CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the findings of the study are discussed. The findings are presented in the form of transcripts, which were transcribed from observation field notes, informal discussion, and semi-structured interviews. Some repeat constraints, behaviour, and commitments mentioned by informants were identified as units of interest and later grouped under a common category. Certain recurrent behaviours found through participant observation were identified similarly. Some emergent themes on the informants' constraints in the pursuit of higher education would be contextualized and detail. The three working mothers who were the focus of this study provided deeply honest, detailed, descriptive, and diverse experiences that would not have been available through alternative means of data collection (Ferraro, 2003; De Vault, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Lofland and Lofland, 1995).

4.2 ANALYSIS

As mentioned above, only repetitive constraints, behaviour and traits of informants are adopted to form the backbone of this study. The researcher scrutinized the transcripts thoroughly to derive units; failing to meet these criteria, the transcripts were considered uncommon and thus deemed unrepresentative of the professional working women. These transcripts were discarded.

Table 4.1 (page 59) is the result of this scrutinization where units and categories are arranged in three domains, which are in constant conflict with one another. These domains are the Work, Family and Studies. Categories of similar subjects are then identified as emergent themes, which warrant further analysis and elaboration for the study.

4.3 DOMINANT THEMES

Each of the socially constructed categories reflects and reinforces the various constraints on working mothers turned students. Though we see common constraints being faced by all three informants, the degree of constraints on each one of them is influenced by their background in terms of ethnic group, cultural norms and values, and their religious inclinations.

During the course of this study, several dominant themes surfaced and needed more consideration. Research questions set in Chapter 1 assured that the observations and interviews carried out in this study are geared to elaborate the dominant themes that the researcher deems appropriate. The theoretical framework of the gender role theory helps to explain some of the themes like social changes which have influenced a woman's traditional role, the constraints on working mothers turned students, the inter-connectiveness of work-family-study conflict, role balancing dilemmas, relationships which are bound to suffer, self actualization, and providing role models for children.

4.3.1 SOCIAL CHANGES THAT HAVE INFLUENCED WOMAN'S TRADITIONAL ROLE

From the transcripts, one can see that the informants' husband and immediate family members gave tacit approval for them to pursue higher education. Thus, better education for women is widely accepted in the society. Consequently, gender roles have became blurred and less distinct and role sharing more prevalent. Role sharing has definitely gained popularity albeit at varying degrees determined by informants' ethnic group and cultural factors.

Supportive family members

The Malay Informant is blessed with supportive family members. Therefore, she could study with less stress and in a conducive environment. The excerpt below indicates significant changes in perception with respect to her husband and in-laws.

EXCERPT 1 (Maria)

Sometimes, my husband helps me with my assignments. There was once, I just wrote down the main points and he (husband) constructed all the sentences for me.

According to Maria, her husband took over her role as mother in her family by bathing and preparing lunch boxes for the children when she was late for work. When she was attending her Master's classes in Johore Bahru, her parents-in-law would step in to support her. These family supporters have helped Maria tremendously at the most critical time of her studies, she says,

"At critical times, my parents and my in-laws, as well as my husband are there for me when I thought I could no longer carry on with my three roles."

The Chinese and Indian informants also receive supporting resources from their husbands and parent in-laws, but to a lesser extent. This is mainly due to the heavy workload of their husbands who therefore require more rest at home. Also, their parents and parents in-laws are staying out of state.

EXCERPT 2 (Lee)

My husband shows more involvement with my baby girl. He sometimes will feed her during meal times when I am busy with my studies. Recently, I sent my baby girl to my in-law's home in Perak so that I could have two solid weeks to concentrate on preparation for my final examination.

Domestic help

All the informants agreed that they do not rely fully on domestic help in taking care of their children, cooking, and the children's education. However, with domestic help either of local or foreign origin, it was possible for them to hold a job outside their home.

4.3.2 THE CONSTRAINTS OF A WORKING MOTHER TURNED STUDENT

The constraints faced by the informants in this study can be explained in a symbolic manner through the game of tug-of-war. The tug-of-war in this study is a battle between the status of a working mother against the status of a student; with each status role trying to gain supremacy and dominance over the other.

These working mothers routinely juggle a host of responsibilities demanded by their various statuses and roles (Macionis, 1997). At any one time, role conflict occurs

when incompatibility among roles corresponds to two or more statuses (Macionis, 1997). They experience role conflict when they find themselves pulled in various directions while trying to respond to the many statuses they hold. Even the roles linked to a single status may make competing demands on these working mothers. Role strain occurs when incompatibility among roles corresponds to a single status (Macionis, 1997). Shown below is the situation of role conflict and role strain experienced by the informants.

