after giving birth in September 2011. She did not question the decision or push HR about it as she had a feeling she would be asked to come back, given the complexities within the project making it difficult for the university to outsource a researcher. This decision was questioned by her line manager who supported Emma by liaising with senior people in higher positions) with evidence of Emma's work in the project, and it being of a complex nature, emphasising the fact that outsourcing would be difficult for the university.

Emma was called back to finish the project, however, her contract was not simply extended by 3 – 4 months as this would complicate things for the university, instead she was given the role of a GTA, with no benefits similar to a full-time contract. She took the role as a favour to the head of school; she even completed her work in the project during her first year of PhD, which was left for months during her maternity. During her maternity she felt okay financially as the university paid the rest of statutory maternity pay as a lump sum. However, HR were not helpful in answering questions about her pay, or calculating her pay correctly, and her union representative even asked serious questions about HR procedures in the HR consultations (with Emma). She found that her union were also very supportive.

She found that the HR department was unhelpful as a whole (with no personal bias), especially considering that she was taking part in several projects, therefore was getting paid via several sources. This confused the department in regards to her employment contract, which they thought she was breaching.

Her pregnancy went smoothly and did not affect her work as such. She had good relations with her manager, managed her diary, but wasn't too involved with her other colleagues. During her maternity, she came into work to teach and reorganise a module as a favour to her manager – who looked after her daughter whilst she worked. Emma is not sure if the university or HR were aware of this. After maternity, during her hourly paid job, she put her daughter in nursery to manage her working hours and family life. She was also responsible for caring for her disabled mother. As she won her GTA and continued her PhD, the nursery hours also increased. Her job now allows flexibility with hours and she feels comfortable. However, there has been one instance where she felt it intrusive to share personal circumstances with people outside her team, to explain why she has to leave work by 5 the latest – to collect her daughter from nursery. She did mention this in an email. In regards to work, she has not found it manageable alongside her PhD, but claims it would be otherwise. As well as saying that in the academia field, there is always work to be done.

Overall, she has experienced most support from her tight-knit group of colleagues, all of whom are females. She thinks that the support is highly dependent on who you work with. She has currently has a work-life balance and knows her team would be supportive if she had another child. However, she is not sure how HR would respond. She has not shared information about her being a mother with any other body in the university, nor is she aware of any support or policies in place which might be appropriate for working mothers. Emma questions: as long as the work is being done, should working mothers be treated differently?

Lily

[Lecturer, Sciences, Medium-Tariff]

Lily had finished her doctorate and so she is on a post-doc fixed term contract and because of this she had strategically planned her baby in order to get maternity pay and also strategically

planned for another baby whilst in contract. She finds that post-doctorates feel invisible and easily replaceable and so she feels fearful due to the uncertainty of having a job.

When it comes to her first pregnancy, she worked in a different place and her line manager was not sympathetic, his actions were biased upon her having a family she said that he didn't like the fact that she had a family and that it's a shame because she could have had a career there. She also said that her line manager at the time didn't care about anything and if she was single then he would have loved her, his opinions would be different. In case of the department and work-related issues, Lily had awful experiences such as they stopped training when she was pregnant and that they didn't really care about her, she wasn't allowed in conferences whilst in a 'pregnant state' and her working conditions in the lab were horrible when pregnant. She thought she couldn't possibly have another child whilst working here, she said "wonder how they would respond if my child got sick" which indicates her opinion of how apathetic her department was. When on maternity leave she negotiated that she would work double the amount in semester 2 rather than them having to get a cover as she didn't want to be under the threat of replacement.

At her new place of work, she said her line manager was amazing as she was told that she shouldn't have to arrange things, she was informed about risk assessments and she was reassured about facilities for things like if she needed to lie down. Lily found that her department were very supportive as they covered when her child would be sick, and they were very equipped when it came to family-baby emergencies. Lily stated that she was earning £10,000 less than the other lecturers and so she talked to her manager who then gave her a permanent position and a higher pay and then in another case there was a new lecture who has been paid £8000 than her and so she spoke to her manager again who listened and so Lily said she felt like she had a voice, however even though she was made permanent she was still conscious about being replaced.

Lily found that other women would boast about writing papers whilst breast feeding which she did not consider to be good as she felt a culture of overworking was being encouraged. She also states that the maternity leave is not long enough and that there is not enough pay, however the department is very flexible and supportive. When it comes to childcare Lily said that finding places in the after-school clubs is very difficult and unreliable, she also said that the childcare is very expensive as it cost 'almost more than 3x their mortgage'. Lily had a bad experience with HR as she said they didn't play a role, they were not proactive and that they messed up during her return as they didn't keep record of it, the experience was not smooth and there was no risk assessment procedures and she wasn't made aware of policies; therefore, Lily felt the need to send documents to Athena SWAN as there was no support for pregnant women here.

As for travelling for the job, Lily said she can't do it due to the family which causes its own problems. Lily didn't find that motherhood affected the progression of her career however she did suggest that it affected her productivity as she feels tired all the time. Lily finds that success in a career is a persons' choice as she finds that men think that success means getting to the top whereas for women it's about having a balance and being happy. Lily stated that she doesn't want to be a professor as she doesn't want more admin work and so maybe this affects her opinion on motherhood and career progression.

Maya

[Lecturer, Engineering, Medium-Tariff university]

As Maya has a more female dominated department she says that she felt less nervous about announcing her pregnancy and that her team was very supportive, she also said that she doesn't like to admit things about motherhood outside of this team because they would be less supportive as it's less female dominated- almost a sense of safety around more females. Maya said her team were so supportive before her maternity leave as they didn't even let her put her

name down for re-sits just in case that she had a premature baby- highly considerate and so more supportive.

In terms of HR's involvement Maya stated that they were not very involved, as well as not being on top of things as things were very delayed due to the fact that she had to chase them down about things which made her think that they were not very efficient. She said that they didn't really have a role as they were just admin and that they were not personal with her or didn't really look out for her, as well as the policies not being worded properly. As for returning Maya said that they were not involved with her, no communication or coping support was given even if she would be off for a long time due to sickness then there would be no check up from HR. Maya even stated that her healthcare visitor cared more about her return to work than they did. Maya said that breastfeeding was a nightmare at work because she was struggling to breastfeed and HR didn't provide any support even though Maya feels that they should have discussed things with her but she said they didn't even attempt to ask her.

These factors led Maya to feel guilty constantly, she says that motherhood should be called guilt-hood as she doesn't feel like she's doing either motherhood or academia well, affecting her self-esteem. Adding to the guilt was the fact that there was no maternity cover and so other colleagues had to stretch their workload, this put pressure on Maya to come back sooner and on the colleagues to overwork; colleagues had to work above and beyond. She compared it to her time working in a hospital where people always got covered and it was actually used as career progression. There were changes to the office/PC which added to the stress of returning. Upon returning, women plan phased return using annual leave as the university didn't provide. According to Maya keep in touch days were used but were not useful as they weren't integrated because she didn't encounter anyone or keep in touch with anyone, so it was just like going in and doing her job and out.

When back at work Maya stated that the important tasks were not time allocated and this caused workload problems. She said the constant emails were also a problem which probably created some chaos as well as the flexibility being an issues, she knew somebody who left due to only been given evening classes which is hard for mother as they have a family to take care of and there is no family support given if someone was to teach evening classes. This also causes tension between colleagues as if somebody gets an evening off but somebody else doesn't- not fair to everybody, especially to academics without any children- there is hindrance. Maya says that she's got no time to work on the PhD and that she's constantly trying to push it forward as she doesn't want to be perceived as a slacker, there has been no time allocated to research and that's hindering career progression, so time is limited as well as energy due to her always being tired- a lot of workload but she doesn't have enough time because there's teaching, enterprise, research, conferences. When it comes to research the only thing, they take are the outputs and so, they only count the number of outputs which is the only way to get time allocated to research; introduces a vicious cycle that is hard to keep up with. Maya finds that the workload hours are not clear in the contract which is a positive unless you want to object to something. Flexibility was a positive experience for Maya as it is the beauty of the job and it is possible, however sometimes the workload is rigid, and the deadlines cannot be changed; so sometimes things are flexible but sometimes it's impossible.

About motherhood, Maya finds that the topic of motherhood is actually invisible because she doesn't talk about it in the workplace (this perspective is different to the other women). She says that if she was a man she wouldn't have to show that weakness and so can move forward with the PhD, but it's seen as an excuse in reality even though it is genuinely difficult. In front of students Maya feels that she can talk about being a mother however not the same case in meetings as it shows you're not 100% committed or capable and she says it's obviously correct because her son is her priority but, in a meeting,, she would never mention this as it shows her inability to commit to work-related issues and so could cause her to miss opportunities.

With facilities provided by the universities, Maya has had a good experience with the on-campus nursery as they're really supportive and the money is taken out of the salary which means that she pays less tax.

Aaliyah

[Lecturer, Nursing, Medium Tariff]

Aaliyah has one son and has been working at this university for over a year as a full-time lecturer in Social Work on a temporary 2 years contract. She found out about her pregnancy straight after starting and didn't tell anyone for 12 weeks, really worried about implications but had to tell manager eventually. She described the look on her managers face as ". oh. No.." but said she was fine. She worked all the way throughout her pregnancy which was generally fine apart from a graduation day when she was really dizzy, nearly passed out and couldn't attend, but everyone was supportive.

She returned after just 3 months, and managed to write a chapter of her PhD on her maternity leave. Aaliyah's mum quit work to look after her baby and Aaliyah and her husband pay her to do this. She said on her return to work there was no concession made, it was as if it never happened, invisible and not heard or talked about. Aaliyah feels that there is a huge expectation to work outside of hours and there just aren't enough hours to get everything expected from her done, especially with a baby at home. She said academia is flexible until it clashes with something you just can't do. She is expected for her job from 8am till 8pm and says if it wasn't for her family's support she could not do this job. She expressed that HE doesn't acknowledge that you can be a mother and an academic, and it can't support something that it doesn't acknowledge. She said there might be individuals that might be empathetic but the system isn't built for that. She knows that if she said she can't do something due to childcare it will automatically impact her career. She feels that there are unsaid pressures and rules and for her "it's a constant battle"!

Faith

[Senior lecturer, Criminology, Medium Tariff]

Faith has two sons both very young and in nursery. She had been a lecturer in Criminology for 5years before her first pregnancy in 2013. Her line manager at the time was very supportive, and agreed for Faith to work from home in her last month of pregnancy. Faith says she was still sending emails on the day her water broke. She took 5months off and came back; this was tactical because she knew the 'hit' taking a full year off would have on her career. Upon her return she felt really vulnerable but toughened up overtime and learnt that she is a source of 'exploitation'. She then took a sabbatical in 2014, and two weeks into it she found out she was pregnant again. She told her employer and continued to write and publish from home. Came back in office full-time in February 2015 with a different line manager, and now as programme leader, this meant a significant increase in workload and she felt punished for being efficient. This line manager was not very supportive. The appearance was that role was negotiated but she felt massively pressured into it.

She said pregnancy was her forte she liked being pregnant, but not to be mistaken that she might have another baby in her words, "can you imagine that would be the end of my career". After her second return she really struggled and found it very hard to manage. She considered going part-time but knew it would mean no career and working the same but for less money. Faith has progressed to a senior lecturer position but expressed that her motherhood is 'invisible' to the organisation. Support formally in terms of paperwork has been what it should have been, but informally serious gap left her feeling really unsupported. Faith feels that colleagues view anything mentioned about children as an 'excuse' and HR only cares about 'box-ticking'. Faith has learnt a lot from being a mother in academia; it gives the illusion of

freedom and expression of support, but it doesn't provide anything she used the analogy of a relationship break up to express how she feels about the university.

