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Like Mother, Like Daughter: The Intergenerational Link Between Mother Activists and their Daughters in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa

Shana Kleiner
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*LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER: THE INTERGENERATIONAL LINK BETWEEN
MOTHER ACTIVISTS AND THEIR DAUGHTERS IN KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH
AFRICA*

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South Africa: Social and Political Transformation

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1. Acknowledgements

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2. Abstract

The concept of motherhood is often paired with notions of nurturing and caretaking, but it is rarely seen in the context of activism or social and political change. Thus, by researching the relationship between mother activists and their daughters, this paper delves into the concepts of how motherhood is perceived through a feminist lens, and what it means to be a mother while also performing duties as an activist. The research tackles the questions of whether daughters of mother activists become activists themselves, and how they were affected by their mother's activism during adolescence, if at all.

A narrative approach was used for data collection: one-on-one qualitative interviews with seven women were used to collect this data. The interviews were with mothers who were activists themselves, as well as adult daughters of mother activists. Amongst the sample of seven women, there were two mother-daughter pairs. The interviews yielded fascinating responses, such as the fact that daughters of mothers often did not feel neglected, and instead felt rather apathetic towards their mothers' activism as children. As they got older, however, the research yielded that they started to understand and respect their mother's work more. Also, the research showed that all daughters of mother activists became activists themselves, proving a strong intergenerational link regarding political ideologies and outlooks regarding activism. This study took place in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, a country that was specific to research due to the legacy of Apartheid and mothers in activism.

3. Introduction

"To those who oppose us, we say, 'Strike the woman, and you strike the rock'." -Winnie Mandela

One of the arguably most well-known mother activists in South African history is Winnie Mandela, who is often referred to as the “mother of the nation.” Ironically, Winnie Mandela is someone who was stripped of her motherhood: since she was imprisoned as an anti-Apartheid activist, she was incapable of physically raising her children, while simultaneously being defeminized for her activism. But, South African culture, time and time again, has feminized the struggle for equality by using calls for mothers to build bridges and reconcile. In *The Rise and Fall of Motherism as a Force in Black Women’s Resistance Movements*, Wells (1991) states, “At some point women’s political activism is bound to be perceived as interfering with their prescribed role as mothers.” With South Africa’s politically tumultuous history, I want to take a closer look at the link between activism and motherhood. Thus, I researched the concept of women activists and their relationship with their adult daughters, as well as whether their role as activists affected their role as mothers. The objective of this study was to inquire whether growing up with an activist mother affected their daughters’ childhoods and ideologies, and how motherhood is perceived in the context of activism. Essentially, was the mother’s activism in conjunction with their motherhood? Or was there a trade-off between being an adequate mother and tending to activist duties? The research probes at the question of whether women have to

“choose” between activism and motherhood, and if it is possible to fully be both an activist *and* a mother.

Moreover, this research looks at the intergenerational nature of activism, and whether the daughters of these mother activists are activists themselves. The previous research, which lacks in relations between mother activists and their daughters, does delve into why women in South Africa are a specific niche population to look into. The role of women during Apartheid in South Africa was imperative to the struggle, but was also largely defined by their motherhood. As Anne McClintock (1993) notes, “African women embraced, transmuted, and transformed the ideology of motherhood in a variety of ways working strategically within traditional ideology to justify untraditional public militancy.” In resistance to Apartheid, South African women turned the shared identity of motherhood not only into a political tool but into a reason as to why they were mobilizing. Due to this specific historical context and lively nature of activism in South Africa, as well as the lack of research concerning mother activists and their families, I want to study the relationship between mother activists and their daughters, but also get at the sense that women in activism is resistance to the structures that have been oppressing women, daughters and mothers alike, for centuries. In a patriarchal society that often uses motherhood to keep women submissive, mothers mobilising and showing their daughters what it means to make change is part of redefining motherhood as a strength, not a vulnerability.

I hypothesize that daughters that grew up with an activist mother will themselves be politically aware and thus be involved in some sort of activism. Simultaneously, I hypothesize that daughters of activists may have had resentment towards their mothers at some point for

dedicating time and effort to social causes rather than their children. *Long Term Effects of Political Activism on Intergenerational Relations* (Dunham & Bengtson 1992) states that “activist children report less family solidarity when they are young adults than nonactivist children, but there will be no difference between the two when the children are middle-aged.” I will research specifically if and how growing up with an activist mother may have affected their daughters’ lives, ideologies, and senses of motherhood through the lens of feminist and narrative theory. This research aims to dig deeper into exactly how women define activism through motherhood and vice versa. Also, it aims to understand how the daughters of these women see their mothers: neglectful or powerful? The notion that Scanlon discusses in *Representation & Reality* (2007), that children of activists often feel pushed aside and neglected by their mother’s work, shows that there is a trend in activism affecting familial relations. With that being said, due to previous research, I hypothesize that these negative views from daughters will change with time: as the daughters themselves become older, or even follow their mother’s footsteps in activism, I think they will have less resent and more respect for their mothers’ work. I hypothesize that women who were raised by activist mothers are more likely to be activists and socially conscious themselves, and that they define motherhood within a lens of activism because of their socialization.

My research on mother activists is entrenched in a firm basis of feminist theory: according to Neyer and Bernardi (2011), maternity relegates women to an “inferior social and economic status as ‘objects’” with “childbearing forming the core of women’s nature” (165). They go on to say that motherhood is perceived as biologically birthing children, as well as “social motherhood”, or raising these children. The fact that biological and social motherhood is

seen as a woman's duty affects how mothers, including activists, see their relations with their children, with less time to dedicate towards social motherhood. Moreover, Neyer and Bernardi's *Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Reproduction* (2011) notes the fact that since motherhood has been used to oppress women for centuries, it is clear that women involving themselves in activism is a form of empowerment in itself: by being mother activists, they are inherently working in resistance against oppressive structures.

Furthermore, the goal of this research was to tackle the fundamental notion of mothers as *people*: ultimately, does motherhood limit activism or does activism limit motherhood? Also, is there a possibility for women to be both activists *and* mothers fully and simultaneously? Overall, the previous research largely discusses the concept of "sacred motherhood" being used as a political tool, as well as a crutch to keep women under the patriarchal notion of housekeeper and mother. But, there is a large gap in the research in terms of how mother activists feel about motherhood, and how their daughters felt about their mothers. Furthermore, this research begs the question as to why mother activists are oftentimes seen as neglecting their "womanly" duties due to pervasive gender norms. It is important for academics to better understand the generational and emotional impact of activism so that we can ensure that people on the frontlines of change are seen as whole people with lives and families, not *just* activists.

Therefore, there are six specific objectives of this research: (1) To interview both mother activists and their daughters about what it was like growing up with an activist mother or what it was like to be an activist and a mother themselves. (2) To find out if having an activist mother results in the daughter engaging in activism or political work. (3) To further enquire about the fluid nature of perceptions of one's mother: did the daughters' perceptions of their mothers

change over time? If so, how? (4) To understand the concept of mothers as people: what does it mean to be identified as a mother, by one's own children and by the outside world? Does this definition of motherhood work in conjunction or against the definition of activism? (5) To ask if and how one's activism is affected by one's identity (i.e. woman, mother, etc.) (6) To get a clear understanding of how narrative and feminist theory inform the concept of mother activists, and female activism in general. I am grounding my research in narrative and feminist theory in order to hear women's stories and experiences as uncontested narratives. Also, it is necessary to note that throughout this paper, I am defining activism as anything pertaining to people making active social or political change within the community. So, I define everything from anti-apartheid activism to organizing a group of informal street workers as falling under the umbrella of activism.

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, I will review the literature regarding motherhood, politics, activism, and family structure. Then, I will discuss the methodology I used, one-on-one qualitative interviewing, as well as limitations of the study. I will then present my research findings in two sections: the first will be a section called Introducing the Interviewees, which is essentially a summary of the interviews and the second section, or Themes and Discussion, will discuss the seven common findings from the interviews. To summarize the findings and note my initial hypotheses, I will discuss the outcomes of the research in the conclusions section. I will then conclude the paper with recommendations for further study regarding mother activists and their daughters. The last prominent part of this paper is the Appendix, which includes both the interview questions asked and an in-depth summary of each individual interview.

Winnie Mandela is not an anomaly: her “militant motherhood”, a term mentioned by Emily Bridger, refers to Mandela emphasizing her motherhood as the *reason* she was resisting the Apartheid state using militancy and mobilisation. Her violence was to avenge and protect her children, but due to her activism, her motherhood was called into question. Winnie Mandela’s sense of motherhood is found to be a strong political tool, but I am still left wondering how her children felt, and how her daughters, both involved in politics, internalized their mother’s militancy against the state.

4. Literature Review

"Mothers of daughters are daughters of mothers and have remained so, in circles joined to circles, since time began." -Signe Hammer

Introduction

Women participating in politics has been a highly discussed and contested topic, but what remains largely unresearched is the topic of mother activists and their relationships with their daughters. Thus, looking at the previous research, it is clear that the concept of “sacred motherhood” being used as a political tool is largely noted within discourse surrounding activists. By delving into feminist theory, the history of women in South African political organizations, the family structure, as well as mothers in different activist roles, this literature review further entrenches my research regarding mother activists and their daughters within a firm basis of research. In order to truly understand mother activists, we must first define “mother” as well as analyze the concepts that are tied to motherism, feminism, and activism

simultaneously. Lastly, the two themes regarded in the literature review are feminist definitions of motherhood and motherhood and activism.

Motherhood: Feminist Definitions

According to feminist theory, intensive mothering is comprised of the notion that mothers are the ideal caretakers of children, and that emotionally strenuous and laborious child rearing is seen as an undeniable aspect of motherhood. Moreover, intensive mothering assumes that children are sacred. The idea that children, and thus their mothers, are sacred affects activism because women who are activists have historically used motherhood as a political tool (Gross 1998). For instance, as Scanlon notes in *Representation & Reality*, African women activists in South Africa were portrayed as strong, steadfast mothers--this is where the slogan “when you strike a woman, you have struck a rock” comes from. Thus, their role as mothers was equated with nation-building, and women were mobilised to resolve conflict with other women due to shared identity. Scanlon calls this concept “motherism as a method of political activism” (67), which speaks to the idea that womanhood was defined by motherhood and vice versa: women, even as activists, were seen as inseparable from other mothers, and therefore were seen as the nation’s caretakers (2007). Furthermore, Gross (1998) discusses the idea of intensive mothering from a feminist lens: “mothers feel intense guilt when they leave their children in the care of others or, as is sometimes the case, alone. Their sense of accomplishment in other spheres of their lives is often undermined by chronic ambivalence about the adequacy of their mothering” (270). Thus, when specifically looking at activist mothers, the literature shows that when women

become dedicated to causes outside the home, this may result in an internal struggle of whether they are adequately performing their motherly responsibilities. As a critique of this, postmodern feminists claim that women have generally gone unseen in terms of work outside of child-rearing, and should be more honored for their own needs and wants (Neyer and Bernardi 2011).