Role Conflict and Role Strain

In addition to their traditional roles at home, these three informants have taken up paid work outside their home and work as lecturers in a private college. The full time jobs do occupy most of their time leaving less time for their roles at home. The new role in turn demands a great deal of time, effort, and attention from them.

For these working mothers, taking on a work role affects their image as a wife and mother. Generally, these mothers expect paid work to lead to problems in running the home and looking after the children. Sometimes, they feel anxious and guilty about their adequacy as mothers. For instance, one of the informants (Chinese) said:

"When my baby is suffering a fever, or a cough; I would think that I am not a good mother. I blame myself for not having given her my attention. I also feel disheartened to see her suffering. I wish I could relieve her pain."

The informants consider that their careers demand time and energy. Having to devote their time to the family as well caused them stress and pressure resulting in role strain which is defined by Goode (1960) as 'the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations'. These working mothers are under pressure because they are trying to take on a new role, while trying to maintain their previous ones as well.

Lee, the Chinese informant who always aspires to excel, expecting flying colours in all the examinations and assignments; encountered conflict between work and studies while preparing for her examination. On one occasion after her examination, she said,

"I don't think I have done well because I was not thoroughly prepared due to insufficient time."

4.3.3 THE INTER-CONNECTIVENESS OF WORK-FAMILY-STUDY CONFLICT

In this theme, we can see the difficulties in playing multiple roles. Professional working women are constantly in a bind for not completing each role's task in the scheduled period. Encroachment into the next role's scheduled period creates conflict.

Furthermore, at times, even though tasks are completed in the scheduled period, the mental burden of worries of one role is often carried into another. Table 4.1 shows the spillover conflicts from one domain into the other.

Table 4.1: Main Categories of Constraints of Working Mothers according to

Work, Family, and Study Domains

DOMAINS	CATEGORIES	UNITS
1. WORK	a. Stress	i. long working hours ii. overload teaching hours
	b. Unfriendly working environment	i. problematic photocopy machines ii. insufficient printers iii. noise at workplace
	c. Family to work spillover	i. sick child at home ii. heated argument with spouse
	d. Career woman	i. extra effort at work
	e. Studies to work spillover	i. full concentration on final exam
2. FAMILY	a. Domestic roles	i. household chores at night
	b. Time management	i. allocate time among chores ii. work efficiency
	c. Husband's perception of wife's role	i. wife's duty at home ii. attend to family members
	d.Demands on maternal role	i. caring for children and husband
	e. Family members' expectations	i. remembering certain events and occasions ii. children's expectations
	f. Studies to family spillover	i. less quality time with family members
	g. Work to family spillover	i. bringing office work home (strain-based) ii. working overtime (time-based) iii. worries on work related matters
	h. Role sharing	i. husbands help in child care and education

3. STUDIES	a.Family to studies spillover	i. household matters to be attended ii. late night studies
	b. Insufficient time	i. heavy workload at work and home
	c. Inferior quality	i. less time to do assignments
	d. Guilty feeling	i. not offering the best
	e. work to studies spillover	i. long working hours ii.late for class iii.insufficient study time
	f. supportive husbands	i. help in course assignments
	g. other supporting resources	i. parents, in-laws, domestic helpers
4. SELF	a. Stress in personal life	i. guilty when unable to meet expected standard ii. frustrated at workplace when unable to fulfill expected requirements iii. moral support for husband, good listener
	b. Strong aspiration	i. enrollment in higher education ii. strong desire to achieve
	c. Role model	i. children try to emulate
	d. High expectations	i. work satisfaction ii. good exam results iii. happy family members
	e. Time management	i. leave 'job' at workplace ii. divide time efficiently between home and study
	f.Role 'compartmentalization'	i. take one role at a time
	g. Lower expectations	i. do not expect the best results all the time

As mentioned in chapter 1 and 2, housework is the central aspect of a woman's traditional role, which is frequently undervalued or forgotten (Fransella and Frost, 1977). When the informants were asked the open-ended question, 'What would you say about being a housewife after working hours?' they agreed that they would need to carry out their duties as a housewife after work. One of them (the Chinese Informant) said:

"While I would hate to be identified as a housewife, it is certainly very tiring to take care of the housework after a hard day's work in the college".