Katie

[Associate Dean Academic & Senior lecturer, Health Sciences, Medium Tariff]

Katie at the time had two children that were 8 years and 10 years old. She worked as a lecturer in Health Sciences for 5 years before announcing her first pregnancy. She took 6 months off on maternity leave and came back to a higher workload to catch up and cover additional modules because other colleagues had covered for her when she was off this made her feel a degree of penalisation for being off. Katie expressed feeling emotional and worried all the time. After 7-8 months of being back she was a programme leader and became pregnant for the second time. She felt really anxious about telling people this time and her pregnancy news was not taken nicely. She took 7 months off and upon her return she was told that the maternity cover should carry on that role, unhappy with this she had to fight for her role back because she wanted to show leadership qualities to progress to senior lectureship.

Katie then returned to compressed hours and found it difficult to negotiate work arrangements with her line manager because she thought it was her line manager that was being unfair, and HR's role in all this was limited to procedural not supportive in any way. As a result she planned her own phased return by incorporating annual leave days. She also described flexibility as a positive aspect of her return. However, she did feel pressure to be accessible all the time and inconsiderate timings of meetings made her feel penalised for being a mother. Katie had progressed in her career to position of Associate Dean, but she said she had relied heavily on her mother's childcare support, and experienced no great deal of support or mentorship aimed at women specifically from the university and a serious lack of role models in senior positions.

Justine

[Lecturer, Business, Lower Tariff]

Justine was recommended through a friend and the interview took place in Justine's office. She has one daughter, and worked throughout her pregnancy as a research fellow. She went on maternity leave one month before her due date at the end of January 2010. This was "good timing" because it was holiday season so she didn't feel stressed. After one year of Maternity leave she worked part-time as a lecturer for five years. Generally, her colleagues were very supportive and she had a positive experience of return to work. Once her daughter was old enough to go school Justine began full-time lectureship in Business Studies.

Justine highlighted that her biggest support during her transition back was her mother who came to stay with them. She said her biggest struggles were the mentality of her husband who wanted her to be a housewife, whilst she wanted to work. Justine expressed that her biggest difficulty during this time was her "research presence" because whilst she had continuous teaching experience, her last publication was before she had her daughter- 6 years ago. She found it really difficult to pick up on research again. However, she felt that flexibility was the biggest benefit because she can work from home but Justine recognises that her efficiency has reduced significantly. Overall, Justine felt that having a child was her personal life and the university provided a good maternity policy.

UNIVERSITY C

Jasmine

[Post-doctoral, Research Fellow, Criminology, Highest Tariff]

Jasmine is currently doing her post-doc and teaches in a UK university, but resides in Portugal with her family and commutes to work. She has two children – she had one during her PhD and one during her academic job contract. Being alone in the UK was good for work, but was also emotionally demanding. She has a financially stable background and doesn't necessarily need to work; however, she is passionate about research and teaching and wants to pursue academia.

Jasmine did not realise she was pregnant (2nd baby) until 3 months into her work contract. This raised concerns about her commute, how she would tell her manager, and the fact that her due date fell on a big project event. She waited until she was sure of the pregnancy to announce it at work - her manager was very supportive and positive about it. Her manager supported her through her issues with paid maternity leave: in practice should have been covered by ESRC research council (covering her contract pay), but they refused and offered a 6 month leave without extending her contract. Her manager argued with the university and faculty, but they did not pay her maternity leave, instead the centre did. Nonetheless, Jasmine felt protected owing to the support she had at work, where her manager said if worst comes to worse, they would cover her maternity out of the department budget. She did feel bad that ESRC would jeopardise her job for being pregnant and deducted 6 months from her contract. Unlike ESRC, she had a positive experience with HR who were patient and supportive. She was concerned that her pregnancy would hinder her access to field work in prisons, but HR helped by doing lots of risk assessments and disclaimers to enable her to continue as planned. They also personally contacted her in regards to return carer funds, which included maternity.

Everyone in Jasmine's department is family friendly and understanding as they all have children and over half are working mothers and feminists. She did not feel pressure whilst working, except one downside to having role models in her department who had children: she felt like they raised expectations for working mothers and felt like could not do as much as them. They did say that they were less productive when their children were younger, and Jasmine felt this way whilst her children were still babies. She says she feels a never ending guilt because she knows she can do more as a mother and as an academic, and having a strong CV or being a strong academic in this competitive field is not enough.

Whilst pregnant, she was flexibly working from home, and during her maternity she equally contributed to her group publication with her department. She did not want to feel completely cut off but was glad that her colleagues were understanding with work otherwise she may have felt overwhelmed. She did however fail to submit her book chapter with another publication and found this very stressful. In hindsight, she feels that she should have told the publishers earlier and not stress during maternity.

Jasmine had informal arrangements with her manager on how best to return, they agreed that she would commute every other week and see how this would work. She returned to work in field research in prisons in Portugal, of which conditions were bad, and this catered to an ongoing depression Jasmine was facing at the time - along with post-natal depression. She visited her doctors, went to therapy, was on antidepressants, and received immense support from her mentor – who also experienced post-natal depression. Generally, her post-natal experience (with tiredness, sleep deprivation and depression) affected her career in terms of productivity, creativity, and quality of work. Even though she was really well supported professionally and at home, motherhood still majorly affected her and career. She would still manage childcare and other home life aspects whilst being away from home i.e. commuting.

Having children also affected her ability to travel for work, and now she rarely stays anywhere overnight. Even though she claims that working in academia (specifically to women) is about mobility and travelling/research/working in various places. She says that this is difficult for mothers in academia as most people complete their PhD and start family planning in their 30s, so to be expected to move around so much is ridiculous. She would not move her children from Portugal unless it was for an exceptional job opportunity. She also feels that generally fathers are not as stressed out as mothers, and uses her colleagues as an example.

Overall, Jasmine says that financial stability and security are needed for work in academia, and to be able to digest the uncertainty of contracts changing or ending. But, at the same time, it is rewarding, allows flexibility and enables you to make a difference. It is just generally difficult to be a working mother anywhere.

UNIVERSITY D

Sally

[Senior lecturer, Sports science, Medium-Tariff university]

Sally works in the sports department of a non-research intensive university, where there is over all less pressure to publish, and more women in the department than men, but mostly men in higher positions at work. She has a good friendship with her line manager, along with really supportive colleagues, and flexibility at work which is positive.

However, during her maternity leave there was no effort made to find a cover for her which left her colleagues with extra work – considering Sally took two years' maternity leave. In addition, she had to coach and support a PhD student, who was covering her maternity work, where she should not have had to do this during her leave and feels that she should have enjoyed her time off instead. She said that a senior directorate wanted KIT days but this was never materialised, which made Sally think that she was not needed. She also claims that there was always the expectation of completing work during her maternity leave. Furthermore, she explained that when you on maternity leave its last cause to get over or hourly paid otherwise they do all they can to spread workload amongst colleagues.

She felt that HR generally has no role to play in her experience and offered no support or made any support known to her. Her return to work was part time – three consecutive days in a week, by an agreed arrangement, but explains that her colleagues still expected responses to emails on her off days. Over all, Sally feels that in her experience in academia, relationships with managers, colleagues, with the department and the length of time you have worked is very important.

Victoria

[Lecturer, Humanities, Medium-Tariff university]

Victoria is a course leader and feels that there is generally no pressure for presentism at work as there is a trust and understanding between colleagues; as well as the fact the academics tend to be flexible and can work from home.

During her pregnancy she took six months maternity leave and her maternity cover was also arranged for, as her role was considered significant enough, which she claims is rare as colleagues usually cover for each other. However, this proved to be stressful and not a smooth transition as she had to leave information without knowing who it was going to. She then returned after six months as she knew absence would be problematic for her. She had her baby during term time and returned to a lighter work load – not owing to any agreed arrangements. She says that HR had a minimal role during this time and that she mainly communicated with her manager.

On return, she the managerial role of the job held, but was glad about this outcome. She even wanted to work part-time but was advised by her manager to reconsider and reap the benefits of a full-time salary, as the part-time hours tend to be full-time. She decided to work on a fractional contract of 4 days a week. However, with a promotion, she was given her leadership position back and reduced hours to 3.5 days a week, except she could not cope with the work load – namely administrative tasks – along with time management. She says that the workload of the job was not doable within the contracted hours, nor is a supervisory role feasible, or sufficient time for research, and therefore cannot progress in her career. This proved to be too much for her, causing anxiety and stress, and she decided to take a 2 month hiatus.

Victoria accepts that her current rate of publication will be slower than others because she does not work evenings and weekends, and she is okay with this. She also says that progressing to a senior position will impact her family as it will require a huge sacrifice from them. She has noted an increasing number of women in senior positions, but is unaware if they are in fact mothers and have families – she claims that it is not something that it openly discussed in academia.

UUNIVERSITY E

Hannah

[Lecturer, Law, Medium-Tariff university]

Hannah believed that even announcing her pregnancy would be awkward as she was aware that it would increase the workload on colleagues. This caused her to feel anxious especially as the module she teaches is very specific and it would be a struggle to find cover for it. While Hannah was on maternity leave she wasn't kept informed of sabbaticals and as a result missed the deadlines to apply and then had to wait another year before she was able to. She feels this is a problem and believes the university should deal with members on maternity more inclusively.

Upon the time of returning, Hannah used her annual leave to extend her maternity leave in order to stagger her return, however explained there were no formal updates or transition procedures in place for starting back at work. She also stated that HR's involvement was that they were simple and straightforward as well as being accessible however limited to administrative roles. After she had returned, she explained that there were only a few female colleagues with young children, which did not provide much support and was at times quite isolating. Hannah also said that returning mothers don't receive recognition of the impact of time off taken and there is an expectation to pick up where you left off without measures to smoothly transition back. Maternity cover was a concern as the workload is spread onto colleagues and Hannah found that this was very badly handled, as her colleagues were overworked. Upon returning Hannah was asked to cover for a colleague on maternity leave which she found was very difficult as it added the workload on top of catching up and it was a lot to ask for a returner, the increased workload meant less time for research. Hannah explains that she also had to move from private offices to shared offices, which has been problematic when working especially for researchers and breastfeeding mothers, she finds it very difficult to work in the shared office space. She was however able to bring her baby to work with no objections by colleagues. If in a case of her child being ill Hannah finds it hard to negotiate time off especially with conference commitments.

Hannah enjoys the flexibility of her working hours as it benefits in attending antenatal appointments, however she also feels the that she is working around the clock with no real 'switch off'. When it comes to presentism, she explains that, there is no case of presentism with her experience as there is no pressure in this respect from work. She states that she is encouraged to work from home, which is not necessarily always a positive as she struggles to work from home due to her children and feels the department doesn't account for this and assumes it is the

same a colleague with no children at home. A nurse is also provided on campus and Hannah states that they are very supportive.

Hannah feels that when it comes to promotions travelling is an integral part which obviously is a lot harder for working mothers and are adversely affected due to the lack of; she also shares that amongst her colleagues it is the male colleagues who travel the most.

In the case of her first pregnancy she did not feel guilty leaving as her colleagues were supportive, she feels guiltier if her colleagues are friends, but they would be more understanding. It was manageable for her because she had good colleagues, but she shows concern for women who do not. She didn't feel guilty for her second pregnancy because she felt she had covered for her colleagues on maternity leave and so it was fair and also because it was during summer she feels less guilty as there's less workload for her colleagues to cover due to lesser teaching time. Hannah does however express that there could be more formal and tangible support measures rather than relying on your own circumstances.

Leah

[Lecturer, Humanities, Medium-Tariff]

Leah's first child was born in 2002, the second in 2004 and the third in 2007. She took a year's unpaid leave to move away and then took a sabbatical (so came back on the payroll) and later went on unofficial maternity leave as she had no teaching duties that year; this was at the time of her first child which she had in August. She gradually came back to work after a few months (by September). Her second child was born in June 2004 and was only entitled to three months leave (in the summer) and had to come back in September even when she wasn't teaching but had other duties. For her third child, which she had in July 2007, the law changed so she was entitled to six months off.