Capitalism inherently objectifies women's bodies and highlights male labor and autonomy, and thus links motherhood to patriarchal and capitalist structures (Neyer & Bernardi 2011). Due to the nature of capitalism, which prioritizes profit and money rather than individuals, the female body functions as another object for male exploitation, as a symbol of power and resources. According to Federici (2014), "The body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers, the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance." Female reproduction, under capitalism, is ultimately another function of labor production: the classic family structure of the man working and the woman bearing children maintains the status quo, resulting in capitalism thriving culturally and economically. Thus, motherhood itself is institutionalized: Rich (1995) points to the fact that the larger society and systems, such as the government, aims to ensure that women remain subordinate to men due to the fact that they are expected to bear children and reproduce. The literature shows that due to this institutionalized and thus oppressive motherhood, mothers deal with exhaustion and anxiety due to cultural standards to be the "perfect mother" (Green 2015). More research is necessary to understand the effects of institutionalized motherhood in non-western parts of the world, such as South Africa, where legacies of Apartheid, colonialism, and racial tension add to the discourse on motherhood. In *Conceptualising Motherhood in South*

Africa, Walker (1995) defines motherhood not just as the actual practice of raising children, but as the narrative and values around what constitutes the “Good Mother”, and how motherhood has become a social identity. Walker argues that the social identity of motherhood affects the individual’s sense of self, which may or may not be in conflict with other social identities. The idea that women are not only “women” or that mothers are not only “mothers” shows that the intersecting identities of women are shrouded with the blanket-term of “mother.”

Motherhood and Activism

Woyshner (2002) synthesizes this concept of motherhood with activism and social reform by analyzing American women activists in the 1920’s. She states that two theories emerged amongst female activists: maternalism and “municipal housekeeping” which stipulated that the community was an extension of womens’ homes. Essentially, she discusses that women were not allowed separation from their role as mothers or house-makers: even single, liberal female activists referred to themselves as “public mothers.” Thus, in the women’s movement of the 1970’s, mothers and nonmothers were pitted against each other, as well as working and nonworking mothers. The idea that working mothers, and therefore activist mothers, may be shirking their roles as mothers is something I want to explore further. Contrastingly, mothers have not just been driven into conflict with one another, but have also been expected to connect via their identities as mothers (Scanlon 2007). Since women are often seen as shapes that assume their relationships with parents, husbands, and children, women were often mobilised by calls to “build bridges between women on the basis of their common interests and concerns regarding

their households and as mothers” (Scanlon 2007). This sense of shared motherhood also bleeds into activism: Gilmore (2004) claims that women mobilise through “social mothering”, or this sense of fighting for social justice not simply *as* mothers but *because* they are mothers. Gilmore states, “[The mothers] come forward, in the first instance, because they will not let their children go. They stay forward, in the spaces created by intensified imprisonment of their loved ones, because they encounter many mothers” (27).

Boris (1989) discusses sacred motherhood and activism in the context of race: “White women reformers did not have to defend their reputations as mothers, as black women activists often did, because the dominant culture found in them the prototype for “woman” and “mother”” (48). This note on intersectionality is important, specifically because the notion of activism has been racialized due to Apartheid. Moreover, women were seen as caretakers in terms of activism despite whether they had children or not; and the intertwined nature of family life and the larger community defined women’s activism. For instance, Boris notes that, “only through shorter hours, higher wages, and generally improved working conditions would motherhood be protected and home life secured” (43). Since motherhood is inherently tied to family structure, the effects of activism on intergenerational relations was explored by Dunham and Bengston (1992). The researchers used a longitudinal study of three generations to enquire about parents’ political activism and effects on the family: they found that liberal-minded people usually have liberal-minded parents, and that activist parents are usually liberal-minded. Moreover, it is clear that mothers of activists are more liberal than mothers of nonactivists. All in all, the previous research shows that activism has a strong intergenerational link. In order to thoroughly study this link, more research between mother activists and their daughters is necessary.

Furthermore, the politically tumultuous history of South Africa has led to a flexible, changing definition of motherhood. As Walker (1995) points out, during Apartheid, “massive disruptions and reorganisation of social relations took place during this period, directly affecting the position of women, family structures, gender relations and the social, economic and political ordering of society more broadly” (429). During Apartheid specifically, women were navigating new social identities due to urbanization and political strife, such as “wage worker, union member, squatter, African, church member. All of this had to have impacted on women's consciousness, their self-image as mothers, and the meaning they attached to this work.” (429). The idea that new identities emerged due to female activism, whether the activism was directly or indirectly anti-Apartheid, proves that the notion of motherhood within political activism in South Africa is something that needs to be explored more thoroughly.

Due to motherhood being a central theme in South Africa’s political history, there is a congruence of attitudes regarding social and political identities of women. As Walker points out, the racial tension between mothers during Apartheid was apparent: she quotes Gertrude Shope, the president of the African National Congress Women’s League, who stated, “Women bring life to this world and they have a duty to make sure that this life is preserved and protected. There is a need for us to come together regardless of our colour to look at the situation in the country and respond as women and mothers.” Of course, black women and mothers were the ones to spearhead the activism against the Apartheid government. Walker calls for “more careful attention to a much more complex configuration around the experience and meaning of motherhood: 'eurocentric' ideas have not been the property of South Africans of European descent only, but have been absorbed and refashioned in complex ways by black South Africans

as well” (436). So, this kind of idea that non-western mothers are vastly different than western mothers is “overly purist and ahistorical construction of black 'culture” (436). Overall, motherhood within different races differs due to a multitude of nuances within racial and cultural stratification, but the activists during Apartheid strongly noted the need to build bridges as *mothers*, rather than further separate themselves from women with different identities.

The idea of equating the meaning of “woman” with the meaning of “mother” points to the concept of women’s rights versus mother’s rights: Wells (1991) states that there is a stark difference between motherism and feminism, due to the fact that women who are fighting for mother’s rights are fighting for their rights simply as mothers, not as women. The contradictory nature of motherism is notable in South Africa especially, with motherhood as a central aspect to both the oppression and emancipation of South African women. A collectivist view of women banding together as powerful mothers created a positive portrayal of activist women as “mothers of the next generation.” On the flip side of this, viewing women as steadfast protectors and peacemakers reinforces prejudicial images that it is the woman’s job to reconcile men’s violence and wars. Fakier and Cock (2018) discuss the fact that essentializing all women as peacemakers dehumanizes them and disregards their vastly different political ideologies, especially as activists. This specific discussion is where the discourse on motherhood becomes increasingly convoluted: of course, peace and reconciliation is preferable to war and violence, but homogenizing all women reinforces female oppression. With that being said, the idea of women assuming roles as peacemakers in the name of *motherhood*, historically and repeatedly, does bring women of all cultures, lifestyles, races, and political views together.

Bonnin (2000) conducted a case study of a political protest by women in Mpumalanga Township in KwaZulu-Natal, and investigates whether a challenge to power relations in one space can impact power dynamics in another space, such as the home. The author suggests that this sense of female activism has become part of the “collective memory”, and “thus represents a potent symbol of popular culture” (303). The dichotomy of public and private space, for women, is especially potent within Western feminist discourses: the public sphere, such as the civil society and the state, appear to be male-centric whereas the private sphere, such as the family and the domestic life, appear to be female-centric. Thus, South Africa has an interesting relationship with the public vs. the private due to the Apartheid government’s relentless disruption of the black family, and therefore, the black home. As Bonnin (2000) puts it, “a white middle-class South African family would be likely to have experienced the household as a private space, while for a poorer black family, subjected to the invasions of the pass laws and the regulations of resettlement, privacy would have been less assured” (303). Therefore, when seeing women activists in KwaZulu-Natal, she saw that the physical appearance of female bodies in a public space in itself is political. In regards to their newfound political activism, women in Mpumalanga said that they had become the breadwinners, and thus the “engines of the family.” Moreover, Ruth Wilson Gilmore discusses mothers and their activism regarding their children experiencing incarceration (2004). She discusses the idea of organizing, as black women, on behalf of their children who are forced to live in the public prison system--as a way to combat the forced publicness of their activism, Gilmore highlights the fact that these women used motherhood as a method of challenging the state. By insisting that they have rights to their own children, they dissolve the stark contrast between the public and private spheres. Gilmore’s

research is applicable to mother activists in South Africa because during Apartheid, women clearly acted in resistance to the fact that the government, time and time again, stripped black women activists of their right to a private life.

Something Walker (1995) notes that I find particularly interesting and empowering is the idea that despite the fact that motherhood was largely constructed by oppressive male-centric systems, women themselves have constructed their *own* identities of motherhood, irregardless of men. Overall, Walker (1995) succinctly claims, “Mothers in the most fundamental sense are lifegivers: this is a capacity which could be celebrated without endorsing women's submission to men” (437). Motherhood being defined by women’s relationships to men may be half of the discussion, but there is still an innate sense of mothering and nurturing that can be helpful to women in social movements. In terms of women participating in activism in South Africa, McClintock (1993) discusses gender, nationalism, and the family: she notes how the African National Congress (ANC) excluded women from participating, which forced them into grass-roots activism. Thus, women’s political identity was seen as simply “supportive and auxiliary” (74). McClintock discusses the intersections of feminism with nationalism, and how that inherently affects family structures within the nation-state. As she blatantly puts it, “Nowhere has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maidservant to nationalism. A crucial question remains for progressive nationalism: can the iconography of the family be retained as the figure for national unity, or must an alternative, radical iconography be developed?” (78) The notion of changing this nationalist concept of family structure is imperative to my research because it argues that in order for women to truly be seen as activists, and not just mothers, they must no longer be seen as the integral, central part of the family within

the nationalist identity. In reference to women transforming public and private spaces due to activism, I am particularly interested in the mother-daughter relationship within family structures. As Chodorow (1974) notes, there is “a crucial differentiating experience in male and female development arises out of the fact that women are largely responsible for early child care and for (at least) later female socialization. This points to the central importance of the mother-daughter relationship for women” (95). Therefore, my research is directly aimed at mothers and their daughters, rather than their sons, because I believe that motherly impacts on family structure affect their daughters more than their sons.

Evidently, as is blatantly clear in this review of the literature, all these notions of women activists and the challenging of public spheres exists within the context of the largely contested myth *and* reality that there is shared commonality amongst women due to motherhood. Fouche (1994) argues that all women cannot connect due to motherhood. The notion that they can reduces womanhood to being about caretaking, and not all women can relate to one another on the basis of caretaking largely due to identifiers such as class and race. Fouche discusses the idea of motherhood through a South African cultural lens: she notes how the discussion of women being submissive or passive to men is part of Western culture rather than African culture. For instance, she notes how women in the Federation of South African Women identified as mothers rather than wives because they were concerned with protecting their children rather than protecting their husbands (Walker 1991). For the purpose of this research, I am defining motherhood outside the confines of maleness and patriarchy. I am defining motherhood as the care-taking of children, as the ability for women to bear children, as the inkling to raise children

with love and acceptance, and as the radical activism that comes with being a mother and bringing people into the world, socially and physically.

In reference to women connecting through motherhood, Fouche cites the 1950s protest against passes for African women, where the women activists addressed the government with, “We speak from our hearts as mothers, as women. Life cannot be stopped. We must bear children in hope and in pain. We must love them as part of ourselves. We must help them to grow, we must endure all the longings and sufferings of motherhood. Because of this we are made strong to come here, to speak for our children, to strive for the future” (Joseph 1986). This notion of resilience and strength in motherhood does not necessarily exist in contrast with the idea that motherhood as an institution can be oppressive and beneficial to male-centric systems, but that women, through the shared identity as women, can support others. Albertina Sisulu, the famous anti-Apartheid activist and mother, while discussing white women’s apathy said, “Our children are dying in the townships, killed by your children. You are mothers. Why do you allow your children to go to train for the army? Our children are being killed mercilessly, but what do they say? How can they, as mothers, tolerate this? Why don't they support us?” The calls to action for other women--not just black women--to support the plight of other mothers shows the idea that women are supposed to care for the nation in the way that they care for their own children. This argument perhaps reduces womanhood to caretaking, to nurturing, to peacemaking, to building bridges. But I think it also shows women striking rocks, raising fists, relentlessly protesting, and raising children all while doing so. Thus, my research looks further into *how* mother activists formed their identities as mothers and activists separately or in

conjunction, and how their daughters were socialized in a household with a mother who was also making change.