Surprisingly, despite these women's involvement in the workplace from eight to five, the amount of household chores and responsibilities at home have not declined. Their home duties amount to a "second shift" (Macionis, 1997) of work after returning from their first shift at the workplace. Lee, the Chinese informant added,

"Twenty-four hours of a day is not enough for a woman to complete all her daily duties. There are times I had to burn the midnight oil to finish my course assignments."

work-family conflict

The conflict between work and family among working mothers is definitely prevalent in this present day scenario. This is evident from the fact that many working mothers experience this kind of stress in their daily life. Some obvious elements of the conflicts are work-to-family spillover in the forms of time-based and strain-based spillover; and family-to-work spillover in terms of emotions, strains, and thought interference due to their individual personal values, beliefs, personality, and character (Poelmans, 2001).

Work-to-family spillover (time-based spillover)

EXCERPT 3 (Devi)

For example, towards the end of the semester, when graduating students need to present their projects till late in the evenings. I just could not rush back home in time to prepare the evening meal for the family.

Work-to-family spillover (strain-based spillover)

EXCERPT 4 (Lee)

Some of my students are just too weak, I have to pay more attention to their work and even try to work out some solutions in order to ensure they pass. The worry of a high failure rate sometimes disturbed my thoughts even when I am at home with my family. At times like this, I can't pay full attention in caring for my little girl. I allow her to watch her favorite videos instead of playing or talking to her. I feel bad and I 'bash myself up' for not being a good mother.

Family-to-work Spillover

Working mothers have their roles changed from paid work to wife work once they reach home after a full day of tiring work in the office. By anybody's reckoning, 'wife work' is a time-consuming, energy draining, and emotionally exorbitant enterprise (Maushart, 2001).

EXCERPT 5 (Lee)

Once, my husband and I had an argument over a family matter that was not resolved and the emotions were carried over to the college affecting me at work. That day was really a bad day.

EXCERPT 6 (Devi)

My husband expects me to remember important dates like in-laws' birthdays, children's birthdays, as well as that of extended family members. This extra burden creates tension and strains, and it tires me. It does affect my performance at work.

The types of work-family conflict experienced by the informants are closely related to the informant's personal values and beliefs, her personality and character. If the respondent strongly believes that it is the duty of a wife to take care of the husband and children then the inability to do so due to work commitment, will make her feel guilty and this guilt would create more stress in her life. If the informant has a strong personality and character, she will assume more responsibilities either at the workplace or at home. Due to limited time, she may not be able to carry out all her

responsibilities. Then, she will feel frustrated and this too will affect her quality of life.

Demands on the maternal role

That women in academia generally play their maternal role well, is evident from my three informants who have in many instances touched on the topics of childcare. Some of the excerpts below show the concern of the mothers about their children.

EXCERPT 7 (Lee)

I had to sponge my baby girl throughout the night. Her temperature was between 38 – 40 degrees Celsius. She still has a slight fever. I left her at the nursery this morning.

EXCERPT 8 (Devi)

I applied for emergency leave yesterday because I could not leave my baby with the maid when she was having a cough and influenza.

EXCERPT 9 (Maria)

I have to rush back at five o'clock every evening so that my son won't have to wait too long outside the school gate. I pick him up from school daily.

Studies-work conflict

Both study and work require substantial time to achieve results. As time is limited, these professional working women need to strike a balance between work and study or decide on their priorities. As a result, work performance could be compromised if studies take precedence or vice versa. Therefore, work-studies conflict is a result of time-based spill-over conflict.

For example, when Maria is rushing to complete her assignment before dateline, she pays less attention to teaching. This is what she says:

"When I need to concentrate on my assignment and the dateline is later that evening, I normally give some written work to my students to occupy their time while I carry on completing my assignment in the class."

The Chinese informant, Lee, when preparing for her final examination, normally keeps to herself after delivering her lecture, she would go to the library to study. She said:

"I can't afford the time to socialize with colleagues when my examination is near. My time is for college lectures and study for examination only."

There are times when the informants have to forgo preparing for their studies. That is when they are preparing their students for important examinations in the college.

Studies-family conflict

Studies take up most of the family quality time. There are numerous constraints faced by working mothers when they become students: 1. Not having enough time for reading, 2. Not being able to pass up work on time, 3. Facing problems in going to the library during working hours, 4. Due to time constraints, quality of work may sometime be sacrificed. All these constraints have negative effects on the informants. Due to their inability to perform well in their studies, they take it out on their families. Therefore, there are a lot of conflicts faced by all members of the family. The conflicts between family-studies and studies-family are inter-related. They affect each other.