She had a positive experience from colleagues as well as the head of department. After only three months maternity leave she worked full time with her first child but worked from home and had family to help with the baby. When she had her second baby she only has one course so less teaching workload. The University provided creche, but it wasn't easy to secure a place in however both her children got a place which she found 'lucky'; one child was too young for crèche but Leah managed this through working half days. She found it harder to breast feed for her second child as she wasn't at home so had to pump milk majority of the time and had to plan extensively. For her third child she was still doing only one course, but also got six months leave so found it easier; the following September she then took unpaid. She spoke highly of Legislation as they arranged maternity leave and reduced workload, which was benefitting. She feels she could have benefitted from a cultural change about work life balance from the university and that more women need to be on interview boards for better representation.

Leah feels that as a mother she's very tied to a schedule. She explained that though this helps work efficiently, it leads to lesser opportunities for networking and believes academics with no children have more fluidity with time and more networking and socialising opportunities. This in turn benefits raising profile which Leah feels she's unable to do. She suggested that the university can assist in many ways some of which included: meetings held during core times where they don't clash with her having to pick her children up from school, or to split jobs as some institutions are said to do, which eases some responsibilities temporarily, get more women on committee for better representation of working mothers.

Appendix I- An Exemplary Narrative Transcript from female academic: Emma

Emma

[Lecturer, Health Sciences, Medium Tariff]

I was a research fellow so I was actually on a fixed term contract, and I found.. so this was in...so how do I see I had one child and she was born in September 2011 and my contract actually ended on the 31st of December 2011, so when I went to maternity I didn't actually turn to that job, I was made redundant. So that was a..i think it was a 3 ½ year fixed term contract. So yes...i did come back to the university but as an hourly paid lecturer because I was a GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) student. My research fellow role was for a specific project, which actually wasn't finished but I was also doing some lecturing and was module leader at the time. So I was..i did actually contact the union and they supported me by saying that part of my role wasn't redundant, erm but I was still made redundant even though the project wasn't finished. Then after that when my daughter was about 6-7 months old I was asked to come back.. as an hourly member of staff to work on different projects including the project I was initially employed to do. So I came back and finished that at an hourly paid rate but they wouldn't re-employ me as a full time lecturer..which meant I didn't have any of the benefits someone with a full-time contract would have.

My line manager at the time..i told her quite early on in the pregnancy that I was pregnant because we had both been aware that the contract was coming to an end.. in the following year, and she was really supportive and organised all the consultations with HR, but I found that HR were never supportive, they weren't answering the questions I asked them they never gave me sufficient answers, so for one of the questions I asked..okay so basically I was paid externally for the research fund that we got, so it had its own project code, so we knew that the project wouldne be finished when I went on maternity leave because there was still a questionnaire part.. which my line manager had to go and disseminate to the participants, so I asked the question to HR, so when they claim back my maternity pay I asked them where does that money go? Surely that money should go back into the project code from which ive been paid.. and I never got a sufficient answer and all I could get out of them was that that money went back into the school. When really that money should have gone back into my project code to then pay me, to come back to do maybe 3-4 months worth of work, but then say if they'd extended my contract by say 3-4 months to finish it..i would've gone over the 4 year mark and I would've been classed as a permanent member of staff. Which I suspect would've caused issues in the way that would've dealt with me then if there wasn't work left after the completion of that project but there was still just the lecturing work. So it was quite a tricky time really, because I was only really asked to cover some lecturing because there was a death in public health and we needed to cover the master' course at the time.

Erm..so I sort of took on that role as a favour to the head of school but that wasn't really ever addressed and then when I did have consultations I did have a union representative in there and she was quite..you know..she did ask some quite serious questions to HR about..how part of my role wasn't being made redundant and what was going to happen to that and there were never really and those questions were never really answered by HR at all..so yeah I did feel supported from my line manager but..not from HR. I suppose that part of it was

that I knew that.. I would be the only one that would be able to finish the project because it was soo..it was quite complex in terms of the statistics and the data collection and I'd already been involved in it for three years.. and I knew that it would've been quite difficult for them to outsource the work, outside of the university. So I never really pushed things with HR and stuff because.. I always had a deep down feeling that they would have to ask me to come back to do it anyway.. I do know that my line manager at the time did push things a little bit with people that were high up in the university that I wasn't able to be in contact with... I know she had some private meetings and took some examples of data collection and.. computer coding that I'd done for people to see and know how difficult it would've been to outsource the work. And I remember coming home really upset one day because she had pushed it and pushed it and the people higher up just hadn't understood how complicated it was..and they were like no no you have to outsource the work. Anyway it didn't work out and after I had my daughter I was asked to come back on hourly pay.. and I came back and finished it. And it was the 1st year of my phd when I properly finished it and had it signed off..I went off on maternity leave quite late actually..because I went off on 38weeks, so not a lot of weeks were left for me to have my delivery and I came back when m daughter was about 7months or so..and nothing had been done in those sort of 8months.. it hadn't been outsourced and things..so..

The contract was initially 3years and they extended it to 3 ½ years.. so yeah it was 3 ½ years of the research fellow contract and I finished on 31st December 2011. So when I went on maternity I had about 3-4 months left of my contract.. but then that was my maternity leave so I was ermm...here at this university we get paid maternity from the university full pay, so I think that ended a week before my contract ended, so it actually worked out quite well money wise and things.. and then the university then paid the rest of my statutory maternity pay. Ermmm with my last pay packet.. so those few months when I came back and I did hourly paid stuff I was actually okay.. financially because I'd had my statutory maternity pay as one big lump sum and my accrued holiday as way ell but I had to push things. I had to ask questions and I knew that I had accrued holiday pay, whilst I was on maternity leave but they hadn't calculated it so I had to push them to get that pay which actually came when my contract had ended. So I've found HR very difficult and I've found them very difficult here at the university ever since, for organising my hourly paid contract or even when I came back as a lecturer.. I've just always found them very difficult, its not a personal thing but just HR as a department... its just that they never really answer any questions.. sufficiently always.. I mean you know if there are people who don't know what is going to happen to their holiday pay.. or are not so pushy with it.. they maybe at the risk of loosing it.. so it was really frustrating for me doing things..when you are affixed term researcher so many days before the end of your contract you have to have consultations to see whether there are any other roles/ research they can find for you at this university and there was nothing appropriate for quantitative researchers and it was really difficult to find something for me that I could be deployed to when I came back from maternity .. there was just nothing there, and I generally didn't find the consultations very helpful. It was just like a formal process really and felt like a tick box exercise.

I was really good friends with my line manager, we were abo friendly so I didn't have any problems or any apprehensions in telling her.. and I told her really early on..because I wanted her to be aware of it. I was on m third fixed term contract as a researcher here at this university so I always knew that contracts came to an end..i was always aware of that. Emmm so I wasn't too apprehensive e about it, I think I was just annoyed by the way it was handled

really by HR, and I know redundancy is just what happens to fixed term contractors unless there is more money coming in.. I don't know they decided what they did because I don't know what happened in these higher up meetings.. I know that my line manager and another colleague in public health they fought for me in meetings and you know they were always hopeful that there would be something that would come up for me..and erm..but at the time the public health team were actually made redundant other research fellows in the team and other lecturers were made redundant..six months after I was, it was probably more convenient, whereas some of the other research fellows were permanent members of staff, but they actually made whole of the team redundant in the summer of 2012, and...ermm..people then had to re apply for jobs, when there were lecture jobs came up at the time, there was one for statistics (which is my subject) but I couldn't apply because you had to have your PhD, whereas for the job that I have got now, the specification was to have nearly completed your PhD, so I could apply for a lectureship this time but at the time there wasn't and that's what my line manager and other colleague would have hoped for at the time. Because they knew that these jobs were going to be advertised at the time but they didn't know that the specifications were going to be so stringent. So I couldn't apply but I was asked to come back on hourly paid rates to finish the project, but because the other members of public health had been made redundant they had been made redundant before any re-sits and reassessments for our Master's in public health so I was asked to come back and mark, exams and reassessments. And there was another project that my line manager was doing and I had to just write a few things and I had general just public health work and stuff.. I think I had like 4 hourly paid contracts and I use to come in for 2 or 2 ½ days and I just built them in as I had to put my daughter in nursery for 2 days. Whenever depending on how many hours were needed of me. So then HR definitely hated me because I had 4 different hourly paid contracts. So they were just really confused because it was coming from different sources and different pots of money.

I remember there was somebody in HR who contacted the director of public health and said that I wasn't allowed to work for the university. Because id taken voluntary severance when I was made redundant but I hadn't because I just knew that one of the rules for when you take voluntary severance is that you cant, voluntary reverence is.. so when you get made redundant from a fixed term contract you get paid like a redundancy pay maybe one weeks pay for every year of your contract maybe. If you take voluntary severance you get like one ½ or 2 depending on your age.. so you get more of a redundancy pay out, but one of the terms and conditions of the voluntary severance is that you cant apply to work at the university for another like 2 years or something. But I knew that if there was a job offer I would want to apply for it so I didn't take voluntary severance. So somebody in HR you know..it was like things were being stirred, or rules were being made when I was trying to sort out that contract but then I had a meeting with two girls from HR and then they were fine.. we sat down together and worked out what the different projects were what I was doing for each one and because we figured everything out , it was okay.

It was quite difficult, only because they were being made redundant 6 months after my contract had already ended, so that was always sort of in the background, when I came back I didn't really see them and then they were made redundant, so I didn't really have much involvement with the rest of the team, I was aware it was going on but I didn't really see them much. I suppose its different for everybody but I had one of those pregnancies where I didn't have any problems/ illnesses or something..so it didn't bother me at all and actually at the time

I had an office up here on the 8th floor, and I just shared it with of the other girls but they had to do something with the ceiling... so I actually moved into the office with my line manager so that was fine and we worked well together and things.. and yeah she was fine and in terms of appointments and things.. if ever had any maternity appointments and things I'd just put them in my diary and it was never questioned, I don't think. I've always found that in academia as long as you put things in your diary and people know where you are its usually fine, especially if you have a good relationship with your line manager. So..yeah I never had any problems.

Ermm I was only in contact through my line manager and one other person just because I was friends with them and they came around to see me and things as well. I think I just got official letters from HR right at the end of my maternity but I don't remember any other contract with the university apart from my line manager and other colleagues who I was friends with.

The only thing I did was that I came in three afternoons as a favour because at the time we created our masters module and we sifted it from 15 credit module to a higher credit module which all the master' students had to do at the time ermm and there were some part time girls that were some of our home students who were actually nurses and health professionals who hadn't taken this course, so before I left I re organised the course which was that I organised it into 3-4 week sessions like extended sessions, and I came in and taught those as a favour for three or four afternoon and I think I think my daughter would've been about 2 months old... I use to bring her with me and my line manager and colleague looked after her while I taught and that was just a favour, but that was just me being nice..i don't even know if the university or HR even knew about that.. but I knew because of the keep in touch days because I knew my contract was ending, I could still come in and do s many days, if I wanted to and that was more of a favour because there was nobody else to teach, because there wasn't any statisticians in or there weren't any at the time so yeah I came in and did that but.. that was me being nice as a lecturer because I never wanted to let my students down. It wasn't difficult for me to do, you know it was easy for me to teach because so I didn't need to prep for it I didn't need to set up readings for them and things to do.

In the period when I was working hourly paid, I applied for the GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) with my line manager and she would've been my supervisor, so that started in October 2012 and obviously I got the studentship then. Ermm.. so then my first properly working job was September 2015, so I had just finished my GTA when I got a lecturing job, so my GTA was from 2012-2015 and I started my lecturing in 2015.