Conclusion

All in all, the research points towards the fact that motherhood and activism has a strong link in the political history of South Africa. I am using this literature on the sacredness of motherhood, feminist definitions of what motherhood truly means, and previous research on mother activists to inform my research on mother activists and their relationships with their adult daughters. There is a substantial gap in the literature regarding the actual relationships these mother activists have with their children: the research discusses how motherhood is often used as a political tool, but there is not much discussion of how they juggle their own notions and identities surrounding motherhood while performing activism. Therefore, my research surrounding mother activists and their daughters is necessary to understand the needs of women activists that are making change within communities.

5. Methodology: Overview

I conducted seven one-on-one qualitative interviews with both mother activists and daughters of mother activists. There were two mother-daughter pairs, whereas the rest of the sample was unrelated. Overall, I interviewed four daughters of activists, and three mothers, and in order to keep the identities of the participants confidential, their names in this research are pseudonyms. I used purposeful sampling in order to interview women who I was positive were either activists themselves or had mothers who were activists. I found it critical to conduct

interviews for this research due to the fact that it calls for recollection of past memories during childhood, as well as complex answers regarding mother-daughter relationships. Founded in narrative theory, my research highly values personal narrative and the dialogue used by women to express their definitions of motherhood and activism. By using myself as an instrument, I was able to create an open space for participants to answer interview questions comfortably, and I used strengths-based interviewing to probe about their activism work as well as their interpersonal relationships.

Methodology: *Sampling*

I used purposeful sampling due to the niche population required for this research: I gathered my sample of women by asking support resources who had experience with activism and research whether they could refer me to anyone who is a mother activist or the daughter of one. After gathering the contact information of multiple possible prospects, I reached out to these women via email and set up times to meet with the ones who answered. Thus, my sample size is seven women from the KwaZulu-Natal area, and the sample population is women in South Africa who are activists and mothers or who have an activist mother.

Methodology: *Data Collection Instruments*

One-on-one qualitative interviews are my method of data collection. Of course, I approached each interview as more of a conversation, so some of the questions were tweaked according to the flow of the interview. Moreover, using myself as an instrument for data collection is an imperative aspect of the interviewing process: by asking strengths-based

questions that do not accuse but rather call for reflection, as well as validating and reinforcing personal narratives, I ensured that the space was honest and welcoming. I audio recorded all the in-person interviews and then transcribed the responses word-for-word. In regards to the one interview that took place via phone call, I received digital consent and transcribed the interview as we spoke. I took notes on the women's responses, as well as their body language and general demeanor, but the interviews were conversational and flexible. Found in the appendix are the semi-structured interview questions I asked, with a different set of questions for daughters and mothers listed respectively (Appendix A).

Narrative Theory: methodological basis

In terms of methodology, I am grounding my research in Narrative Theory, which has a strong foundation in social constructionism, or a sociological theory which claims that people ground their ever-changing reality in their interactions with others, and that they receive knowledge that is constructed socially (Andrews 2012). Roscoe (2009) discusses narrative theory in terms of language: she notes that, "in our narratives we outline our perceptions of self." Furthermore, dialogue or narrative is seen as using language to talk about our own personal truths and realities. Thus, conducting one-on-one interviews for my research is grounded in the belief that people's words they choose and stories they tell reflect their experiences. By expressing personal narratives and stories, there is a cathartic and oftentimes therapeutic nature to feeling heard. Interviews, therefore, create a space for a person to feel empowered and speak about their own senses of reality, in specific regards to motherhood and activism. Overall, Baldwin (2013) discusses narrative theory in the context of social work practice: "the notion of

Self which, viewed through a narrative lens, is seen as rhizomatic (root-like), characterised by complexity, multiplicity, non-linearity and de-centredness” (103). By honoring personal identities, experiences, and language, narrative theory works in conjunction with feminist theory, as Scanlon (2007) points out: “Since feminist theory is grounded in women’s lives and aims to analyze the role and meaning of gender, women’s personal narratives are essentially primary documents of feminist research” (13). All in all, honoring women’s narratives and language they use is a large part of this research: interviews are meant for the person being interviewed to speak, and for the interviewer to simply listen.

Methodology: *Data Analysis*

Since my data collection was entirely based upon one-on-one interviews, my data analysis is comprised of transcribing, reading, and coding the interviews. I define “coding” as finding specific themes or recurring concepts in all the interviews I conduct, and then elaborating upon what was said about those themes and concepts. Firstly, I provided a summary of each woman’s general interview answers, with verbatim quotes, in the Introducing the Interviewees section of the findings. Then, after coding the interviews and seeing the common themes, I thematically analyzed all seven interviews holistically, and found seven overall themes. I picked out specific quotes from the transcriptions that were helpful to understanding the themes, and analyzed the commonality within interviews in the interview findings. In order to maintain confidentiality of all participants, the seven women were given pseudonyms used in the research findings. Also, so as not to leave out the holistic interviews, there is a more in-depth summary of each individual interview in the *Personal Narratives* section of the Appendix (see Appendix B).

6. Limitations of the Study

A large weakness of this study is the minimal sample size: with only seven participants, the data is not remotely generalizable. With that being said, the purpose of this qualitative study was to get personal experiences, rather than receive extensive, statistical analysis. Moreover, the data would be stronger if there were more mother-daughter pairs, rather than unrelated mothers and daughters discussing their individual experiences. Another limitation of the study is the short time period to collect and analyze the data: with only four weeks, and the nature of my interviews being long-winded, it seemed difficult to instrument meetings with more than seven women. Furthermore, since the interviews are based on memory recollection and largely on perceived relations with others, the data I collected is very specific and distinct to each participant. The nature of qualitative interviewing seeks to hear personal stories, but especially since my questions were based around motherhood, childhood, and activism, the women I interviewed all have extremely different lived experiences. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that of course, different identities and backgrounds result in extremely different narratives, and that by finding common themes, it is not to dilute these narratives but find common ground amongst them. Lastly, a weakness of this research is that the definition of activism is flexible due to its partly ideological basis and partly tangible action basis. Thus, it may be hard to understand what I meant by “mother activists”--is every woman who is a mother and a person making

change a mother activist, or are mother activists specifically women who perform activism due to their motherhood?

7. Findings

Introducing the Interviewees

Siyabonga¹ is a mother activist herself, as well as the mother of another interviewee, Lindiwe. Siyabonga is an informal worker as well as an advocate for informal women workers and mainly discussed the idea of solidarity amongst women due to shared experiences, as well as the importance of caring for one's own children despite other responsibilities. When discussing the importance of her activism, she passionately noted: *"Our problems are same. We have no market, we have no money, they do policies...but they didn't give us a proper support to us because we are doing things at home, we don't have market to sell that...We need to know our rights. We need to fight for our rights."*

Lindiwe, her daughter, talked about how her childhood was happy, despite the fact that they were very poor. She herself is also an activist for informal workers as well as a self-proclaimed community development practitioner. She largely talked about how she viewed her mother, and even grandmother, as extremely strong and influential women. She discussed her mother's activism as something she was initially apathetic to, and then as she got older, she garnered newfound respect for her mother's work and strength: *"Whenever I think of her, I just*

¹ All names are pseudonyms meant to protect the interviewee's identity.

see...the sacrifice, I think she sacrificed herself to work so hard, to wake up so early, to sleep so late, making things, producing those products to sell, so that she could just buy us food and make sure that we had a good home.”

Janice is the daughter of a mother activist who was part of the Black Sash, a famous anti-Apartheid organization that was comprised of white women. Janice herself grew up aware of her mother’s activism, and in her interview, told many different stories of how she learned about social issues as a young adolescent. After being raised in a socially aware household, Janice grew up to be a social worker within the mental health field and thus an activist, working for informal workers as well as advocating for child support grants. When reminiscing on her mother, she stated: *“I was lucky enough to spend quite a bit of time with her when she was in her final illness, and she just looked down at her breasts, I was washing her or something. She goes, ‘look at these old dugs’ ..she said... ‘they have done so much work. And each time I was pregnant with another one, I thought now, how am I going to do this all over again? And each time one of you popped out, there was just so much love.”*

Ana is a mother activist herself. She is a social worker, community organizer, and anti-Apartheid activist. When discussing her activism, she talked a lot about mobilizing communities with education. Ana stated that her daughters also became activists, and are grateful for her work both as a mother and as an activist. She notes that managing her time was one of the most prominent aspects of being an activist and a mother at the same time. She discussed the importance of her culture and Hindu religion regarding her activism: *“In 1947, India got its independence, so I was there, and I saw the spirit, the enthusiasm of the people, you know... And*

just the symbolism of that. As a little child of seven, I experienced that patriotism, and what it means for a community to be free.”

“...what I’m saying is that for me, my religion is active. It’s part of my life, it’s not something that is loaded into rituals. For me, lighting a candle doesn’t mean that I learned something about my religion, for me...you try and lead your life in an unselfish way.”

Edith is the daughter of a mother activist who was part of the Black Sash, but has more of an interesting take on the concept of mother activism: instead of her mother being an activist while she was a child, like the rest of the sample, her mother became an activist around the same time she did. Edith was an ANC member and was an anti-Apartheid activist. Her mother went to university at an older age, and then also became an activist while her daughter was becoming one herself. In retrospect, Edith laments that: *“So in a sense it wasn’t like I had an activist mother, who then while I was growing up influenced me. In a way, I think I influenced her...as much as I don’t think she politicized me, she obviously was absolutely instrumental in giving me my sense of values and who I am and the strength of character.”*

Des, the mother of another interviewee, Alice, was a trade unionist and anti-Apartheid activist. Now, she works with informal workers. She talked a lot about raising her daughter at the same time as getting back into trade unionism, and how she had to figure out the balance between caring for her children and working. Des mentions her feminism informing her definition of motherhood, and mentions that although guilt was a topic amongst mother activists of her generation, she did not feel guilty for putting her children in a creche or working; she said that activism is an incorrigible part of her identity, and something she would gravitate towards whether she had children or not. In terms of balancing both activism and raising children, she

stated, *“you know, getting this balance between being an affectionate persona and being a very disciplined activist. I’m not sure that I got the balance right.”*

Alice, Des’s daughter, is now working with a nonprofit organization in Cape Town that cultivates effective leaders for the future. When discussing her childhood and memories of her mother, she states that activism was a large part of it. She also talks about how her own motherhood has put things into perspective in terms of her childhood, and how having an activist mother was a big part of her being aware of the injustices of the world, and knowing she would have to do something about it: *“to see your parents do things that are so brave, my mom was in danger, she kind of modeled the stories of what she did. Our moral compass was just so ingrained from that. You don’t let those kind of atrocities just go by. Those are values that people can talk about until they’re blue in the face, but it doesn’t do as much as knowing that your parents did it. When people get super disillusioned and want to leave [South Africa], my response is, “do something about it then, because that’s what my parents did.”*

Themes and Discussion

After conducting the one-on-one interviews, there were seven main themes found in the research. The themes found were that (1) all activist mothers had to have other people care for their children while they were doing their work. (2) All daughters of activists became activists, or people that facilitate change within the community, themselves. (3) The daughters’ understandings of their mothers’ work changed with time. (4) Most mothers said that they were able to fully be there for their children despite their work responsibilities. (5) The husbands of

activist mothers would initially be supportive of their activism, and then as time wore on, would often become less supportive. (6) The mother activists did not necessarily feel as though their identities as women affected their activism work. (7) The participants discussed a sense of solidarity amongst women within different activist organizations.