Besides this, these working mothers cum students have the obligation to be good listeners and supporters of their husbands' ideas, opinions, and aspirations. Below is an informal discussion between two informants and the researcher.

Devi: "When I got up this morning, I felt miserable and had a severe headache. My husband was talking about his big plans with regards to his career until late night. I could not get a good night's sleep."

Lee: "I am also used to such experiences when my husband talks about his

work and problems in the office too."

Researcher: "Why do you have to tolerate this when you are tired and not

interested? Can't you tell him so?"

Devi: "This is the norm with Asian families. The husband is always

to be respected and listened to. Don't you know that?"

Based on the above conversation, it is clear that the theory of gender role, which implies multiple roles for woman is very relevant in this context. This situation creates stress and conflict among the women, who bring their problems to their workplace. This affects their studies, too. Therefore, there is a continuous spill-over situation and it works in a vicious cycle with a reciprocal effect among the three domains of work, family, and studies as shown in the diagram below (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Inter-connectiveness of Work, Family, and Studies conflicts
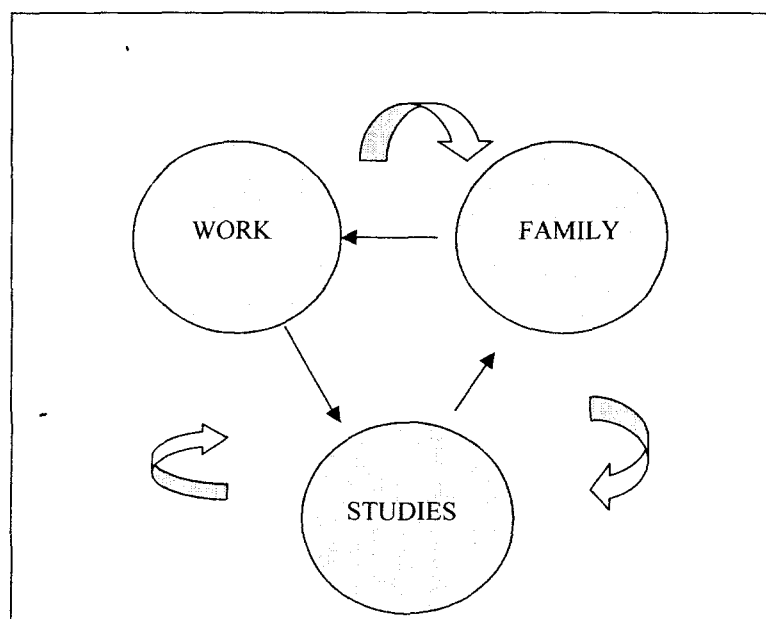
4.3.4 ROLE BALANCING DILEMMAS

As mentioned earlier, all the informants mentioned that the biggest barrier to their success in all their roles is time, or rather the lack of it. Therefore, efficient time management is of paramount importance.

EXCERPT 10 (Maria)

I always make sure I finish all my tasks during my professional working hours, so I do not take work home. When I am at home, I divide my time between home matters and study matters. I am grateful that my husband is supportive towards my work and my studies.

EXCERPT 11 (Lee)

Time management is very important to me when I am required to play so many roles at the same time. Normally, I wake up as early as 5.00 a.m. in the morning to do some reading for my course requirements. In the evening, when I return from work, I will prepare the ingredients for cooking the dinner. After that, I have to pick up my baby girl from the nursery at 6.00 p.m.

The desire of these working mothers turned students, to perform all their roles efficiently leaves them exhausted and tense. Such a desire is reflective of the cultural values of our society that expects a lot from the woman.

Most women consciously and naturally do a balancing act of their multiple roles. In order to minimize role conflict and role strain, they try to 'compartmentalize' (Macionis, 1997) their lives so that they perform roles linked to one status at one time and place, and carry out roles corresponding to another status elsewhere at another time. For example, one of the informants, Maria said,

"I always make sure I finish my work in the college. I will never take home any unfinished work. My principle is to leave the 'job' at the workplace and head home with a relaxed attitude."

However, this is only hypothetically possible. Many a time, the informants found difficulties in 'compartmentalizing' their time to fulfill their responsibilities. How can one stop thinking as a worker and switch one's role to a housewife when a task has not been completed in the workplace? In this case, she may need to work overtime. Thus, in this particular situation, the work domain wins the tug-of-war. Later, the informants may need to take on the role of a housewife to care for her children and husband. Then, perhaps to coach the children with their schoolwork, and to put them to bed. Only after having done these could the informants find time to study for their assignments in their role as students.