When I was working the hourly paid lectures my daughter was in nursery, because my husband and I don't have any grandparents or any family support, its just us. I have my mum but my mum is disabled. So my daughter was in nursery and we could just afford that with the hourly paid stuff and my husband's wages. Yeah.. we just put her in there for set days and then just increased that...for maybe like 2-3 days by the end of the summer. And then when I started my GTA I put her in 4 days a week. And I didn't come into uni on a Friday and if I could do any work on my phd I did do, if not I didn't and then I think after a year then I started doing my PhD full-time. Then I put her into nursery 5 days a week

My hours have always been flexible, that has always been fine. The time when she was born I was doing the hourly paid stuff we lived a bit further away so I knew it would take me an hour to get home.. so I was fine there was always flexibility there. And then obviously when I was doing the GTA I was in a shared office downstairs again I just came in and dropped her off at half 8 or 9 and the latest I would leave was say 5 or half 5 and then I had to pick her up

by 6. Depending on what my husband's shifts are, my alarm goes off at 5 o'clock (pm) and I have to leave by 5 to go get her from nursery because the after school club shuts at 6. So unless my husband..say my husband is off today I can stay till maybe 6 or half 6. The same in the morning it depends on what shifts my husband is doing and what time I am getting in ive always felt like ive had that flexibility, the only thing actually which has just come to mind, since I've been lecturing , so even though there is like the flexibility within the team and stuff as long as you get your work done and I actually prefer it, I come into work every day because I can't work from home at all. I prefer being here. There's some timetabling aspects..so when as a university we're supposed to timetable from 9-6, and an email went round the school a few months ago to say, and you had to say if you couldn't lecture till 6 o'clock even the latest lectures on our course go to is 5. So I felt, I felt it was quite personal really. So even though I do my work and I come in everyday I had to say exactly why I couldn't stay till 6 o'clock. To say oh I have a daughter and she's in school and after school club shuts at 6 so I have to leave then... and also as I mentioned my mum being disabled and having to care for her and I don't mind say the team of people in public health knowing that because we're quite close, there's only a few of us, to know of each other's circumstances but I did feel it was quite intrusive to have to let everyone else know for it to be on a form for everyone to see. You know as if tryna prove , to put a case forward as to why I can't be here till 6 o'clock if I was needed, which I actually didn't like, and I did say that in an email when I sent it back. That should be dealt with more as a team or a directorate rather than a higher level and where is that information going to and things.. and I felt that you know..people without children would have to do that but there maybe other reasons for why people cant do that. You do feel different, well I've got a young child you know, as oppose to people with older children who themselves can let themselves in after school and things. So it made me feel like I was different just because I had a child. that's the only instance since I've been lecturing that I've noticed.

Ive chosen my daughter's nursery on the basis that it has, rap around care, that I know that..i try not to but she can be put in as early as half 7 I don't do that though, the earliest she tends to go in is half 8. I can be here for 9, knowing that she's got after school club till 6 o'clock, and there is holiday club if we need it and things e.g. she is in holiday club today and ermm.. but that is one of the reasons that I did that because I did nt..well I didn't want to be seem as "oh she's an academic with a child" and has to leave early to pick up her kid from school. I don't want to be leaving at half 3 because I don't think id get my work done before half 3. Im happy that ive got that after school club and I can do my work and she enjoys it, obviously if she didn't enjoy it then I would have to re-consider but she does and she's been doing that routine for quite a while now, ermm..so she doesn't know any different really. I don't know how it works for others you know, whether they do leave and work in the evenings because I don't have that.

Also because I cant really work in the evenings because I've got my mum to care for and I've got carers coming into the house at different times, so I have to get my mums tea done at a certain time, knowing that the carers are going to come in at half 8 in the evening to go to bed on time and things. Sometimes I'd go to bed and so some readings and things but I wouldn't do say..computer stuff at home because I've already switched off by then. Last night I just sat up on my bed and I had some reading and checking to do and I had a document to send off, which is fine I can do that, I can just upstairs and do that. But I feel like the not working in the evening is not necessarily impacted by my daughter I think that is impacted by my family

situation, its having multiple carers in the house, rather than having a child . I prefer to come in do my work from 9 till half 5 and then go..u know I always still think about it..but yeah.. you know for example last night is just an example of when I needed to get something done but it wasn't too taxing.

I haven't found it manageable specifically with trying to do the PhD as well, I think if I wasn't doing the PhD then the workload would definitely be manageable, but having the PhD constantly on my mind, I think that's just too much and I think I'm quite looking forward to getting that finished. And then once that's done I think if you ask me again next year, I'd probably say yes, its been manageable. The thing with academia is that there is always something to do..i've got a research allowance as well. Which is suppose to you know..to help me finish my PhD but I actually have other research projects going on that aren't PhD, and.. so yes theres always things to do. Youi never go home thinking right I'm done, but that's just the nature of academia I think whether you're a researcher or a lecturer or do both... and I just think that the time pressures...I think if you just manage your time. I think if you manage your time well, you have some periods where some are busy and some are lighter but with a PhD at the moment, its because I know I've got more to do and I need to find that extra time

I think it depends on who you work with. So for public health for example, we are only a team of 4 and we're quite close outside of work as well. So public health here at this uni has recently had a really shit time. In terms of we've lost 3 staff in the last 8 years to illness so thats actually made us quite close so because we know each other quite well I think we are aware of family situations. To the point where two of the other member of staff regularly baby-sit for me because we don't have that family support. Ermm.. so I think its dependant on who you work for in your team and my line manager is actually not just for public health my line manager is a director of psychology and public health, who i think is approachable if I need to approach for something, he knows I'm here everyday anyway. So I don't know. In HE generally as university, being a mother is never really brought up, apart from that you know how I said about having to give personal information about why I couldn't stay till 6, but within my team that's fine because they know that, you at half 5 I say good-byeeee and they might still be here or you know if my husband is not working then I may stay till 6 or 7 but other days I don't think its ever questioned. I suppose sometimes personally I feel that I'm doing less than some of the others because of my family situation but that doesn't bother me because that's my choice. I've got to have a work-life balance, and I know that when I didn't have my daughter , I would happily stay till 8 or 9, especially if my husband was working till late I'd be like ooh I'll stay and finish something but I'm at a different stage of my life now, and I am not the type of person..i won't feel guilty for having a child and finishing at half 5 if I need to if other people stay till half 7 that's fine, I use to do that I get it. As long as the work gets done. Whereas other people I can imagine, they could feel different for having a child and being a mother but it just depends who you work with. And we're all female as well, I suppose if you're on a team We've made a conscious decision to only have one child, I know that if I was to have another child, I know the team would be supportive, but the way HR has been, I just don't know.

I've never had interactions with other parts of the university about being a mother. When I did come back from my maternity, there was nothing offered in terms of support, especially because I came back on an hourly paid stuff, I wasn't integrated on the whole you know the policies thing and because I'd already been here. I just came straight back in and did the work that needed to be done and because I only came in for those hours I did work from home and I

didn't really think about it..and would I have liked any support I don't know.. I actually don't know if I would have liked or appreciated anything from the university because I already had the support from the line-manager and the immediate team because they knew that the work needed doing and I was going to do it, they were just grateful for that and I say that because I know them quite well and they've been supportive and you know asked questions about family-life and things..errmm so yeah..apart from that one thing in that email I've never really been made to feel different for being an academic with a child but errmm..

I'm also not aware of anything that is in place to support that or if there are any policies and things apart from obviously the maternity pay/ leave, that's all I was aware of when I had my daughter. Part of me also thinks as long as we get the work done, should we be treated any differently because we are mothers? Errmm as long as you've got that team dynamic and you're supportive of each other. My daughter had chicken-pox recently so I had to work at home for three days, but she wasn't too poorly so we could just sit there and I could put films on for her and things.. and I did work but it was mainly emails and I couldn't do anything too complex. I could catch up on some emails and readings and I did email my line manager and the other public health girls and that was just fine- there was no question, there was also no other option and that was fine and I still managed to come in for half a day because I had a meeting and in that time my mum got one of her friends to come and sit with my daughter for a bit so I was still getting things done and that was never really questioned which was good. And I never felt that other members of staff were like ooh what she doing at home you know.. because obviously in academia people work in home anyway quite a lot I just choose not to as the norm. Overall, I'd say a very supportive small team, all women, had a very bad experience with HR other than that all good.

Appendix J- An Exemplary Interview Transcript from HR

- Well, so far interested. Okay, so one of the first findings of my research showed that academic women that return to work from maternity said their experience was heavily influenced by their line managers, their colleagues and kind of the time that they had their baby. So, if they had their baby in non-semester time, they had a slightly easier return to work because obviously summer is not that crazy for academics. Students are off et cetera, and often they tried to time their baby in May so that they can kind of have a phased return because then they have seen or experienced that they wouldn't otherwise. So there's kind of this phased return thing that I just want to know what is it that's supposed to happen. What is it we have in place, what is offered, et cetera, and then the line management and their autonomy over decision making and what HR's role is in that and what women should do if their line managers weren't following policy and not implementing?
- HR 2: Okay, the first ... Sorry just going back to the first bit because quite a lot of information there to kind of remember. In terms of what's supposed to happen when somebody returns, it really does depend on the team or the business area sometimes in which they work in, and by that what I mean is that it might depend whether there's peaks and troughs in a service. So if, say for example, it's professional services but, just as an illustration, over in advancement services they tend to have pockets of busy periods maybe for about a couple of months, three months and then it'll cool down again and then they'll have another peak. So, normally what would happen is, depending on when that person goes off on maternity leave, we would be explaining to them, "Okay, so you can't generally carry over annual leave in the current leave that you're in. You'll be expected to kind of take that annual leave before you go off on maternity leave, and then when you come back you'll accrue annual leave from the new annual leave year and you'll be expected to take that either when you return or that particular leave year whenever you actually return back in to work."
- HR 2: Now, ways in which that could change could be that because of the peak in service and because of demands of the service, we may then say to the manager, "Look if your manager is willing to let you carry over your annual leave, because actually at the moment you can't take that time before you go off on maternity leave, that's a conversation that you need to have with your line manager." It's not a rigid 'the policy says this, you have to do this.' There is an element of flexibility. It's not a wish list, but what we say to them is if there is a business case there and your manager is willing to support that, then by all means you can carry annual leave over into the year in which you come back.
- HR 2: Obviously you'll accrue any annual leave, bank holidays, Christmas closure days and anything else that's maybe given to us by the university, and then how they manage back on their return, again, is a conversation that they would have with their manager. Excuse me, and it would be a case of does someone want to fulfill the full 52 weeks of maternity and then tag on annual leave or do they cut short their 52 weeks maybe by four or five weeks and say, "Actually I'm going to reduce that, I'll curtail my maternity, and then what I'll do is I'll take annual leave in order to come back," because then financially ... Certainly more so if it's like a first child and they're not really sure what the financial side of things will look like, they may wish to come back and take their annual leave. They're gonna get paid for it.
- HR 2: So in terms of what that looks like and how it's managed when they come back is really more down to how they kind of speak to their line manager and what

their line manager is willing to do based on what the demands of the service are. I don't know if that kind of ...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. So that makes sense. So what you're saying is there isn't really a hard and fast policy and that there is negotiation around it in terms of annual leave that can or cannot in peaks and troughs in the kind of business demands of the department you're working on. Yeah, so that makes sense, but in terms of kind of ... So for academics specifically, obviously they might return in September or October, which is crazy busy and they might be front loaded with a lot of teaching, a lot of research papers, etc, and not really have a kind of phased return where they ease back into it kind of thing. Is that also very much on line managers' discretion to say okay flexible working for breastfeeding or childcare, we can negotiate timings or-

HR 2: It would be a conversation that the individual would need to have with their line manager. If somebody say for example, academic or not, they're full time prior to going off on maternity leave but then actually as time goes on and they come back and they say actually do you know what or before they come back they have a conversation at home with their partner, husband or whatever and say "Actually I'm considering going down to three days a week," there's a flexible working request scheme in which they can kind of journey down that avenue. Generally speaking, it's a conversation with the manager to consider what it is they're looking to request, whether it's something that may or may not be able to be accommodated. If it can be accommodated, great. It means they can submit that form. They get approval and as for the date that they will return, we can then obviously make sure that their record or their contract is amended accordingly.