Childcare due to Mother's Activism

All mother activists noted the fact that they would either have relatives, hired domestic help, or public childcare look after their children while they were working. The notion that they had to inevitably be home less compared to mothers that weren't activists was slightly resisted by the mother activist participants and their daughters: many of the mother activists said that they were home when they were needed, and provided for their children regardless of their work. Some mothers, however, did note the difficulty of finding the balance between being present at work and at home.

"I did all the picking up of the children, bringing them home, making sure that they ate. Sometimes we used to go out in the evenings when we have some meetings, and then I would explain to the children, and we always made some arrangements so that there was somebody taking care of them, or they came with us, and participated... Well, they often tell me that they missed my company, also you know like other mothers who are at home all the time, who could do things for their children, I wasn't able to do everything for my children in that way as a full-time mother." (Ana)

"When she was four months old, took the decision to put her into a public creche. This was another debate that we had with all of our generation: do you put your kids into a creche, do you hire a servant? We were in no position to hire a servant, we earned so little, and we were fighting for public services for everybody, so we sort of took our political position quite seriously and believed that the political should be personal... I thought because I've decided to have these kids, I need to actually not put my activism first. So I gave up my job in the union because at that time, I was leaving home before they were awake and getting back after they were asleep." (Des)

Despite the pressure put on mothers to constantly care for their children, Alice noted that she does not remember being particularly resentful or even that aware that her mother was working; it was simply part of her life to be in full childcare:

“I went to full care childcare options, she never stayed at home...she travelled a fair amount, which to be honest, unless it’s all very subconscious, I still don’t think it was a big deal to me.”
(Alice)

Intergenerational Link Between Mothers and Daughters

All daughters of activist mothers became activists themselves, in some way, shape, or form. Some of them, like Lindiwe, in fact, entered the same field of activism as her mother, or advocating for informal workers. Something interesting is that the grandmother, or older generations are also mentioned when discussing activist households: Lindiwe, for instance, mentioned her grandmother who was socially active in the community. Des, who did not have an activist mother herself, does cite her mother’s values of acceptance as largely informing her activism and motherhood. Edith, on the other hand, may not have been directly influenced by her mother, but said her mother’s values of social justice and equality led to her having a firm basis of activism in childhood. All in all, the daughters also said that their mother’s activism had an impact on their career path, and many of them grew up with a sense of social awareness and helping others.

Interviewees also discussed specific skills and lessons taught by their parents that not only helped them get a basis of being in the field of service, but that also shaped the way they saw the world around them, in regards to both activism and general life lessons. In the quote

below, Janice discusses a memory she has from her youth, and how she internalized that political education, which led to her being more socially aware as a child and then as a grown adult.

“Outside the city hall, this young African boy of maybe 8 or 10, was running past us, helter skelter, being followed by police, who were trying to catch him, and catch him they did. And bundled him, roughly, into the back of a police van, and took him away. He clearly must have been stealing something, or was under suspicion of stealing something, I don’t know. And mom just said—oh, she would take advantage of every opportunity for a bit of political education! —saying, ‘if that boy was stealing something, then the police have to be able to catch him, because stealing is wrong. But when we see how he was being treated by the police there, then that is absolutely, absolutely wrong, and we have got to keep those two things as separate and different.’” (Janice)

In terms of daughters having similar outlooks on life as their mothers, Alice and Des ironically both discussed the idea that children of liberal activists still have to rebel against their parents in some way. Although there is a strong intergenerational link between mother activists and their daughters, there is still a sense of the daughter having to find her own passions, interests, and way of viewing the world. As Alice points out, however, there is simultaneously a strong foundational link between her views and her mother’s views, despite their differences.

“Even as a left wing parent your kids have to fight against you and they have to rebel against you. My son used to deliberately provoke me by saying he was gonna become a wealthy capitalist. They both have a bit more of a corporate outlook than the one that I have.” (Des)

“Probably now that I’m older, I’d be happy to call myself a feminist but I would have never sought out that label earlier in my life...probably because most people rebel against their parents by doing unconventional things so I did conventional things. Sometimes I think about what my mom would do...our ideologies are fairly different, but I think in broad strokes, I think we approach the world maybe with a similar lens.” (Alice)

Understanding Mother’s Activism with Age

Many mother activists said that their daughters were not aware of the work they were doing, while the daughters agreed, with some of them saying that they were aware of the work, but were apathetic to it and simply saw it as another function of their mother's lives. The daughters discuss that with age, they only realized the importance of their mother's work, and were able to note a change in their mothers due to activism once they themselves grew older.

"She did not understand my work that time. They ask me, 'why ma? those people who are working in the street because they are making dirty in the street'...they didn't like that women who are working in the street...so now, its changed." (Siyabonga)

"At that point, I was just looking at this, I was not understanding it, I was not asking about it, it was just what she did...However, the only thing I did see what it did to her...she was always this woman kind of like, "you have to be submissive to your husband, you're a woman, your place is obviously at home" and when she started to be in the company of these other women, I saw her changing in the way that she was asserting herself at home, with her community, at church." (Lindiwe)

"I think I remember being frightened for her. It was only much later, that I knew she actually had been asked to run the ANC'S Radio Freedom. If she'd been caught doing that she would have been in jail for 20 years, and she knew that that was the limit past which she wouldn't." (Janice)

"I think it was fairly embarrassing at the time but I feel like as a teenager you're embarrassed by everything. For me, it's very obvious to attribute that to my parent's political leanings and aesthetics, but it disappeared...most people don't think their parents are cool until they're older." (Alice)

In contrast to the other testimonies, Janice talked about understanding and respecting her mother's activism from a young age because she was confronted with the world's realities through lessons from her mother:

"One of the first protests she was ever in was a sit-down protest outside the jail against the conditions in prison that were being undergone by African women who were pregnant and in prison, so it was around the protection of children...it was quite a courageous thing then. At one

of those 'stands' outside the City Hall a crowd came and threw eggs and tomatoes at them or something like that, and I remember getting the kind of lecture from Mum...There was a big front-page picture of the event, which had Mum in it, and her just saying to us "you will never, ever be ashamed of me for this work that I'm doing." It sounds now that given when friends of yours have been assassinated and tortured and that kind of thing, it sounds now as though making a stand must have been relatively easier, but they were from such a different generation, with such a different gender-base to it." (Janice)

Alice, on the other hand, discussed remembering that she had more of an apathetic sense towards her mother's activism, and Des stated that she felt her children were probably both a bit embarrassed and ashamed of her work. Yet as her children grew older, Des discussed them becoming more interested in her viewpoints.

"Politics and work and activism were kind of part of our family identity...sort of at school and things, you play that part down and sometimes kind of wished my mom was more like a white pearls, PTA, which you've met her, she's not." (Alice)

When asked if she resented her mother's work, Alice stated, *"I didn't resent it, it just felt like that was how it was...I didn't think it was negative or positive. Now, reflecting on her choices, the pieces I deliberately had to do differently were a result of them having to dig their heels in. I think my mom's job and her identity resulted in a choice that I think wasn't what I agreed with—but not with any anger behind it or thinking she was wrong for choosing that, because I can understand why that happened...It's just such a different world, and we're in such different positions."* (Alice)

"They find it a bit of a joke that I'm a communist, but you know when they were young they found it uncomfortable in the same way that Shawn Slovo did, and their dad didn't help by making it sounds like I was sort of a fringe, crazy activist. But as they got older they became interested in knowing what it meant and what I thought about things, so they actually grew closer to wanting to understand my take on the world as they got older. So while it was a bit painful while they were growing up, they shifted towards being a whole lot more interested." (Des)

Activist Mothers as "Full Mothers"

The mother activists noted their difficulties with balance and time management, but also said that they were essentially fully dedicated to their children. The daughters also generally did not feel pushed aside by their mothers' work. With that being said, the daughters and mothers both noted that at times, due to activism responsibilities, they were not necessarily able to be at home as much as they would have been if they were not activists.

"I think I did very good work to my children because while I am getting 60 years, they do for me a big party, then they tell me "you are a good mother." (Siyabonga)

"I feel more connected to my mother. I feel more respect for her, I even have tears right now just thinking about it, I mean, her life has always been struggle, when she tells us she would have studied, but her family did not allow girls to continue school...yes we were poor, but we were good, because she made it good, not my dad, my dad worked, but my mom made that home. My mom cooked those meals. My mom made sure that we went to school. And all the opportunities that I had, it was all through that sacrifice, through that work. I'm telling you, I think about that all the time, whenever new opportunities come my way, to say, it's because of her. It's because of her sacrifice, because she couldn't get it herself...it's her...it's really because of what she did and how she did it and the sacrifice she made, seriously and honestly. Every time something good happens to me, I just see her triumph." (Lindiwe)

"Her commitment was, 'There'll never be a day when I am not at home in the afternoon when the kids come home from school...I never felt neglected.'" (Janice)

"I tried to adjust my time in a way that my work was when, you know, they didn't need me. So when they did need me, after school, I was there for them. I did all the picking up of the children, bringing them home, making sure that they ate." (Ana)

"They do realize that for all that I did as an activist, I still found the time to pick them up, it's not their father who used to pick them up from school, I used to. I made sure they have had their meals, they've done their homework, I would be the one to take them for any activities...That's all I can say, I tried to be a good mother to them, I tried to be there...and still, motherhood doesn't end. I feel that my daughters are very close to me..."(Ana)

In contrast to the majority of other responses, Des retrospectively talked about not being able to be as present for her children as she thought. When acknowledging the balance between being a “full mother” and an activist, she stated,

“Yeah, I suppose it’s a case of having to be conscious of both areas of work, and certainly I spent a lot of effort on personal self discipline trying to make sure that I didn’t do one at the expense of the other, but getting that balance right obviously doesn’t always work out...when (the kids) were still quite small, I saw a movie made by the daughter of one of the political activists, of Shawn Slovo, and that thing was very close to the bone, cause I noticed they were very critical of their mother, much more than their father, and it was very unfair on their mother, because they were much more judgmental of the time she spent away from home than he did. But I realized that it’s society that makes them feel that, and you can’t really blame the kids for that.”
(Des)

Wavering Support of Husbands

I did not necessarily ask any questions geared towards the husbands and fathers in the families of these women, but discussion about them inherently came up. Surprisingly, there was a trend of the husbands of the activists, who were often activists themselves, initially supporting their wives but later, for some reason or other, not supporting their activism as much. In the case of Janice’s family, her father did not need more attention from her mother, but ideologically disagreed with being as politically active as she was. Contrastingly, Des and Ana’s husbands required more of their time and attention, and thus saw their activism as taking away from the relationship.