However, these roles do not fall into place according to plan. Constraints appear when one compartment may need to take in more than one role. More obvious constraints are seen when working mothers turned students cannot compartmentalize

their roles due to the lack of stamina, poor planning, indecisiveness or being too feminine, and lacking external support.

Nevertheless, if the informants do not insist on a high standard in carrying out multiple roles, then compartmentalization would be feasible. Thus, lowering the level of their expectations is crucial in reducing conflicts or avoiding them altogether.

4.3.5 RELATIONSHIPS ARE BOUND TO SUFFER

The decision of these working mothers to become students has an impact on their immediate families. The impact is to a certain extent negative, in the sense that there is a feeling of discontent particularly from their husbands and their children. On this issue, Devi, my Indian informant says,

"My family members forever hold a grudge against me for not being able to spend quality time with them. To be precise, my husband is unhappy because I can not accompany him to many social functions or gatherings. I need to take care of my infant child. I just can not leave her with the maid."

Further, Devi also mentioned that her six year old daughter is also not happy with the existing situation.

"My girl sometimes feels neglected because she wants me to help her with homework, play with her or simply to watch a movie with her which is considered a luxury to me because of the time factor involved."

4.3.6 SELF-ACTUALIZATION

The strong need to self actualize enables these professional working mothers turned students to overcome a lot of obstacles. As described by Maslow's motivation theory (1954) on the highest needs of a person in achieving self-actualization: though they go through a great ordeal, it all does not matter in the face of the rewards they will reap once their aspiration are realized.

Generally, the informants except the Malay informant are satisfied with their level of academic performance. She (Maria) has faced some problems with her non-cooperative supervisor. Besides, these informants have a high self esteem and they are also at the same time regarded highly by their family members. Devi, the PhD mother-student has this to say:

"Even before I started doing my PhD, the approval of my topic from my supervisor gave me encouragement and hope that I too will be able to achieve my goal in the near future. This feeling of self achievement is boosted by the fact that I am achieving something while being a mother, a wife, and a lecturer."

Our culture defines women as deferential and emotional (Macionis, 1997), and the traditional view that working for income is "men's role" (Macionis, 1997) no longer holds true. Today, working mothers like my informants are more ambitious, capable, and are determined to pursue their dreams.

Devi, a young working mother of two has always shown her determination in juggling multiple roles while still finding time to concentrate on her studies. In a conversation she had with one of her colleagues on the progression of her PhD, she spoke with full confidence that she will somehow catch-up with her studies despite the extra teaching hours given to her.

"I may encounter a few delays in submitting the papers required by my supervisor, but I am quite confident that I will be able to complete my initial writings as requested by her. I don't think I need to take a month off just to catch up with my backlog of work. The students need me. Somehow, by the grace of God, I will make it. Trust me."

4.3.7 PROVIDING ROLE MODELS FOR CHILDREN

All three informants agreed that upbringing is very important for their children. Better still, when the children can learn by example from them. Consequently, these working mothers indicated that they would not mind struggling through all barriers and constraints in order to continue their battle in pursuing higher degrees in the local

universities. This is because they desire to be role models for their children. They hope to set good examples for their children to study hard for good results, learn to be independent, to be tolerant, to practice time management, cooperation among siblings, and most important to have goals in life.

Devi saw one good sign in her six year old daughter, where she is more interested in doing well in school and more excited about learning.

"I always wanted her to solve her problems especially her homework by herself before coming to me. Well, ever since I started my PhD course, she tends to show her initiative in taking care of herself. So, I told her, 'You did a good job; we both did.' I think she is going to be very happy in her learning curve as I do see some motivational factors when she mentioned to her aunts and friends that she wants to do better than her mummy."

Lee, a working mother turned MBA student noted that her little girl was more inclined to flip through some books whenever she saw the mummy studying.

Maria, who completed her Masters Degree last June; said that her children especially the eldest two sons realize the value of a good education. They are more independent in studying as well as looking after themselves.

4.4 Conclusion

Societal changes have enabled women to be employed in the workforce. This change created conflicts between work and family. The situation is further aggravated by the pursuit of higher education. In order to strike a balance between the three roles, they need cooperation from various sources in their circle. In the process of role balancing, relationships are strained. However, none of the difficulties they face will stop them from actualizing their final goal - the Masters or PhD.