HR 2: There may be situations where actually a flexible working request has to be refused and there are certain reasons within the policy that the manager would have to be able to provide, the business case and a reason why we couldn't accommodate that, and it would be purely based on business reasons. It's nothing to do with that individual. It's not because they've been on maternity leave. It's purely about providing a service. In terms of things like breastfeeding, yes we do have facilities here at the university. We appreciate some parents do come back to work but still would prefer to continue breastfeeding. Estates have certain buildings and rooms which are allocated for that purpose. It's simply a phone call to HR, we will advise them and it's plain that that was something that the situation that they would phone themselves or chose to go down that route, there are facilities there for them.

HR 2: So, yeah. There is an element of flexibility there, but this is why I said at the very beginning, it is purely down to service and, unfortunately, what might work in Sowby might not work in health. What works in, I don't know, health sciences might not work in health and society. It really is dependent on the needs of that service as to whether or not that person's request in flexibility requirements, childcare arrangements can be accommodated. It might be that they come to the table and say, "Right I want to work three days a week. Can we do that?" There might have to be a compromise in that. It might be we can but we can do it as four days or actually three days is probably not ... What we could offer is this. There's got to be an element of flexibility in that. It's certainly not-

Researcher: From both sides.

HR 2: Absolutely yeah. It's not a wish list. With the best will in the world, of course everybody would love to turn around and be a wonderful manager and say, "Yeah, of course you can. Don't worry about that. We'll sort that. Don't worry about the service, that'll suffer, but that's fine." That's obviously not going to

happen. It really is down to kind of the needs of the service which obviously is dictated by the students primarily. Our work is our main concern.

Researcher: That's why we're here.

HR 2: Exactly. That's why we're all here in the morning. So, yeah it's kind of give and take and a little bit of negotiation potentially. Sometimes it might go through straight away if they come in say "Right, I want to go back to work. I've got childcare issues. Actually I'm gonna be coming back but I'd like to continue breastfeeding." Whatever the issue, it will always be based on kind of like the needs of the service. Breastfeeding is a different issue. We can provide the kind of services to do that and I would probably challenge anybody that would stand in the way of a mother trying to breastfeed. On what grounds? That would be silly in that respect, but yeah. We've got the flexibility there.

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What about in cases where ... Okay so understood if there's a business case for it, that's the only basis that you can say no to a flexible working request or on the grounds of not being able to provide a service et cetera. What about ... Obviously not all line managers, but some might experience discrimination that is outside of the remit of what the policy allows and if that is to happen what's the point of call that the women should kind of go to and where can they get support from if that is their experience?

HR 2: As with any kind of discrimination or any issues, if somebody is having problems at work as the result of line manager then you can take that up with other managers. I appreciate it's not a conversation you want to have with your line manager because it's about that person. Potentially it could then stand to be a grievance and there are other policies in the university which that could go down, but we would always try to resolve something like that at low level. Keep it amicable and work it out between the line manager and the individual. It might need a little bit of intervention for someone to guide them and point them in the right direction, make them aware of where they've gone wrong. If it is, and it's deemed inappropriate for what the person has kind of advised on or the option of the kind of response that's been given. So the support is there in conjunction. Initially, we would always actively encourage the individual speaks to somebody and resolve that, like I said, at low level locally with the line manager.

HR 2: If that fails, and it doesn't work and there's a little bit of friction in between and it's kind of damaging that relationship, what we would do then is yes, as I said, there's formal policies there that can be followed. Obviously it's not something we would like to go down, but we appreciate that it's not always something that can be resolved amicably, but then that would be the kind of formal route that we would go down.

Researcher: So what would happen on a ground level? So the woman would contact HR and then would they look into it like that or would she contact somebody within the department to try and sort it out first? Who would kind of look into it to kind of see whether ... to see both sides of the story and really see if it is what the woman's claiming it is?

HR 2: It could go one of two ways to be honest, and that's down to the individual that's been affected by whatever has been said, and that is that they would either come to HR and say, "I've just come back from maternity leave. I've asked for flexible working. I've been told this. I'm feeling a little bit aggrieved by it. Can you tell me what to do?" Okay, we would recommend that you would speak to somebody obviously other than your line manager. It might be that you go to their head of department or it might be that actually you go and speak to another manager. Again, it depends on your circumstances. There's plenty of people in our department that I could go and speak to if my manager if I wasn't happy with. I

appreciate not everybody's got that option. So it might be that they then kind of out their line manager and go on to the next level.

HR 2: Or, what the person could do is they could physically go straight to the line manager and speak to them and say, "Listen, you know, I'm really not happy with the decision that's been taken. I really don't want this to kind of spiral out of control. I'm hoping that we can sit down and have a chat about it," or that conversation might be with the line manager's manager and take it ... So it's down to the individual and generally speaking it would be down to the relationship that you have with your manager would be my kind of obvious first way of thinking. If you've got a cool relationship to start off with your manager, then the last thing you're gonna wResearcher do is go and speak to them.

HR 2: So it's down to the individual. They'll either straightaway contact HR. It might be that they go straight to the union because some people do. They think that the union can kind of you know help them. So, I suppose yeah that's a third option for them but as a rule generally they'll always go to the line manager their senior manager. If not they'll come to HR and we'll kind of ask them then to go and speak to the manager and kind of guide them softly through that what, hopefully, will be a route to resolve any issues that have been raised as a result of return from maternity leave.

HR 2: It's not often we get that, to be fair. We're not aware of. It's really not a situation that we've ... Quite often you'll get many a time you'll get a flexible working request that comes in, but we'll have that conversation first and think the negotiations might've gone in. It might gonna only want two days, but I say no we can accommodate three and then we'll get the paperwork in. So, it could be that we're not privy to this sort of information because it's been ironed out locally within the team.

Researcher: Okay. Yeah. That's very insightful. The second finding and quite a ... Very focused on the experience of working during pregnancy and specifically being on maternity leave. So, I'll just do a brief and I'll ask you one by one in case it's too much. So, kind of being pregnant at work, some women said that they'd experienced direct or often indirect discrimination and specifically, like you said, it's very different in different departments. So, for example, in a lab, the research that I did showed it was much tougher and it was more difficult to negotiate because again the demands of the job, but also just not kindness around very common things that can be resolved like frequent breaks and temperature changes, etc.

Researcher: So when that is happening ... and of course the line manager is the one who's responsible of that and the woman's usually gone to the line manager and said that this is what happening, kind of again what happens in that? What does the policy say in what can and cannot be done, and then on maternity leave kind of three issues mainly. Number one was maternity cover and it became apparent that getting a maternity cover was not the norm and usually it was colleagues who would kind of overwork and pick up the work of the academic that was on maternity leave, which led to pressure and guilt of faster return because colleagues are usually your friends and they're really overworked. When you're on maternity leave and you don't want that negative feeling of returning, so felt pressure to return to work. The second issue was communication. So at times it was not enough communication. So didn't know what was going on, what updates were made, or too much communication. So, constant kind of can you help with this, can you call this ... like work related demands during pregnancy.

Researcher: In the occasions when there was a maternity cover, there were kind of issues with communication with the maternity cover. So, not being able to pass on the

knowledge or pass on the information, sorry, of what to do and that causing some sort of anxiety in terms of 'well I have double the work to do' or at times feeling a bit replaceable. So thinking 'if this person's doing my cover on part-time basis and doing my job to the full and I'm not, what if I'm to return and I'm not really needed.' Basically, cause of anxiety, stress and communication as a barrier, either too much or too little.

Researcher: And then the third things that came out of maternity leave was women that had gone on adoption leave and their experience as not being perceived in the same way as a maternity would be perceived within their departments and by their line managers and the negotiation of times and flexible working and time off being a lot tougher and them feeling like they really had to fight a lot more to convince that they also needed this time off and for it to be seen in the similar kind of way as a maternity leave would be seen.

Researcher: So, if we start off with pregnancy discrimination at work. Have you experienced any cases like that or what is the ideal that's supposed to happen and where can a woman go to do what in terms of our stance on it?

HR 2: I'll be honest, I've not personally come across anything in terms of discrimination for anyone that's off on maternity leave or about to go off on maternity leave. So I'm gonna struggle to answer that, I'll be really honest with you.

Researcher: Fine. That's fair enough.

HR 2: I don't know maybe whether it's worth speaking to somebody that has had children. Myself, I don't have children. They might be able to give some personal reviews around how they felt, which is interesting actually because as I was listening to you talk, a lot of people's perceptions are their perception. It's not a fact. It's how they feel and actually there's a lot of psychology in everything that's being said around, oh well, maybe cutting short their maternity leave in order to come back. Oh well I was made to feel like this. Well, actually were they? Or was it their interpretation? The fact that they've been away from work so long, it's very difficult to come back.

HR 2: There's all that kind of flip side to it and I'm not being derogatory towards anybody that's been off and had children and I imagine it's very very difficult. It's bad enough when you've had two weeks for a holiday and you come back and you don't know what's going on, and I do think there is a lot of psychology in there and I think that maybe actually the university could be perceived as being far worse in this area than actually it is, but that's because of an individual coming back, if they've been out of it for such a long time, you know there's that kind of side to it, but from a discrimination point of view, no. I'm sorry. I don't have any kind of experience for me personally from the HR point of view.

Researcher: Okay what about maternity leave? So in terms of maternity cover, where do we stand? Is that something that's required, not required? Is that on the discretion of the line manager?

HR 2: Yeah, so effectively the reason why the policy stipulates you need to give us eight weeks' notice on your return or obviously as much notice as possible in terms of when you go off. There's risk assessments that need to be done and all that sort of stuff. But in terms of cover, that's down to the manager. If they feel that they can give all that work down to other team members and maybe split it and kind of it might be that rather than getting cover, they say "Okay, well this part of the job we can give to them ... give to them ..." And it might be that there's a little bit of a responsibility allowance that they give for them. Give someone a secondment opportunity.