“My husband go out and live with other women, and I live at home with my children and in that time God helped me. I got work that time...I got work in this union.” (Siyabonga)

“But he wasn’t radical like mum was, and he believed very strongly in the Max Weber idea that as professionals in society, there’s some place, there’s some boundary where you shouldn’t get engaged, especially in the health and social services. His ntipathy, I think, to some of mum’s

activity was really about that, rather than, you know, that she was wanting too much of social justice or something.” (Janice)

“He was an activist himself, he was also banned and house arrested. Umm..initially, he was very supportive, he wanted me to participate in the work that I was doing, but later on, I don’t know what happened, but we sort of shifted away from each other, and he found another partner. So, that’s something that activists go through, you know? Because I think...men have a very big ego, they want to be pampered all the time, and if that doesn’t happen, then they look for the means and the people who will pamper them...If the woman is more popular or gets more attention, then they can’t take it.” (Ana)

“That also happened, and was one of the things that led to us splitting...well, he also had an affair which helped. He did find my work difficult and challenging and he very much wanted to be supportive...but he just, you know, couldn’t really. He just felt I wasn’t giving him enough attention, so he was like a third child, and he was more demanding than the other two were. He wanted more attention, and I just had to eventually say, ‘look this is me, this is the kind of person I am, I’m not really sure what you want but I think it’s not me, and you should look somewhere else.’ I just basically didn’t try to be a different person.” (Des)

Non-Genderism Amongst Mother Activists

Another theme that I was taken aback by was the non-genderism, or sense that mother activists did not necessarily feel disadvantaged because they were women in their activism. Multiple women activists lamented on the fact that they felt as though their womanhood was actually *not* a part of their work--the women felt as though they were treated as equals to men in their activism.

“Personally, it didn’t affect my activism because I always felt that I am empowered, that I do what I want to do, you know..nobody’s gonna force me to do something that I don’t want to do. I was independent in that way, but what did happen is that often when I went into meetings I would find that there are very few women participating.” (Ana)

“A lot of people think I must be a very strong feminist, but actually, I’m a humanist. I actually felt quite blessed that I came into fruition of age at a time when women could participate, you

know. I've always kind of been one with the boys--I've never felt personally that I'm persecuted. For me it was more about freeing South Africa from the Apartheid system, so I was never strong in the women's league, strangely enough...I have never felt disadvantaged cause I'm a woman." (Edith)

"Because I was working in the unions, and the people I was working with were workers, they only judged us seriously on the basis of the work that we did. So whether we were white or black, whether we were women or men, it depended on your work. So, the whole issue that now exists in the workplace, of special conditions for women, we didn't have those. So we worked just like the men and because we proved ourselves in relation to that, they treated us equally. In fact, they treated us more equally than they treated their wives; it was like we were a third gender. Because there was men and women who they oppressed, but then US, their female colleagues, who they treated like a third gender cause we were their equals according to them, we were treated on a different level to their own wives." (Des)

Solidarity Amongst Women within Activism

Although the interviewees discussed nongenderism, they also talked about women solidarity within activist groups being positive and helpful. Multiple interviewees discussed feeling as though the women's groups within their activism were helpful, especially as Siyabonga points out, due to the necessary space for sharing that these groups create. Edith discusses the fact that her mother, who was less confident due to her lack of education, needed a space where it was all women so she could be supported rather than in an organization surrounded by intimidating men. This clear distinction between men and women, where men are meant to seem less supportive and women moreso, shows that despite this shared sense of nongenderism, there is still a specific solidarity amongst women that may not exist when women are in the company of men. This theme inherently ties into motherhood because motherhood is often defined by womanhood and vice versa: are women able to connect as women, or as mothers? Moreover, if the answer is both, how connected and intertwined are the identities of

“woman” and “mother”, if at all? The research shows that women see activist spaces for women specifically as spaces meant for solidarity, community, and belonging.

“If we share the information with all these women, we know “I’m not alone who has this.” If we share the experience with other women, I think my heart is okay, because we are sitting with heavy shoulders. If we talk about with other people our shoulder are relieved...if you are talking with other women, we are relieved.” (Siyabonga)

Sometimes, if we have a gathering with the other women, we are talking, whatever you are having challenge as a woman...yes, we share about that. Yesterday we have a meeting with the (activist) women in my home, then we share. (Siyabonga)

“And probably Black Sash, a woman’s thing, was actually a more natural home for her, because I think, as much as she was radical and strong, she had, deeper down in her, a lack of confidence. And I think that came very much because she hadn’t gone and done all the things she wanted, particularly around education. And she kind of always said, ‘Why me? I’ve never had to do this, I’ve never had a career.’ I think being amongst women was good -- she rose to the top through there, still saying, ‘I don’t know how I’m at the top’, I think in ways she might not have fared so well in a male thing, she would’ve gotten knocked down, where she needed that growth...she needed a more supportive environment for that growth.” (Edith)

“I worked in the paper union and then a chemical union, they were very male-dominated industries, but we had strong women’s groups in those unions.” (Des)

Although it is not a theme amongst all the interviews, I do want to shed light on a specific aspect of mother activism that was brought up by both mother-daughter pairs. The concept of either falling into the mother’s proverbial shoes, or fighting against following the same career path was a part lightly discussed about by Siyabonga and Lindiwe, as well as Des and Alice in different ways. Siyabonga and Lindiwe both discussed the notion that when in the same field, one’s daughter may surpass her mother’s success, and that that success may feel unwarranted for the daughter. Contrastingly, Des talked about Alice forging her own path in her career, and Alice discussed how although her career path is different, it is heavily influenced by her mother’s sense

of social justice. The two mother-daughter pairs showed a strong correlation between intricate mother-daughter relationships informing one's career and sense of purpose: in fact, both Lindiwe and Alice said that at one point, they had a bit of an identity crisis regarding what they were going to do with the rest of their lives. As two daughters of strong-minded, activist mothers, they both had to find a way to make a name for themselves within the field of activism, while simultaneously paying homage to their mothers.

“Well, because of my education and things I feel like I have surpassed her. There are kind of opportunities that I get that she would not get, and sometimes I feel she sees that, and obviously she's my mother and she loves me and supports me, but sometimes I feel like she also feels like, “I should be getting that opportunity, I should be in that workshop” you know because she been there the whole time.” (Lindiwe)

“Now she like to work with the people who are working at the grassroots level because she know about me. ‘oh my mother work at the grassroots level...my mother is not enough education, but now I am, I have enough education but I willing to fight for these people.” (Siyabonga)

“I think she's always been very conscious of wanting to make her own personality and make her own stamp on things...kind of a knowledge that she's got these two forceful parents and she needs to make her own space in life...My daughter started being a straight economist, and then she took me completely by surprise when we were having a chat about what she wants to do with her life, and she said she wants to do something more like I do, and you could have knocked me down with a feather...she wants to work more with people.” (Des)

“I am definitely more conventional than my mother, but yeah...Growing up, it just never entered my head to do something that wasn't meaningful. So what I studied, what I've done as work, have always been incredibly driven by the sort of mission behind it, and sort of creating change in the world, and that work being a strong part of my identity is for sure...from both my parents.” (Alice)

The important thing to keep in mind throughout this research is the fact that mother-daughter relationships are infamously some of the most complex relationships there are.

Des stated that her children probably felt embarrassed about her advocacy work, while on the other hand, Alice stated that everything was embarrassing at that age. Thus, although mother activism clearly effects the daughter's outlook on life and career path, this sense of shame surrounding activism may be something not unique to mother activists, but something children feel towards their mothers regardless of occupation. As Des states below, Alice felt as though her mother did not see her, which I would venture to say is unfortunately not necessarily unique to daughters of mother activists, but may have been a result of her mother's strong identity as an activist.

“When my kids were grown up and had stuff left in the house, I found a diary of Alice's, where she wrote that I didn't see her, and that really was very cutting. It made me realize, ‘okay I didn't do that thing so well as I thought I was doing it.’ Yeah, I suppose it was a balancing act all the time, trying to do both.” (Des)

8. Conclusions

“A mother is a mother, black or white. Stand up and be counted with other women.” -Albertina Sisulu

In terms of my findings, the seven themes simultaneously affirmed and negated my initial hypotheses. The notion of children of activists feeling resentment or a sense of neglect was not a trend within my interviews. What was a trend, on the other hand, was the daughters of activists having a sense of apathy towards their mothers' activism during adolescence. My hypothesis that things would change over time, however, reigned true: women learned more about the activism as they got older, and had more feelings of respect towards their mothers for their work. The overarching idea that mother activism affected their respective family relations, and specifically

their daughters, was true: personal political ideologies, due to having more radical, activist parents, led to more progressive and activist daughters. Every single daughter I interviewed was an activist themselves, and every single mother activist I interviewed noted that their daughters were heavily influenced by their own careers. Regarding my six objectives, I was able to not only interview both mother activists and their daughters, but was able to arrive at the conclusions that having a politically active mother led to a higher likelihood for the daughter to be an activist, and that the daughter's perceptions of their mother activists changed over time, and largely became more positive rather than apathetic or negative. When asking mothers to define motherhood, I was able to address my objective of seeing how people internalized the word "mother," and how it was seen as more of an identity rather than an empty label. For instance, many mothers said that they saw motherhood as being nurturing and raising one's children--they classified themselves as mothers, not simply because they bore children but because they actively raised those children with love and support.

Lastly, my objective regarding narrative and feminist theory was inherently implicit in the interviews. By talking to women about disadvantages that come with female identities and the power of mother-daughter relationships, their personal narratives, combined with uplifting female sentiments, spoke towards the theoretical basis of my research. Also, in terms of my stipulation that daughters of mother activists would be more affected by their activism than sons, one of the interviewees, Janice, pointed out that, *"By the way, I don't think a lot of the political education went the way of either of my brothers, I love them both, but it was myself and my younger sister who kind of received the activism from mother, or the sense of working for political justice."*

Something interesting is that although nongenderism was a pervasive theme, solidarity amongst women was just as much of a theme. Siyabonga, for instance, discussed sharing experiences with other women informal workers, and feeling a sense of community. Des also talked about working in male-dominated unions, but still having strong women's groups in those spaces. Thus, when thinking about activist spaces created by women in order to make change, a large question the interviews left me with is whether the term "mother activist" relates to any person who is both a mother and a changemaker, or if it specifically refers to the niche of women who are activists *because* of their motherhood. Essentially, throughout my research, the idea that activism, for me, became increasingly defined by motherhood rather than anything else led me to wonder whether nurturing and caretaking are things that naturally lead to activism. When discussing that with the women I interviewed, they reflected upon it and ultimately agreed that women are oftentimes drawn towards activism about motherhood, but that not all activism has to do with one's personal identity. Thus, looking towards the future, more research regarding mother activism, the term I have used throughout this entire paper, is necessary: what exactly classifies as mother activism and who defines motherhood and activism respectively? On the topic of mother activism affecting the lives of their daughters, the notion of embarrassment due to one's mother was a large part of the interviews, but it seems as though, as Alice pointed out, that youth lends itself more towards feeling shame than not. Thus, I am left wondering whether daughters with activist mothers felt *more* shame, or if shame is simply a function of adolescence entirely.

9. Recommendations for Further Study

“In the name of humanity, can you as a woman, as a mother, tolerate this?” -A Federation of South African Women pamphlet (1958)

In terms of recommendations for further research on the topic of mother activists and their daughters, I would highly recommend not only conducting one-on-one interviews, but facilitating focus groups. With one group geared towards mother activists, another group geared towards their daughters, and then a group for both of them to come together, there would be much more free-flowing dialogue regarding motherhood and activism. Within focus groups, people also find a sense of solidarity and community, so it would be cathartic for people to share experiences with people who may share similar sentiments. Also, in order for the research to be more accurate on the intergenerational link between mother activists and their daughters, it is necessary for future researchers to find more *pairs* of mothers and daughters rather than unrelated ones. By limiting the research to pairs of mothers and daughters, the sample would be more focused and would have a stronger basis regarding intergenerational activism. Moreover, I think looking into the difference between mother activists and their daughters versus their sons could be really interesting: perhaps delving deeper into family structure and involving more discussion about the role of the potential sons and fathers could also lead to a more holistic study. Since my research did yield results about husbands of activists becoming less supportive, a more in-depth study as to whether this is a trend could be interesting. Also, a comparative study for this research would be helpful: looking into the effects of different types of activism on the mother activists' daughters would potentially yield responses that differ.

