

Executive Summary of Research Paper

The Lived Experience of the Relationship Between Parenting and Leadership

Summary of the Paper

The large amount of literature on parenting suggests that it can be measured and generalised. However, qualitative papers claim that motherhood, in particular, is a highly individual experience influenced by a variety of factors (e.g. Laney, et al., 2015). Some papers have argued that effective parenting can be synonymous with transformational leadership (e.g. Morton, et al., 2011). However, while identity theory, attachment, and transformational leadership could lead to significant findings when combined, there is hardly any research linking the domains. Thus, the present study has chosen to explore the lived experience of the relationship between parenting and leadership in more depth, basing its findings on four interviews with mothers in leadership positions in academia. It uses an interpretative phenomenological analysis from Smith and colleagues (2009) and links the evaluation of findings predominantly on identity theory, looking at the influences of both i.e. work and mother identities on each other (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Three main themes with subthemes have emerged from the interviews, which are *Responsiveness and Flexibility*, *Importance of Support*, and the *Relationship between Work Identity and Mother Identity*.

Elaboration of the Themes

Major Themes	Subthemes
1. Responsiveness and Flexibility	a. In the Workplace
	b. As a Mother
	c. Compromises
2. Importance of Support	a. At Work
	b. At Home
3. Relationship between Work Identity and Mother Identity	a. Work Identity Influencing Mother Identity
	b. Mother Identity Influencing Work Identity
	c. Parallels between Both Identities

As noted in the table, several subthemes have emerged from the major themes. While the major themes were mentioned consistently by all four participants, the subthemes better reflect their individual experiences.

Responsiveness and flexibility both at work and as a mother links the present findings to existing literature which mentions “transformational parenting”, i.e. the application of parenting strategies on organisational settings and vice versa (Popper & Maysel, 2003; Morton, et al., 2011). However, as seen by the subtheme *Compromises*, participants’ work identities as well as mother identities were relatively salient, yet both take up a considerable amount of time and energy. This leads to the necessity of “cutting corners”, as phrased by one participant. The *importance of support* both in the workplace and at home feeds into the latter, as the perceived stress and pressure of the participants was mediated by the amount of support they felt they received from both their workplace, i.e. management and their work teams, and at home, i.e. their partner. The *relationship between work identity and mother identity* has commonly been mentioned by existing literature as a work-family conflict (Aryee, 1992; Noor, 2004; Erdoga, et al., 2019). Interestingly, however, in the present study, participants have mostly talked about positive influences of both roles on each other. While they still mentioned that both domains require a lot of time and energy, thus put them under a lot of pressure and increase the need for compromise, the actual relationship between their roles was perceived as rather positive. Their training and practice, i.e. work identity, enhanced their decision making as mothers, while at the same time, their experiences as mothers positively influenced some perspectives and behaviours at work. Also, again confirming previous findings, some *parallels between both identities* were determined, such as the goal to be responsive to both followers and their children, while furthermore acting as a role model and empower them.

Implications of the Paper

Both future qualitative and quantitative research could benefit from a focus on one of the main emerged themes, for instance, investigating the details of mothers’ sensemaking of their experiences in either regard. Due to the study’s design, the collected data underlines the individuality of the issue, yet highlights a degree of consensus among the participants. In summary, the present study validates a lot of the perspectives which have been established by previous research. It nevertheless highlights that being a working mother in a leadership position is a highly individual experience, which should be considered by organisational, or even legal, policies. Adequately adjusted, they could not only provide a smooth transition into motherhood, facilitating the identity transformation that women undergo when becoming mothers, but also support working mothers who have to switch flexibly between, and thus juggle, both their work and mother identities.