- HR 2: So, as a result of someone going off, it could be that they actually go, "No, we definitely need another body. I'm going to speak to the HR business partner. Look to see what our options may or may not be. Is it an agency worker that we get in? Do we actually fill it as a fixed term contract?" It's very difficult with maternity 'cause you don't know how long someone's going to be off. If it is that they've said actually, "Yeah, I'm thinking I'm gong to be off maybe nine, twelve months," you know, it's all written up in the letter in the contract that says that the reason for your fixed term contract is due to maternity cover. Your return date will be this date or we used to put in the return of the post holder. But they can manage that. The manager goes and speaks to the business partner. They arrange, it gets agreed, the role then gets filled, someone comes in and it purely is a fixed term contract, and then when that person comes back, that person will leave and everything goes back to the way it was before they went off on maternity leave.
- HR 2: It's purely down to service, and again it just depends on what the demands are and whether it is academic. I know purely you're talking about academia, but it's the same whether it's professional services as well. If the needs of the service are such that they have to have somebody in, it might be that that person holds a specific skill and there's nobody else on the team that has it and they have to have somebody in in order to be able to provide that aspect of the service. It could just be that purely because of the demands at the time when that person's off, they're going through a really busy period. It could be the opposite, and it could be well actually do you know what, I think we can manage it. Let's devolve it amongst the team, and let's look it and try to make a saving, which everybody is obviously trying to do at the moment. It's about the existence of the university and the students. The more money we can save the better. So yeah that's various different options available to them.
- Researcher: What about KIT days? So is that a necessity or is that also kind of optional if the person on leave and the manager wants to they can. If they don't, they don't have to. Is that optional or is that ...
- HR 2: They're optional completely. Obviously it's a bit like if you're off sick where the manager can, unless someone's really very poorly, but if say, for example, I know someone's broken a limb or something like that, you can still maintain that contact and keep them up to speed with changes and what are going on in the department. We would always actively encourage that. More so for the going back to the scenario of coming back. I've had nine months off. I don't know what's going on. It hopefully breaks down that big barrier for somebody that they have been in contact. They might have come in with baby and kind of seen the team, but in terms of the KIT days, they're not massively popular. The reason for that is you don't get paid.
- HR 2: The overall policy at the university is that they come in and it's off your own back. You can only take so many. If you only come in for an hour, that's classed as one of your days. Or if you come in and you do nine hours, either way you're not gong to get paid for it. Some other organizations do pay for it, but a lot of people go "Well why would I come and work if I'm not gonna get paid for it?" I think it's probably also because you're being paid maternity of some description unless you're not entitled to it, but the university stance at the moment is that we don't pay for keeping in touch days. So they're not heavily used to be quite honest, that we're aware of. Again, it's something that's managed locally. HR wouldn't necessarily have an input in that other than a manager inquiring about it: 'Joe Bloggs is going off on maternity leave. Can you tell him more about KIT

- days?' Yep, it's arranged locally. If that person wants to come in, just keep an eye on the number of days. We tend not to get involved in that respect.
- Researcher: What about this perception and cultural perception on adoption leave? So, our stand on that. Is that the same service that we provide for ...
- HR 2: Absolutely.
- Researcher: Yeah?
- HR 2: Absolutely I'll be honest, in the six years I've been here, I've only ever processed one adoption. They don't come round very often. And it was interesting to hear you say that a lot of managers are not as open and receptive to people going through adoption leave. I actually think it's ... In some respects, I don't treat them any differently, but I've actually got a lot more respect for people and I almost want to help them more because what they're doing is a massive undertaking. It's huge. Biologically, they're not their parents, so to actually take on ... And I know they've gone into it with all the facts and figures and everything. They've gone through a process, a quite lengthy one probably still at the moment, but I have an utmost amount of respect for people that do that because I think it's a huge undertaking. And it's their choice, I get that, but it must be difficult if not ...
- HR 2: I won't say harder than going through maternity and giving birth and all that, it's harder but for different reasons. Probably the same, but I think the pressures on a person adopting are different to the pressures of somebody that's giving birth and going through it naturally. But we don't have very many, but certainly the process is exactly the same. It's actually harder to manage an adoption process because when they issue the matching certificate, it literally happens and then it's like within seconds, 'Right I'm off and I'm off for 12 months. Oh right okay.' Whereas at least with maternity, unless something happens with the baby and it arrives early or something goes wrong, you can manage that much sooner. Whereas with adoption the matching certificate is issued and it's kind of like, "Right, okay. I'm going off on adoption leave. I can give you a week's notice." So I think it's harder for the manager in that respect.
- Researcher: Yeah to kind of know when to arrange everything for ... Yeah. Okay a little bit about kind of experiences of support on return now. So moving on from pregnancy and maternity leave. So women I spoke to kind of narrated their experience of both tangible and intangible support. So, tangible support being something that you've mentioned earlier like breastfeeding rooms and flexible policy in place and things that they could kind of access. And then they also spoke about intangible support and they said that that's where they kind of struggled a bit more. So intangible support consisted of experiences of miscarriage, for example, where obviously things didn't go to plan and ... Well the woman I spoke to had her miscarriage kind of very, very late on in her pregnancy. So it was as if she was giving birth, but obviously she had a miscarriage or stillborn birth which is similar experience but then you don't kind of have the outcome that you were hoping for, of course, and post natal depression and anxiety, feeling isolated and ... Generally just spoke about the hormonal imbalance that they experienced on return and how that was a real thing for them, and they didn't know how to discuss that and they didn't know who to approach or if there was even awareness of it. And even in some departments ...
- Researcher: In very male dominated departments, they were very scared to even mention it in case there was a stigma around it and, of course, they didn't want to be perceived as not competent or going through a thing or anything like that. So in terms of intangible support, so this sense of invisibility or post natal depression

or experiencing miscarriage, stillborn birth, where things don't go to plan but you do return to work, but psychologically you might not be as fit and healthy as you might have been previously. In terms of that, what's kind of your opinion on the kind of awareness we have or the kind of acknowledgement or support that there might not be in place or is that more of a personal kind of thing? As an organization, do we have a stand on it at all?

HR 2: Again that's really based more on a case by case basis because, first and foremost, we would only know about said situations if the manager made us aware. So we might ask the question ... So, what happens is when someone goes on maternity leave they notify HR, they tell their manager. We write out to the manager and ask them to complete a risk assessment with the individual. We'll send the maternity leave scheme and the code of conduct, parenting ... not parenting. Code of ... What's the word I'm looking for? I can't remember what it's called. Code of something. We send that documentation out to the mum. At the point of the MAT B1 being issued, we would find out what their entitlements are in terms of pay; SMP, occupational maternity et cetera, we would then confirm everything in writing.

HR 2: Now, we wouldn't have any reason to contact that person only other when it comes to nearer the end of their maternity, which again we would rely on the individual, and they need to contact us. So we wouldn't necessarily know if something had happened. It would only be if that individual contacted us in a really sad situation like that and said, "Unfortunately I was due to go on maternity leave. We've lost the baby. So is there any kind of support and is there any counseling?" You know there's a lot of people that maybe hope in their life they don't need that sort of service, but we do have a counseling service that we can refer people to.

Researcher: Is that for staff?

HR 2: Yep it's for staff and I think it actually covers family members as well. So in that situation, it could well be that dad is ... Obviously he's got a part to play in this in the sense that he's just lost his son or potential daughter, whatever. So it could be that we could offer them some form of counseling. As I said, it's down to whether the individual tells us or if the line manager tells us. The line manager might be quite happy managing that locally and keeping in contact and kind of checking in on that person and making sure that they're not struggling, and if there are any reasonable adjustments that we can make and it might be that just for a short while they agree look, "Obviously, you want to come back to work. Maybe your mind's not in it for a full day." Look to see whether or not they could reduce their hours or on a temporary basis. There's always things that can be discussed around the table, but it would be down to that relationship with the manager and the individual as to what those kind of options might look like.

HR 2: So, we are literally at the end of the chain and if people don't tell us, we have no way of knowing. But certainly there is the counseling service. We've had very sad situations where, like you said, there's been stillborn involved and ... Actually, you know what it's probably one of HR's worse conversations to have with a person because ... I'm sure I'm not breaking any confidence here, but a situation whereby a mother unfortunately loses the baby and it's stillborn. Because of the policy and the government guidelines, we then have to look at it and go, is it classed as a birth? Did the baby breathe? And to have that conversation with somebody, to have to find out especially when it's so raw, to find out ...

HR 2: It's the line manager, ultimately, that has to do it; to have that conversation and find out, did that child breathe. If it did, it potentially then it becomes maternity

leave. If that child didn't breathe, it becomes a miscarriage, which there's no time. So, you then have to manage that as best as possible. The likelihood is that individual's going to go off to the doctor and get a sick note or a fit note as they're now known. It might be that they choose to come back, but actually have a very good work relationship with their manager and say, "Can for a short while we just agree to do this, this, or this?" As I said, it might be look at different working times or, until they've physically got their head round it.

HR 2: So it really is down to the individual. But certainly there is support there for them. I'm not saying it's massively advertised because obviously we don't want people to go through that sort of situation, but we do recognize that in the event it does happen, there will be a requirement for people to have counseling or that they might be off sick as a result of it. Or, it might be that we can work with them and look to slowly get them back to work. We'd appreciate that full time, possibly, isn't something that they want to do straightaway, but yeah. There is support there for them.

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Finally, in terms of HR, so women's descriptions of their experiences with HR was administrative and procedural. Is that, would you say, a fair description and ... Is that a fair description and what should their expectation be of HR's role within the maternity process?

HR 2: Okay, I would say it's probably split. One is there to answer questions and be there as a kind of sound board really if they've got any queries in relation to the policy because ultimately that's what they're ringing for; is what they're entitled to, what can they do, what can't they do, how to ... Normally it's about holidays, how does that work? Do I get my bank holidays back? So, there's a lot of ... if it is or are there breastfeeding facilities? What happens if I've got a lot of appointments. Some mothers carry and don't have any issues. Others end up with all sorts of different conditions as a result of carrying a baby, whether it's diabetes, the condition where your pelvis sits wrongly and you're in that much pain and you can't come in to work. There's all sorts of kind of different reasons, but what that could mean is those are the kind of questions that people will ring and ask us about.

HR 2: Though the other side to it is yes there is ... I won't say there's a lot of administration. It literally is, notify your manager, either the individual notifies us or the manager notifies us, we send an email out to say that Joe Bloggs has notified us that they're pregnant. Please attach risk assessment. So that then is asking the manager to undertake a risk assessment in the work environment to make sure that they're safe. Do we need to make any reasonable adjustments, or any adjustments to accommodate that person whilst their going through maternity right through pregnancy? The email to the individual will be, here's the code of practice. Here's the maternity leave scheme. Any questions whatsoever, please feel free to give us a call. That then tends to follow with a number of emails about like I said annual leave, et cetera.

HR 2: We ask them then once they've got the MAT B1 form to send that in to HR and then at that point we can then liaise with payroll to ascertain exactly what their pay entitlements are, and we will then confirm it in a letter. Once they know what their intended maternity leave start date is, check the payment, what their entitlements are and pop it in a letter and that's it. And that's the end of it from HR point of view. It just tends to be a little bit probably more longer and drawn out because we get notified, then we've got to wait for the MAT B1 and the intended start date, then we need to get the information from payroll with regards to SMP and then we write it out.

HR 2: So it can be over a few months, but that depends also when they notify us. Some people might not find out until late on. It's come up as a bit of a surprise for them. Others will tell us very early on and say, "Oh actually, I've not told my manager yet, but I am expecting. Can you tell me what the process is?" But it's not heavily administrative. It's more a fact finding mission I think for a new mum or anyone that's expecting. Certainly if it's the first time they've been through it, what are my entitlements, what do I need to do, what about my annual leave. Yeah, it's not too heavily administrative.

Researcher: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay 9:00 exactly so-

Appendix K- An Exemplary Interview Transcript from a Line Manager

All right. So, the first one is being pregnant at work and taking maternity leave. Some of the experiences were, of course, positive. They had a lot of support from their line manager. However, others did not. Some women said they experienced pregnancy discrimination, although not directly, but indirectly. Maternity leave was problematic in terms of communication and how much communication they wanted to keep versus how much communication their line manager wanted to keep, things like sorting out kit days and, generally, the managing of expectation of the line manager and the women didn't seem to match up, according to the women's perspective.

So, in your experience, how have you dealt with reasonable adjustments with pregnancy at work, or dealing with maternity leave cover communication?

LM 3: Okay. So, I've had experience of line managing two women who have become pregnant, one twice, one once, and they've both returned to work. I'm just trying to think if there are similarities between those two cases or whether they stand on their own. So, I think the ... Obviously there's a requirement, and I can't remember the number of weeks or months, of when someone needs to alert a line manager that someone's pregnant. I'm not sure as to whether that was used in both these cases, or because ... with one person, I'm their line manager but I've known them for along time so, we're friends anyway. So, it's ... there's probably a degree of celebration because of that, anyway, around it.

In both instances ... Actually, in both instances of these two women being ... telling me they were pregnant, were very close together, actually. It was a time where the research team that I was leading at the time, was very ... very, very challenging environment because we were understaffed at the time. This was like an added bit of news, which I think both women felt not guilty, but were aware that this would [inaudible 00:02:25] leaving the team, in an added [inaudible 00:02:29]. I like to think that, in all the ways in which I responded to that was nothing but support. Life carries on, and the university will adjust to whatever demands.