In terms of comparative studies, comparing this research done in South Africa with similar research in other locations with different political climates would be effective, especially because South African activists are a niche population due to the history of Apartheid and the resistance to that system. Discussing the significance of identifiers such as age, race, and class could also lead to a much more specific research study--if further researchers were to ask about those identifiers more, there may be results that age has an effect on the daughters' views towards their mothers. Also, discussing racial differences among mother activists and their daughters, or comparing white activists with activists of color, could show discrepancies in the data collected based on racial identities. Lastly, a recommendation for further study would be to do a more quantitative analysis asking daughters and sons of mothers activists if they themselves are activists in order to tackle the question whether activism is passed down more easily to women than men, and if this activism extends beyond motherhood.

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11. Appendices

Appendix A: *Interview Questions*

Questions for Daughters:

- If you had to use one word to describe your childhood, what would it be? Why?
- Describe your mother. Give me an example of a time she exhibited these traits.
- What did your mother's activism consist of? Do you feel as though it affected you? How?
- What was growing up in an activist household *like*?
- Did your mother's role as an activist inform your own career path at all? If so, how?
- Would you call yourself an activist? If so, what is your activism? How is it a part of your life?
- Do you feel differently about your mother's activism now than you did as a child?
- Tell me one word as to how you're feeling at the end of this interview.

Questions for Mothers:

- This is a loaded question, but when you think of motherhood, what words come to mind?
- What does your activism consist of? How did you come to this work?
- Did you feel as though your identity as a woman affected your activism? If so, how?
- What was raising a child like while you were an activist?
- Do you think your activism affected your child? If so, how?
- What are your views of your own parenthood? --what is a strength of your motherhood, what is a limitation.
- Does your culture enforce any expectations on motherhood specifically? If so, what are they?
- Tell me one word as to how you're feeling at the end of this interview.

Appendix B: Personal Narratives

Siyabonga (Mother of Lindiwe)

I met Siyabonga in the middle of the city, with people selling fruits and underwear downstairs, and the honking of cars and buses in the background. I almost got lost on the way to her office, which was tucked into the back of a nondescript building with a stall selling electronics in front of it. Siyabonga, from the second I met her, was very animated and passionate. She is an activist for women in informal work, or home-based workers, and she herself is an informal worker. Siyabonga, with the noises of the market downstairs, spoke unabashedly and talked about empowering other women workers, as well as the importance of taking care of one's children (Munya, S., personal communication, April 2, 2019).

Regarding her activism, Siyabonga said,

“Our problems are same. We have no market, we have no money, they do policies...but they didn't give us a proper support to us because we are doing things at home, we don't have market to sell that...We need to know our rights. We need to fight for our rights.”

Siyabonga discussed the importance of solidarity amongst women, as well as the concept that having meetings amongst informal workers also leads to women simply gathering and sharing as women:

“If we share the information with all these women, we know “I'm not alone who has this.” If we share the experience with other women, I think my heart is okay, because we are sitting with heavy shoulders. If we talk about with other people our shoulder are relieved...if you are talking with other women, we are relieved.”

When asked about how she defined motherhood, Siyabonga discussed financial struggles, as well as hardships within her marriage:

“My husband go out and live with other women, and I live at home with my children and in that time God helped me. I got work that time, when I got work...I got work in this union.”

In reference to how her activism affected her daughter, Siyabonga notes that her own activism had an impact on her daughter, and notes that her daughter is an activist herself:

“she affected...I think now she relieved because now she is working other people and fighting for the right of other people...because now she like to work with the people who are working at the grassroots level because she know about me. ‘oh my mother work at the grassroot level...my mother is not enough education, but now I am, I have enough education but I willing to fight for these people.’”

In reference to culture, she discussed Zulu culture highlighting the importance of mothers taking care of their children, no matter what. At the end of the interview, she stated that this research could be helping other people, and could make it apparent to mothers that it is important to *“look after your children...don’t disappear and leave your children alone. As a mother, always take your children.”* Siyabonga also made it clear that she is close with her children, and that they see her as a good mother: *“I think I did very good work to my children because while I am getting 60 years, they do for me a big party, then they tell me ... ‘you are a good mother.’”*

Lindiwe (Daughter of Siyabonga)

Lindiwe, Siyabonga’s daughter, was equally as animated and genuine. When asked about her childhood, she said it was extremely happy, despite the fact that they were very poor...the fact that she was poor was something she actually did not know until she was much older. Lindiwe herself is also an activist for informal workers as well as a self-proclaimed community development practitioner. We met in a coffee shop and both ended up teary-eyed at the end of the interview, discussing Lindiwe’s mother and her own life experiences (Munya, L., personal communication, April 11, 2019).

When discussing her childhood as well as financial hardship, Lindiwe lamented upon her mother’s work:

“I mean my dad was the only one really working, like at a job, my mom was always work from home--she always like make stuff to sell. Sewing stuff, crocheting things, so she always had that kind of income, which for a very long time, I never considered that as work. Up until this one day where I had needed school shoes for a very long time because I was wearing what was called church shoes. And that had a little heel had gone off, so whenever I walk in the class, it would make like a really bad noise, and the teachers were really scolding me about not wearing school shoes, but there was just no money to buy shoes. And this one time, then my mom made a lot of

pillowcases as an order, and she sent me to this family to take the order to this family and the people paid I think was like 20, 30 rand, something like that, but it was enough money that I needed for the shoes. And it was at that moment that I realized that my mom actually does work that pays because through her work I was able to get the money and then with that money I was able to get shoes.”

When asked about traits of her mother, Lindiwe said Siyabonga was strong and tough, and also mentioned her grandmother who she also categorized as extremely resilient:

“My grandmother was a strong woman as my mother was a strong woman: they did all they could do to just make sure that our home was warm, we had food. Whenever I think of her, I just see...the sacrifice, I think she sacrificed herself to work so hard, to wake up so early, to sleep so late, making things, producing those products to sell, so that she could just buy us food and make sure that we had a good home.”

Lindiwe talked about her initial apathy towards her mother’s activism, which started to pick up when she was an older teenager. While discussing her mother’s work with informal women workers, Lindiwe mentioned that she saw her mother changing and becoming more assertive and empowered. With this, she also discussed her grandmother, who *“would have been an activist as well, because even in her time, she really did a lot to change, kind of, the stereotypes and the nature of things in that rural area...especially for women.”*

“At that point, I was just looking at this, I was not understanding it, I was not asking about it, it was just what she did...During her busiest time, I went to university, I just remember her not being there, but I don’t remember it affecting me so much. However, the only thing I did see what it did to her...she was always this woman kind of like, “you have to be submissive to your husband.” Obviously she was organizing women in the community, so that assertiveness and speaking out and just talking about issues with women...I saw her changing and becoming this woman that was different.”

“My grandmother was naturally a very excitive woman, and my mom was always submissive to that, but I saw her coming out, and being kind of like an equal to my grandmother, and being able to talk...even back, when there’s a need for that. I know there was a big issue with wearing pants for my house, for example. My uncles were strictly against it...when my mother started to find her power, she started to speak, ‘my kids will do whatever I tell them to do...if I don’t mind them wearing pants, that’s it.’ She was speaking back to my uncles who were complaining about

it. You know...finding that voice and being able to be assertive about things, that really came out, and got stronger and got stronger.”

Lindiwe notes that it took her leaving the house and reflecting upon her family to realize that her mother and grandmother were really strong women, and that they were not necessarily the stereotypical household. Fresh out of university, Lindiwe said she easily found work, and ended up moving to the UK, but still hadn't truly found her passion. So, she returned back to South Africa to find herself, and in doing so, became involved in activism work herself:

“Then my mom is always in this informal workspace, doing all this activist work there, so I met up with this woman looking for people to do research work, she then introduced me to informal economy. I was hit by what I saw there--the challenges, that my mom was obviously facing as well, but I've just never given myself time to see and understand it and to find out from her what was happening. When I learned about the hardship, the challenges, you know, I was totally shocked that there were people in South Africa where I thought there were so much opportunities available for everyone, that there was this group of people who were just totally excluded in that way, and harrassed, and intimidated...I was shocked to see all that, that's where it all started. I said, if anything, this is the work I need to be doing...I understood more about what my mom was doing...that also kind of renewed my respect for her, it renewed how I always have seen her as strong, as have this resilience--and you know, just really has this power and voice.”

When discussing how her mother's activism affected her, Lindiwe talked about how when she first entered the informal workspace as an activist, she was just seen as “Siyabonga's daughter” and was kind of dismissed in that way. So, she had to forge her own connections to be there, but still learned a lot from her mother:

“She's the one that kind of taught me how to approach, taught me the patience, you know, it's needed in this kind of work, the consistency that you have to show to get respect from these communities, and yeah, all this kind of soft skills that you really need to be accepted, to be recognized, to be respected, to be seen as somebody that is not a threat, that is here really to help the community and in particular, women.”

Something that came up during the interview is the kind of tension that comes with working in the same field as one's own mother:

“I feel like now that I’m in this space where she’s always been for many years, but because of my education and things I feel like I have surpassed her. There are kind of opportunities that I get that she would not get, and sometimes I feel she sees that, and obviously she’s my mother and she loves me and supports me, but sometimes I feel like she also feels like, ‘I should be getting that opportunity, I should be in that workshop’ you know because she been there the whole time.”

Lindiwe discussed this sense of feeling as though people reach out to her more, wrongfully so, introspectively and sincerely. She appeared to feel frustrated with the fact that she receives more opportunities than her mother, and at the end of the interview, she emotionally discussed the pride and respect she has for her mother.

“I feel more connected to my mother. I feel more respect for her, I even have tears right now just thinking about it, just thinking about her journey, I mean she hadnt had like really easy life, her life has always been struggle, when she tells us she never wanted to marry young, she would have studied, but her family did not allow girls to continue school...yes we were poor, but we were good, because she made it good, not my dad, my dad worked, but my mom made that home. Every time something good happens to me, I just see her triumph. And we don’t tell her this enough, but it’s there.”

Janice (Daughter)

I met Janice in her airy and quirky home, and over cups of tea, she spoke of her mother with a faraway look that comes with reminiscing and fondness. She told many different funny, riveting, and telling stories of her activist mother, who was a member of the Black Sash and who was also a prominent children’s doctor in KwaZulu-Natal. Janice herself grew up to be a social worker and thus an activist, working for informal workers as well as advocating for child support grants. She notes that her childhood was happy, and she felt loved, and that her parents were both liberal and “critically inquiring” (Miller, J., personal communication, April 2, 2019).

When asked to describe her mother, Janice said,

“She had a very very quick sense of humor. A strong sense of social justice...she was a really clever person. She was always quirky, but through that time, when you couldn’t express your political opinions against the black bureaucracy there, she had to wear her white uniform, and

she thought “bloody this”. So she started wearing tennis shoes to work, but one red and one purple or one yellow and one brown. It was a kind of ‘two’s up’, you know, to the health establishment or to the intent to politically control people. “

Janice also passionately stated that her mother’s activism had an effect on her own. Due to the household she lived in, with two parents that emphasized working in the helping professions, she later became a professor of social policy as well as a case worker in the mental health field. Her activism later led to working with an organization that improves the working conditions of informal workers. Janice highlights her mother’s lessons as part of her political education.