I can't remember at what stage, now, I was informed that they were pregnant. But, then that was a consultation with HR about exactly what the process is. I don't keep these processes in my head. So, it's ... because they happen so infrequently. I would have just talked to HR straight away and advised them to start that conversation. And, for me to be pulled in, as and when I needed to authorize things or be aware of things. We always had regular catch ups anyway, so I've always been in a position where I've had ... every body that I line manage, I always catch up with them on a two weekly basis, for an hour and part of that's about the work that they're doing. It's a three part, the work that they're doing, the journey on their PDR, that they're hitting everything they need to do, hit the PDR objectives and thirdly, whether they're okay as people.

So, that would have been a conversation as part of that. The thing is, as the pregnancy will have moved overtime, there'll be a ... because my wife's had two children, I'm very aware of how things change over that course of the period so from not being too well at the beginning, to different levels of energy and everything else. The physical demands of doing things at different times. So, quite well aware that right from the off, we needed to start thinking about

flexible working, to enable to get the best out of those people and also make sure they're okay, and they're well.

We'll have had those conversations quite early on. What do you need from me to make this as easy as possible? I think we did start, because I've been encouraging people to work at home a little bit. If that's what they wanted to do. If they were ill or if they were, as in ill for a short period of time rather than ill for long periods of times. Obviously, if you're sick, you're sick and that's it. You're not working. So, I think we've managed that pretty well because we were quite a small team at the time. HR provided what they had to do, I don't think I got a great deal of support, if any. So actually, as a line manager, I don't think I received any support from HR or the [inaudible 00:05:25] point towards the correct lengths, on the website, for forms to fill.

There was a change then, in terms of ... I don't know if it's something that you want to look at. Tell me if don't but the cover that I then, I was-

Researcher: I was just going to ask you, yeah. Maternity cover. So, considering you were already a small team and you said you were understaffed, how did you go about that?

LM 3: I think a lot of the work that we do is self funded, so they're project based, so one person was a researcher, one person was an administrator. Research was not in control of their work load, in terms of, they could finish projects before they went or they could work to a particular milestone and then pass that over quite neatly. So, that happened on two occasions. One researcher was pregnant and then, went on maternity cover so there was less demand at that point. However, that person had a big project that she was leading, which was multi year project, so five years and she just started the first year of that project. But, that was useful because we found that having the external funding coming in for such a long period of time, enabled us to make the agreement with senior management to replace that person, much more easy because there's one here coming in, you just pay the money out, the work needs to be done.

We've got objectives to realize so that was quite easy. So, we got a maternity cover replacement in a further up period of time, for the person and we did that ... I tried to do everything in quite a timely fashion so there's some overlap. The [inaudible 00:07:05] here runs very slow so, very rarely do you get that opportunity but we did that in good time. To protect the project and the researcher had a chance to interview, shortlist and interview for their replacement. Then, do a rudimentary hand over to that person, so they comfortable that the project was in good hands. And then, I think I appointed a lower grade for all the things that needed to be done at the time. I had to go through a fixed term contract or fixed term contractor, over a period of time, with a number of individuals, just to ensure that the work that we had or committed to, could be completed for the right standard.

On the admin side, that was much more complicated because that's more nebulous, that kind of work and people feel that's kind of, could be done, could be absorbed in existing workloads, which wasn't the case. So, we managed a bit of a fudge where we got some time from an existing administrator to cover some of that role. We got agreement to spend some, resolve some agency work and I took a lot of work back, that was support work from my time, organizing meetings of diaries, and things. So, I did a lot of that myself, again, just because it was easier than top it onto somebody else. There was a lot more absorption within existing results as well as went on, at that point which was stressful, I think.

It wasn't ideal at all. In terms of the ... So, I suppose that's it, in terms of cover.

Researcher: Did you do that for both the women that went on maternity cover?
LM 3: Yeah. As I say, one person was a new person. Completely took over that role, new person coming up, took care of that role. With the administrator, that was much of about absorption around all the people existing workloads but I felt like, on the second one, on the administrator's position, that was very much. I was asking favors for that cover to be felt and I think there was a ... I think that was felt by the woman concerned as well, that it was much more easy for the organization to construct her pregnancy as a problem because there's that ... We just couldn't get a like for like replacement in for a while, for being authorized because there was always somebody that could do that kind of thing. Just being reflective, I guess, I suspect then, that she felt that she was causing problems. She wasn't at all. [inaudible 00:09:56] more people and that's actually what we were doing. No need for her to worry about that.

Researcher: Is maternity cover, generally, a norm within the department?
LM 3: Yes. I think so, yeah. I'm only hesitant because we're slightly different in that, we are full time researchers but on an academic basis, you would generally get a replacement to cover a period of maternity leave, to deliver lectures and various things but because the research is much more ... a shorter term, might be a six month project, three month project, again, there's that sort of belief that you can absorb that within existing resources. It's not always the case for making people very risk averse to investing in a longer term, which I think actually ... I'm probably doing some of the thinking for you, from my perspective, is that it does create then, a subconscious level of anxiety around that women feel and believe in their team in better situation. We used to joke about ... because that was kind [inaudible 00:11:06] was like, "Oh, God, got three countries to be in and three different projects to wor" on", but they used to put in front of me really from actually doing that but that was fine. I didn't really mind.

Researcher: Okay. That leads quite nicely into the second kind of immediate return to work and the organizational context that surrounds the women, has a major impact on her experience and if generally shows that there is disparity in experiences because it's heavily dependent on the kind of line manager they have. Like you mention sometimes, it's a very good professional relationship and there is understanding, and sometimes it isn't. So, from the offset, it's difficult and depending on the different kinds of departments ... so some departments are generally more accepting and colleagues are generally more aware, accepting of the familial responsibilities and some aren't. Similarly, the timing of the baby, so these are academics that teach, said they tried to time the ideal academic baby, who's born in September and they return in May so that they have a phased return, which isn't otherwise provided, and the role of HR. So, again, managing expectations so, women whose line managers, unfortunately, weren't supportive or weren't understanding, expected HR to be on their side or to support them, or to intervene a little bit but HR was predominantly administrative and, steered the responsibility, fully on the line manager. If there was a relationship breakdown or difficulties with the woman and the line manager and the woman decided to go to HR, HR would bring them back to their line manager, which is a lost cause in the first place. So, this immediate context of line managers, colleagues, the time your baby is born, the HR department's role in your return, can mean different things in different departments, and different things in different universities, which suggests that we don't have a fair layer that covers all maternity processes. In terms of these relationships and HR's role, and line manager's role, and

colleagues, what would you say has been your experience or what is your opinion on this kind of organizational context really impacting the return? And the responsibility, predominantly being on the line manager.

LM 3: Yeah. I have a real problem with this, I think. If I remember, it's been a while. I think I'm talking six, seven years ago, now. Since I've been involved in this position directly. I had a real problem because ... and this is not just about maternity cover, this is about sick leave and a whole range of different things as well, is that you constantly feel ... So, there's line managers like myself, who have line management responsibility by a default of the kind of work that they do and there's line managers like the majority of management at university, whose roles are line management, include line management as a significant part of what they do. Mine's because of the nature of the work, no bills come. I manage the people I line manage kind of thing, so my core role is not line management, it's one of the things I have to do to get the work done. [inaudible 00:15:08] it's the subtlety across it.

So, in that situation, I always feel very frustrated that HR contracts all those legal decisions and really significant decisions around well being and welfare, back to line managers who have different levels of experience and familiarity with the governance ranges on line management. I'm absolutely convinced that areas such as sick leave and maternity leave, are really important than some people's lives that you can't get wrong because people feel vulnerable in those situations, and are vulnerable in those situations.

That can lead to a whole range of other problems around people, as an assessment of whether they're being treated fairly and the relationships that they can change within the team, with the line manager and wider institution. But, I think HR should play a stronger role in those things. If only, to tell the line manager at what steps, they need to do what. Constantly, all you're doing is being pointed towards web links online, which, on the face of this, is obviously fine. We're educated people. We can read these things but where does it stop?

These are really big deals so, I don't know. I don't think it's a particularly useful position for HR to adopt. I think you probably need to get some kind of a key worker, working with you, checking in with you at regular intervals, where you can talk about where that person is off to, in terms of their maternity cover. Potentially at that moment in time, and they can then interpret that into what needs to ... what responsibilities are, around, as an employer. I'll gladly enact that, as a line manager but I am weary that I may be missing things, misinterpreting things or minimizing events when actually, there is a legal framework which we need to ensure we adhere to, for both the organizations to be happy with their legal framework and also, to ensure that most importantly, the individual is supported as much as they can, at that moment in time of maternity leave.

That's been my main concern. As it happens, it was all fine, I think. I don't think we had any problems. Probably, the only thing that we ... there was any degree of confusion about was, annual leave that people were carrying over from the previous year and onto extend their maternity leave so they could hold off from coming back, as long as possible, under full pay or to get their full pay earlier, or to extend it. That kind of thing and working out the number of days, was the only kind of confusion but it was amicable and we were just trying to work out the correct figures, kind of thing.

But, I think we're a small team, six, seven people, it's not a huge, huge ... it's not a team but six own people now, back then it was about four and half the team went on maternity at the same time so it felt ... So, we had to deal with all of that

and year added work load for a time so I don't think ... I think HR can do a hell of a lot more from what they're currently doing.

Researcher: Do you think that providing line managers with some sort of training or a one-on-one or, awareness raising, or something to equip the line managers, or inform the line managers, would be a better route than just work sites?

LM 3: I think they probably offer that already. I think if I went and said, "Can I get some training on what my obligations are on my maternity leave", they would do it. They would sit me for an hour, one-on-one and they would do it. The problem is that, you never have ... it's not the kind of thing that you need to be dealing with. To retain it and to deploy it in better way, which stays fresh under whatever current equalities legislation we have. So, generally in the better role, to ensure proper governance around the system of a key work ... in terms of the HR person, that you check in with every [inaudible 00:20:17] five, ten minute phone call, just to get an update on where that person's are, so they can catch anything that's happening and ensure that everybody's being treated fairly under legislation.

Absolutely, we should be aware of all the various protective characteristics, all the qualities, governance, anything else that we need to be mindful of but it's the sort of thing that happens so infrequently, for lots of line managers that unless you're dealing with this, you will start to miss things and because of the different ways in which people experience pregnancy in different ways as well, that one ... because you've dealt with it once, in one way, doesn't mean that's going to be the right way of doing it the second time around.

Again, I think HR can be there as a useful way to help you manage that process in a much more involved fashion, which you could do very, a very light touch way.

Researcher: Okay. So, upon return, women spoke about the kind of support that they required from the organization, which I've split into two parts. One is physical support, so more tangible and one is more psychological, so more intangible. Although, even the intangible, psychological support, there can be tangible ways of supporting that but for now, physical and psychological. So, in the physical, of course, things like a room given specifically for breastfeeding, a fridge, perhaps a creche at the university, where they can drop their kids, and office space that is adequate. So, some women worked in very large open plan offices, which made it quite awkward for them, if they had morning sickness, etc. Others is, or only at the side is, psychological support so some women, when they went on maternity leave and things didn't go to plan ... well, two women I spoke to, experienced a miscarriage, which meant they still took the maternity leave but returned to work without having a baby.

So, they had a very, very difficult time, returning to work. Also, because everybody asks, etc. or if somebody had experienced stillborn birth and they went through a very difficult time of questions like, "Did they baby breathe or not?" Because then it gets ... you basically come back to work if the baby didn't and you take maternity leave if the baby did. So, all that plus, returning to work of course and having gone through the physical change. Or, I don't want to say just but also, women that may have experienced a normal, healthy delivery but experienced post-natal depression upon return. Not only upon return, but sometimes for up to two years or three years, still experiencing post-natal depression. That kind of psychological area and the very physical kind of childcare facilities, breastfeeding facilities or even, flexible working to a certain extent.