“She worked for quite a long time as a volunteer to a children’s nutrition organization. When I was 8 or 9 I went, we would go help with the packing [of food packages for malnourished children]. I actually can’t remember whether this was at the same time, but her main activist organization was the NGO called Black Sash, which you may have heard of. Her commitment was, ‘there’ll never be a day when I am not at home in the afternoon when the kids come home from school’ ...which now seems like, god that’s quite a big thing, a big commitment. And so she worked through the Sash which at that stage, obviously with the Nationalist government, was really being persecuted by government. However, they would very very seldom throw women in jail...throw white women in jail.”

“One of the first protests she was ever in was a sit-down protest outside the jail against the conditions in prison that were being undergone by African women who were pregnant and in prison, so it was around the protection of children...it was quite a courageous thing then. At one of those ‘stands’ outside the City Hall a crowd came and threw eggs and tomatoes at them or something like that, and I remember getting the kind of lecture from Mum...There was a big front-page picture of the event, which had Mum in it, and her just saying to us “you will never, ever be ashamed of me for this work that I’m doing.” It sounds now that given when friends of yours have been assassinated and tortured and that kind of thing, it sounds now as though making a stand must have been relatively easier, but they were from such a different generation, with such a different gender-base to it.”

“A big treat was to go with mum into town on the bus, to go and pay the household bills. And we would walk, you know, from the electricity house to the water offices - and this, I mean, rings such bells now for me. She says, ‘you’ve got to understand, darling, that we hate the nationalist party, but we have to pay our bills to the local state...you’ve got to make the distinction between the government and the party.’”

When asked about how she was affected by her mother's activism, Janice describes being frightened for her mother at certain points, as well as stating that she "never felt neglected" or ashamed of her mother's work. Janice fondly discussed how she was in awe of the fact that her mother brought up five children while doing this important political work. When reflecting on her relationship with her mother, Janice stated,

"I was lucky enough to spend quite a bit of time with her when she was in her final illness, and she just looked down at her breasts, I was washing her or something. She goes, 'look at these old dugs' ...she said... 'they have done so much work. And each time I was pregnant with another one, I thought now, how am i going to do this all over again? And each time one of you popped out, there was just so much love."

Ana (Mother)

I met Ana in her well-decorated apartment in the morning, and she initially appeared softspoken and simultaneously intrigued about the topic (Virani, A., personal communication, April 8, 2019).

In her own words,

"My activism was to mobilize communities. I was a social worker, for one, and as a social worker, I felt that I needed to know, what do communities experience, and how did they deal with those experiences? So, umm, often we would go out and we would see that some of those experiences were because of the Apartheid system in the country, and so we would, you know, try to explain to the community how and why what is happening to them is happening, what are some of the reasons and how can we mobilize or unite in order to change that. So, you know, some people felt violence was the way, and we said no, power doesn't come from weapons, it comes from numbers. If you have unity, and you all stand together on an issue, you have far more power than any weapon that you may have."

In terms of motherhood, she defined motherhood as "Nurturing. Bringing up a child with, you know, values, compassion, love." She also emphasized the importance of transparency when raising children: Ana said she would explain to them what her work consisted of, and sometimes her children would accompany her on community visits. She cited her call to activism as a time when she visited India,

The first lesson that I learned was when I was in India in 1947. In 1947, India got its independence, so on the 15th of August, I was there, and I saw the spirit, the enthusiasm of the

people, you know, the fact that the British flag was brought down, and the Indian flag was brought up. And just the symbolism of that. As a little child of seven, I experienced that patriotism, and what it means for a community to be free, to be able to say “this is my country. This is my government. I now’ve got a vote, I’ve got a flag that I can respect.”

Regarding her culture and its ties to her activism, Ana discussed her Hindu religion.

“Every single thing that I do is in the scriptures, and what I’m saying is that for me, my religion is active. It’s part of my life, it’s not something that is loaded into rituals. For me, lighting a candle doesn’t mean that I learned something about my religion, for me going and helping people, doing service...you try and lead your life in an unselfish way. That for me is the biggest part of my religion.”

In terms of what it was like to raise children, and specifically daughters, while performing her activism, Ana made it clear that she was there for her children, and would be there to pick them up from school and feed them. But, she did note that her time often felt split between work and her children:

“Sometimes they felt that, you know, people are intruding on their time. They didn’t kind of blame me, but they blamed other people, you know, because as a social worker as well, I would often get calls and would be asked to go places, then the children would say, ‘oh mom do you have to go? Why cant they understand sunday is our day?’”

Ana discussed how her daughters became activists and are grateful for her work. She does add that ultimately, it is her daughters’ opinions that are significant whether she was a good mother or not.

“All of them [became activists]. They were all very happy about the work I was doing and the work I still do...they’re very supportive...I think my daughters can tell you better whether I have succeeded in being a good mother or not. But...I’ve tried. That’s all I can say, I tried to be a good mother to them, I tried to be there...and still, motherhood doesn’t end. When the children grow up, they still need you.”

Edith (Daughter)

My interview with Edith definitely provided different information regarding mothers and daughters and activism. We met in her house overlooking the beach, and she was outgoing and talked with a lot of gumption and clarity about her activism. Edith travelled around a lot as a child, and even refused to move back to SA because didn’t want to be part of a white system.

Her activism started in school, when she became part of the National Union of South African Students, and then led up to her being an ANC member. Simultaneously, her mother became a socialist and then an activist with the Black Sash. (Bonner, E., personal communication, April 17, 2019).

Upon discussing her own activism, Edith states that, although her mother was empathetic, forward-thinking, and even later a strong proponent of socialism, *“my political awareness didn’t come through her.”* Edith points towards being in school in England when she was a young adolescent, and feeling frustrated that everything was controlled by the conservative party. So, she essentially resented the fact that the conservative party *“clawed you in”* and called herself left-wing to be contrary and rebellious, and ended up doing the political reading.

When asked to describe her mother, she talks a lot about the fact that *“My mum always laments the fact she never went to university then, so she was a very thinking person, and seeing some of her kind of diary things after she died, you realized there was this brewing sense of inequality, there’s a lot of wrong in the world, and so even though she led a privileged life, she was acutely aware.”*

Due to moving a lot as a child and not necessarily having a stable sense of home, Edith fondly discusses her activism with the ANC that eventually led to exile, and the fact that she strongly identifies as an activist:

“I felt so comforted by (the ANC’s) non-racialism...I was just a comrade, I was South African, I was accepted...for the first time I felt, ‘this is the home that I need.’”

If there’s one word that describes me, it’s an activist. Not only in that term, but in the term of...I don’t reflect enough, I’m a doer, rather than a writer, thinker. Now I’m on the ward committee for environment, and I’m still being an activist on environmental issues now. So, there’s one thing that is just, through my life, consistent, is being an activist, in the broader sense of the word.

Edith’s mother, on the other hand, was not an activist while Edith was a child. So, Edith laments upon the idea that she influenced her own mother’s activism, and they sort of started actively resisting the Apartheid government together. When her mother was in her 50’s, she went to university and,

“She came out a very strong socialist, a very very strong activist. She headed up the Black Sash here; she was a known kind of figure. She really was an amazing person who never sort of stopped. She worked everyday--you know, these women, who never had careers, never had jobs,

they worked everyday...Her family alienated her...she hated the hypocrisy of her family: just talked liberal, were very thankful their lifestyle wasn't affected. If you went against the socialist principles she was not accommodating."

"She wasn't really a political activist in that sense, she became that. At the time that I was becoming politically active, then she came to university, and then she was politically active. So in a sense it wasn't like I had an activist mother, who then while I was growing up influenced me. In a way, I think I influenced her."

Seeing the theme of her mother becoming more radical after university, I asked Edith if she saw an emotional change in her mother once she graduated.

"She came back knowing enough in the world that this apartheid system was heinous. My family were all kind of progressive party, which is liberal, but not in the manner she was. She always had a bit of a hang-up that she didn't go to university, and so I think that armed her with the analysis and the language in which to more fully participate in the anti-Apartheid struggle."

Towards the end of the interview discussing her activism and her mother's activism, Edith stated that she not only adored her mother, but knew that her values were formative for her.

"The wisdom that came out of her...I was delighted she came to university, I actually lectured her on the movement, and I loved it. There she was, always pushing herself more than anyone else. I felt a real, real bond and comradeship...throughout that time, so proud that my mother was doing this...so yeah, a very special mother. As much as I don't think she politicized me, she obviously was absolutely instrumental in giving me my sense of values and who I am and the strength of character. She trusted me a lot-- I felt very valued. I ended up never taking drugs because I just thought, 'They've trusted me so much'...it's a trust that I carried for the rest of my life."

Des (Mother of Alice)

I met with Des in a coffee shop, and while we talked over coffee and the sounds of other conversations, she spoke about her activism bluntly and passionately at the same time. In rebellion against her more moderate parents, she became an anti-Apartheid activist and became involved in trade unions. She was a known negotiator in the paper and chemical trade unions, and then after she realized she was spending too much time working rather than being with her children, she took on less responsibilities and ended up involving herself in advocacy for informal workers (Claw, D., personal communication, April 23, 2019).

When discussing her definition of motherhood, Des said,

“According to my feminist principles, it was having children when I wanted to have them...two of them, cause I was working in the trade unions, so it wasn’t really practical to have more than that. It’s an issue of being the nurturer of members of the younger generation that you’ve either produced or adopted yourself, and what I found experientially was sort of being kept up to date with things by having a member of the young generation living with me, which definitely changed my perspective on a number of issues in a way that was interesting, sometimes irritating. But, I regard it as sort of a natural thing to do, to look after children...When I was thinking of having kids in the first place, whether it was irresponsible working in the unions, I sort of looked around me at all my colleagues and most of them had kids and I realized that it wasn’t necessarily a normal thing to decide not to have kids cause of your commitment to the struggle.”

Des noted that she has two biological children, but also looked after her younger brother’s two children after he was killed, and when talking about helping to raise them, she said, *“I wasn’t mothering them so much as parenting them, more in the role of the father, really.”*

When discussing raising her daughter, Alice, she correlated that time with reentering trade unionism after being banned due to her activism. She also discussed having to demarcate her time and learn the skill of splitting her time between her children and work evenly.

“So after my banning order expired I went back into the unions, and that’s the year I got pregnant with my first child, with Alice. Because I worked in the union, I could take her into the office and then if I had a negotiation with employers, then my colleagues would look after her there.”

Des laments upon finding the balance between work and raising children, and the fact that in terms of limitations of her motherhood, *“you know, getting this balance between being an affectionate persona and being a very disciplined activist. I’m not sure that I got the balance right.”* Her discussion surrounding deciding to spend more time dedicated towards her children led to her discussing her eventual divorce with her husband, partially due to her tendency to involve herself in activism.

“When (the kids) were still quite small, I saw a movie made by the daughter of one of the political activists, of Shawn Slovo, and that thing was very close to the bone, cause I noticed they were very critical of their mother, much more than their father, and it was very unfair on their mother, because they were much more judgmental of the time she spent away from home than he did. But I realized that it’s society that makes them feel that, and you can’t really blame the kids for that...that is when I started to organize workers in the informal economy. But it meant me

having another thing occupying my mind, and you know putting the partner second, and I realized that you know its an incorrigible part of me that I would always go into something like that and I am the happiest when I'm doing that. I got rid of some of my romantic childhood dreams about living happily ever after, and realized that I was happiest when I was doing that work. Then, you know, I think found myself in that way...it was distressing (to my partner), it undermined him, it made him feel less of a person and so on. So, to cut a long story short, that's how we finally ended it. My children's expectations were much easier to deal with than their father's expectations."