Now, the overall message was that, the universities these were working in, weren't great at providing physical support but they felt like they could ask for it and they could have a conversation about it and they could be made available. At times they had fantastic facilities available for them but pretty much, all who experienced the psychological difficulty, said A, there didn't feel comfortable asking and B, that they just felt there was a complete lack of awareness or resources available who they could go to because sometimes, they didn't necessarily want to speak to their line manager about this but they didn't know who to, but those who had a really good relationship with their line managers, could and had a very supportive experience to return.

In terms of this physical and psychological support that a woman may need, upon return, where do you think a line manager stands in this and what should be, could be we doing?

LM 3: I suppose the line manager is the broker for ... is the broker and the enforcer of all the different options, should someone need it so, bear in mind what I said before, HR pretty much subcontracted all the actual adjustments back to ourselves. Then, if a person needs any of the physical adaptations that you talked about, then it's up to us to argue in the toss and argue that with the steps or whoever. So, in terms of the role that we can play, it's that kind of lobbying on behalf of the individual. And actually, anything that's either maternity cover or has already involve occupational health, are useful because they are irrefutable and reasons as to why, in my experience, adaptations need to be made or people take those seriously quite quickly.

If there's anything fudgy about how, someone likes to work or anything that's maybe more subjective and not being independently verified, then that's much more difficult to get that thing shifted around. Again, I think it's useful to have HR on your side, within that as well, to help you make that case and take it out of the [inaudible 00:27:00] master's hands or worst again, to say, "This had to happen" for whatever reason.

Going back to myself, in terms of both of my experiences, I don't think I had to make any practical ... don't think there was any request to make any practical adaptations at all, actually. I can't think of anything. The only thing would be, just to be able to ... just basic ... do various appointments and stuff they need to go to, and if someone needs to work at home that day because they [inaudible 00:27:38] those sorts of thing, really. Mainly practical things. I think in both occasions, there may have been illness but they didn't require my to do anything. And again, I've always been ... I had kids years ago so I got a 13 year old and a almost 13, almost 10 year old so I was the first in the team, to have kids. I was here and I had paternity leave, and I was really open about having children, small children, maintaining work and just spoke about my wife's experience around that. So, I think ... and that's just because ... the way I talk about things, I assume that have helped people be more open about their own experiences, which is ... I notice people share things with me but I suspect they've also shared things with each and not included me, as well. I know people have gone to HR before they've talked to me, to understand their rights first, which is the sensible thing to do, obviously. To know what institution that they can access. So, yeah, I think it's possibly easier if your line manager can sympathize on a personal level, with what's going on but that's not to say, people that don't have kids aren't sympathetic. I have to be honest, I'm not sure if I would have been that sympathetic or as aware of the need to be sympathetic, if i didn't have children beforehand and lived through that, and learned what my wife did or didn't experience, in terms of [inaudible 00:29:34] practice.

I think that was useful. For me to do as best like I think I did at the time. I don't think I'd do anything different now, actually. Probably did as best as I possibly could.

Researcher: So, if in the future, you did have women returning to work, who had experienced any of those psychological support, where do you think you'd go from that or what would your take be on that?

LM 3: I suppose a number of different things really. I suppose, ensuring the space for them to talk to me about anything, at least raise anything with me so we are ... like I said, we have to break the capture because that's just good practicing for me. And then, ensuring that that they are aware of where to go, if they want to talk to somebody, want to address things in a different way, through the employer and so providing information that they can access and seek, and take that further. I am fortunate not to have had any ... that I know of, that either two persons have any kind of noticeable, psychological impacts on [inaudible 00:31:10] but I'm not saying that there hasn't been. If there has been, that's kind of be merge within normal sick leave type processes or ... but it's not something specific I got experience of.

We have a HR team, we have occupational health. We have a counseling clinic as well at the university, so it's being able to say there are a sweet of options and ensuring people realize where they can go. I mean I'm a firm believer that people need to be happy to come to work so if they're coming ... just getting bodies here and they really don't want to be here, you only gain 25% of efficiency. You might as well wait a little bit and get 100% down the line, when they're a little bit better so that's why I would go now. I guess.

Researcher: Okay. So, finally, the long-term and eventual career progression of these women who have returned and maybe kids have gone from toddlers to going to school or whatever. This career progression, generally we see in HE, is not great for women because in terms of the traditional trajectory of women in senior leadership or women in professorial roles, is very, very low, compared to their male counterparts and a lot of the literature points that towards this significant difference in the women's career, which doesn't necessarily affect, happen [inaudible 00:33:01] usually, men don't take a full year of paternity leave.

So, the women I spoke to said that it was a lot to do with inflexibility and it's interesting because they said, the sector in general, is actually more flexible than some of their friends who work in very rigid nine to five, nine to six jobs. However, there are areas which are very inflexible. Especially for those that teach or deadlines for example, of any sort, are usually quite frigid but it's the inflexibility of the perception of presenteeism and working from home. Although, it seems that we are going towards, of the working from home, more so, but the experiences of these women want predominantly that. Then, it was also part-time work so quite a lot of women decided to go part-time and they said that going part-time, basically meant no to all, career progression and opportunity, which of course, impacted their overall careers and work load.

Work load was talked about quite a lot, and they said basically ... one woman said, basically, nobody understands work load here because you don't know how much you have to do and what's on paper doesn't translate into practice. You can't explain to anyone what my work load is because we basically, just work around the clock and having children means I can't do that, which means I automatically fall behind all of the other people who can or are able to work evenings and weekends.

So, in terms of thinking about organizational support for career progression, in terms of going part-time or flexibility, work load, or all of those things that may

hinder progression, what has been your experience of seeing that and what kind of support do you think we do or do not provide?

LM 3:

Yeah. I completely recognize everything you said really, it's been damning within the industry, really. One of the women that I made ... was promoted twice while she was on maternity leave, which was pretty unusual, I guess but part of that, I think was, so we did keep in touch. We both want for that person more than the other because I think that was similarly but in different ways, we were friends already so we would ... regular contact, whether it was on Facebook or whatever else, so I knew what was going on. Few a bit less and that was much more formal way of just keeping in touch.

But knowing that the options for promotion were coming [inaudible 00:36:07] these things up and say, "You really should have a cracker day" because she had sometime to work on it, which was outside of the working time. Then, obviously she did quite well in terms of preparing documents that she needed to [inaudible 00:36:22] that promotion. So that was really good but I don't ... that's absolutely not normal, as far as I can see, at all.

In terms of flexible working and reduced hours, both the cases that I both requested produced hours which was fine and we went down from five to four days. I don't see anything wrong with that. I think the one day is, I think it's little, it's not really had an impact in terms of work in which you are doing but I think it is a huge impact on the individual concerned because ... and I'm aware, I'm very guilty of this is, that the rest of the team work five day week and do all their inbox sorting on a Friday and those are the days that people don't work. So everyone comes in Monday morning, with three times more emails and that ... everybody else to deal with so there's that, which is something that we've had to

...

It's been raised and we're trying to sort out how we then, change our practice to suit that way of working and comments about workload are absolutely correct. People, we work in a culture where you can do with much as time will allow. There is no natural cutoff. There's no culture of not emailing at the weekend. There is no culture of not emailing after six. All these things happen and something I read to the week [inaudible 00:37:58] we need to start having a culture of switching off or at least timing emails that you're sending to come at 9AM on a Monday, rather than 7PM on a Friday.

Because of that emotional labor that people are having to go through that feel, that they're not keeping up with everybody else and there is a sense of being left behind. And there is also then, the reality which is more people can be more productive, the more hours they work and that's important in terms of, from my point of view, from research because you can write more, you can publish more, you can be more visible. Electronically, through attendance events.

So, both people worked from home anyway, that's fine, that's something I suggested. I really wanted to keep the people after maternity so anything that would allow them to stay here and allow them to live their lives [inaudible 00:39:09]. One person works two days a week and comes in two days a week and we have our team meetings on one of the days that she comes in. I've encouraged both to put in their calendars, when they leave the office on a night so they don't get ... people looking for [inaudible 00:39:32] they're not putting things at 4PM if they need to be away for 3:30 or whatever.

If they want to start at seven, they start at seven to beat the traffic. There's way in which we can do that and make sure that blank the non working day as a non working day so people again, aren't booking things. So, you don't feel like you need to apologize for not working that extra day because I think that's partly ...

people feel that control and not in embarrassed, what's the word ... subjugated by their right to be flexible.

There's sense that everybody's still too young so you work ... I said that both women can't do work on their non working day. They work on the weekend, they contribute to things all the time and I like to think and I'm dissuaded that wherever I was on [inaudible 00:40:34] but sometimes those, they say that they would rather do that than delay something til the next week or something unresolved that needs doing.

So, it's far from perfect but I don't think we're not doing as bad as we could do, put it that way. We're not working it particularly well. It doesn't mirror the rest of the populations in the industry were nine to five is not even the ... that's five days a week, it's just ... absolute seven days a week. I work five hours, both start at six, finish at eleven on Saturday and Sunday, and that's pretty routine.

And we'll work from six in the morning until seven at night, everyday. Some holidays, I'll be emailing when I'm abroad. Part of that is fine because I'm passionate about what I do but I don't expect everyone else to work like that but I recognize that people have a culture that they then work within and you can maintain a culture you don't want to create. It's a catch 22 situation.

But, we need to think about how we can stop that because it isn't good for individuals or the organization, more broadly. Sometimes the organization doesn't treat you really seriously because it's [inaudible 00:42:01] switch your emails off when you shouldn't be doing those things but the pressure from the work from different directions because the organization is pretty inefficient. It is much that it carries you onto try and solve all of these messes out inside.

It's also that line between ... because we do is essentially, what we are interested in most of the time. Well, some of the time. You don't know at what point you're actually working because it's work or working because this is the stuff that you really like to do. That's not always a clear boundary. I think that makes sense.

Researcher: Yeah, it does and it's true. It's just reflective of what everybody says. I think most academics are just passionate people and they pretty much, devote their lives to this one niche that they are really interested in and it has a ripple effect on everybody else but everybody else is also passionate, but then, when everybody tries to have a family, it doesn't merge well together because like you said, if somebody is working seven days a week, there's no way I can work three days a week and compare to that.

There is no way. Especially if I'm starting out. Is should be working seven a days a week and evenings, to get myself to that, because of the competition. So that means no family for until you get to that. I mean it will be interesting to see what other sectors do that. Here, it's definitely ...

LM 3: Things like the ... for instance, and again, I don't know, I can't comment too much on the teaching side of things because I don't engage in it but on the research side of things, the way in which we're assessed is managed within the rules by, if you have little periods of absence to maternity or if you are part-time I think, by how many outputs they require you to produce per full-time equivalent, so they could work out the numbers based on that. How many papers you should submit, so, there is a kind of balance within that. By no means ... I think it assumed a five day week, actually it is ... People being response is quite hard as well so if some work that we do has ... I found a opportunity today that I needed to get some forms and applications and thought the deadline for a weeks time. I will struggle to mobilize quickly and I got time at my disposal in theory. I know some of someone that works four days a week, that still catch up on their emails now, from last week, is where are they going to be able to do that. I mean

it's things like grand capture, number of outputs and your wider esteem and contribution, which factor into promotion and factor into the way in which you're seen within the university structure so, yeah, everything is beyond the limelight, just controlled.

Particularly against people that, for whatever reason, but particularly around maternity returned from maternity leave and working mothers that are working. Working mothers are ... very rare occasion where you've got a working father that's taken reduced hours. It's up to him to get [inaudible 00:45:56] in terms of career advancement. I think.

Researcher: Yeah. Well, [inaudible 00:46:05].