On the topic of guilt, Des stated that she was not guilty about the breaking up of her marriage or the fact that her children were in a creche, but she did note that a lot of mother activists talked about feeling guilty for not being able to show as much affection to their children. Des points towards compartmentalizing her life as the reason she was able to show love towards her kids while doing emotionally exhausting activism work, but discusses her insecurity with the fact that the time she gave her kids may not have been enough:

"When my kids were grown up and had stuff left in the house, I found a diary of Alice's, where she wrote that I didn't see her, and that really was very cutting, and I saw it long after, so clearly I didn't manage it that well. It made me realize, 'okay I didn't do that thing so well as I thought I was doing it.' Yeah, I suppose it was a balancing act all the time, trying to do both...I mean now, all the unions have maternity leave, and we didn't have those things in those days. One of my colleagues, she sort of said I'd raised the issue about being a mother and work for the first time in the union."

When discussing her identity as a woman affecting her activism, at first Des said that there was actually no different treatment between women and men:

"They only judged us seriously on the basis of the work that we did. We worked just like the men and because we proved ourselves in relation to that, they treated us equally. In fact, they treated us more equally than they treated their wives; it was like we were a third gender."

"When I decided to leave my job in the chemical union so that I could have more time for the kids, by that time a couple of jobs had come up in the unions, like gender coordinators. I found that people who worked with me in the other jobs as equals, one of them, he and I used to go to the factories together...he then became a big shot, and I applied for the job as a gender coordinator, and in the interview he asked me, "since you're the mother of two small children, how are you going to manage that with this job?" The thing of these guys taking advantage and using it against you comes in very quickly. I was so furious with him, and I was so outraged, because you know, that whole comradely that we had before was gone and here he was judging

me about something that he knew the answer to because he'd seen how I worked, and he'd seen how I did everything I was supposed to do, and now he used it because it was a more high-profile job. When there were more resources, it was more attractive, then the man sort of jumped in. We saw that thing happening in our movement very much."

When asked about how her activism affected her daughter specifically, Des said,

"I think it gave her some confidence issues...I'm sure, you know, a lot of it had to do with....having two very forceful parents, and particularly a forceful mother. It did lead to her having confidence issues and being eager to please and not wanting to be confrontational and adversarial."

At one point, Des said that her children hated her work because when they were younger, they felt as though they could not brag about it to friends. So, I asked if her children felt shame or embarrassment surrounding her advocacy work:

"It was probably a bit of both. And the fact that their dad took a different political trajectory and his whole world view shifted a lot, there were definitely certain things where he would dismiss my views because he no longer believed socialism was relevant whereas he used to believe that before."

"Us as left wing parents always grew up with right wing parents that we, you know, had to fight against and we had to learn, you know, that even as a left wing parent your kids have to fight against you and they have to rebel against you. My son used to deliberately provoke me by saying he was gonna become a wealthy capitalist. They both have a bit more of a corporate outlook than the one that I have."

When reflecting on her overall motherhood, Des mentioned that her main strength was her consistency:

"I was very strict and I was very consistent. So the kids would always come to me if they were really in trouble, so they clearly felt they could always go to me, no matter what was going on... My mothering was not just an accidental mothering, it was a very conscious mothering, and so I made many decisions very consciously, and would probably make the same decisions again, but then when it came to things like balance, when you look back you always think, 'oh you know is there a different way I could have done it?'"

When asked about her culture impacting her perceptions of motherhood and activism, Des immediately mentioned her own mother, and was self-reflective about how she has incorporated lessons she has learned from her mother:

“Um, I had a very sort of exceptional mother myself, who was a very strong person and she had an amazing ability to kind of try and understand things from another person’s point of view. I think that I tried to emulate that, and I hope that I succeeded in some of that. My mother did have certain expectations that I just dashed because I took a different political position than my parents...So I had enough freedom as a young feminist to make my own route...My mother actually wrote to me and said, she just wanted me to know that she admired very much what I was doing, because they didn’t like this government either, but they won’t do anything about it, and they admire people like me because we do something about it. And when I went back into the unions, the security police started harassing her that if she didn’t make me stop what I was doing, my baby was going to be born in jail, and my mother didn’t tell me, because she didn’t want them to win. So I wanted to be like that for my kids.”

At the very end of the interview, with a smile on her face, Des mentioned that when Alice was a baby and she would bring her to the unions, Alice was given the Zulu name “Nomzabalazo,” which means “daughter of the struggle.” Des would be referred to as “Maganomzabalazo,” or mother of Nomzabalazo. Des reminisced upon the fact that at Alice’s wedding, she asked her mother to present a poem about being a daughter of the struggle, which Des was more than humbled to do.

Alice (Daughter of Des)

Des’s daughter, Alice, now lives in Cape Town with her own two daughters, but was raised in the larger KwaZulu-Natal area. When asked about her childhood, she immediately discussed the importance of activism while she was growing up, and the fact that as a young child she didn’t like that her mother’s activism made her different, but then appreciated the fact that it made her unique compared to her peers as she got older (Ellis, A., personal communication, April 25, 2019).

When discussing her childhood categorized by activism, Alice stated,

“I guess another word I would use is political—definitely no such thing as “you don’t discuss politics in company”—that’s all that was discussed. Politics and work and activism were kind of part of our family identity...sort of at school and things, you play that part down and sometimes kind of wished my mom was more like a white pearls, PTA, which you’ve met her, she’s not.”

When describing her mother, Alice immediately talked about her mother in the context of her work. Not surprisingly, both mother and daughter used the word “feminism” when discussing motherhood:

“She’s for sure a feminist...she’d probably call herself a workerist. She’s definitely one of the most principled people that I know. I mean, yeah, her work is so ...her work is her identity, that’s not strictly true, but...her work is certainly more her identity than most people. She’s fiercely independent.”

When reflecting upon her own traits, Alice said:

“Probably now that I’m older, I’d be happy to call myself a feminist but I would have never sought out that label earlier in my life...probably because most people rebel against their parents by doing unconventional things so I did conventional things. Sometimes I think about what my mom would do...our ideologies are fairly different, but I think in broad strokes, I think we approach the world maybe with a similar lens.”

When discussing how her mother’s activism affected her, she said there was definitely an affect since she was in the unions from infancy, and she said she noticed that her mother was out of the house a lot, but it was not necessarily met with negative or positive emotions. Alice also discussed the difference between women workers in her mother’s generation versus her generation:

“Her political and work identity is omnipresent. Since becoming a mom it’s been interesting for me to sort of think about her perspective and think back on my childhood from a different lens. I think in her generation, they were having to prove that you could do it all, and they didn’t have any kind of research or studies...they had this instinct that they knew women should be able to get out there and do things. So I think some of their parenting positions had to be ideological. So, I made sacrifices to my job for my kids, but I’ve had the luxury of having everything they’ve done...it’s complicated. I think they had to really dig their heels in and were forced into, ‘just believe that your kids will be okay, and you can have a career, you can put yourself into activist work’ ...they had all these external pressures that determined their hours and their working pressures.”

I didn’t resent it, it just felt like that was how it was...I didn’t think it was negative or positive. Now, reflecting on her choices, the pieces I deliberately had to do differently were a result of them having to dig their heels in. I think my mom’s job and her identity resulted in a choice that I think wasn’t what I agreed with—but not with any anger behind it or thinking she was wrong for

choosing that, because I can understand why that happened...It's just such a different world, and we're in such different positions.

"The other thing that I would mention is, it feels like, in my mom's generation she was actively a feminist and rebelling against gender roles. In my generation, in my middle class, privileged experience, my peers and I haven't felt that like, "we need to be feminists, we need to rebel." People have started talking about the very slight microaggressions against women that we've only noticed now...motherhood has awoken something in me and my peers where now we notice disadvantages because of our gender."

When discussing whether her career path was influenced by her mothers' activism, Alice said it definitely was:

"I studied economics but I was always looking at it from a development perspective. Then went to study at Columbia in multidisciplinary development masters, and that was coming from a frustration of economists just looking at the economics of things, rather than all the pieces that need to fit together to kind of truly get at the underpinnings of poverty eradication. And so, in some ways yes, my career ambitions have been very much influenced by my parents. My husband was really perturbed for a long time, he hadn't noticed before so much poverty...it kind of blew my mind that he hadn't...well, it had always been here. I think that the fact that I noticed that was because of my parents...it meant from a young age, I was like someone's gotta do something about this, and that's what I'm gonna do."

"My dad's very policy-oriented and it doesn't interest me in the least; my mom comes at everything from an advocacy lens, and I was like, I want to be in implementation. What I want to do is be part of the solution of people actually doing stuff. So yes, it was informed by them, in other ways it feels to me, very different."

Alice now works with a non-profit organization that is focused on cultivating the next generation of ethical and effective leaders in Africa. She specifically works in implementing the operational strategies for the organization to make sure the company runs better. In terms of activism, however, she is not sure if she classifies herself as an activist:

"Like I don't go to marches, I don't sign a bunch of petitions, I don't rage on Facebook, but I mean my entire job is trying to affect change in the world. I probably wouldn't call myself an activist, and again, I think that's probably because of my background. The part that makes me reticent: I think of activism having adversarial to it—I think a crude way to put it, is saying anger, but I think that's a problematic term to use...you can be adversarial without being angry."

When reflecting on her mother's overall parenting, Alice says that she sees both negatives and positives to the way she was raised. For instance, she talks about how she was never blind to the injustices of the world because of her parents' work:

“There are positives: to see your parents do things that are so brave, my mom was in danger, she kind of modeled the stories of what she did. Our moral compass was just so ingrained from that. You don't let those kind of atrocities just go by. Those are values that people can talk about until they're blue in the face, but it doesn't do as much as knowing that your parents did it. So you don't get to get away with being super selfish, and sort of being able to see the injustices of the world and not have that kind of hit you in your twenties. When people get super disillusioned and want to leave [South Africa], my response is, “do something about it then, because that's what my parents did.” Yes you haven't been shielded from this as a child, but you grew up having agency to do something about these depressing things in the world, and it makes a difference...I kind of have this understanding, that even if you leave, it'll still be happening here.”

In reference to other peers who are just now seeing the injustices that are rife in South Africa, Alice says:

“They have to deal with this complete loss of what they were brought up to believe what they thought they were entitled to, and they're grieving that, but I'm not, because I was never entitled to feel that.”

In reference to taking some cues from her parents within her own parenthood, Alice referenced how activism affected the ideological approach they took to raising children:

“I felt like, growing up, a lot of the values that my parents thought about, or that it seemed that they thought about, were all very structural. And so it's a whole new ball game for me, as a parent, that a whole lot of the values that I'm kind of delving into, are very interpersonal between individuals: ‘how do I want to talk to my children?’ Again, I think because their whole lives were thinking about these structural issues and activism is very much about that. Because they set that groundwork, I can take what I liked, leave what I didn't, and now move on. I think a lot of the parenting books that I read, from my parent's perspective, feel so indulgent to be able to be angsty whether you use rewards or not with your children. A lot of their parenting rules in how they related to us were quite conventional because they had bigger fish to fry. I can appreciate how little space that left for angsty over the minutiae of parenting.”

Overall, something I found fascinating was that when asked about their own parenthood, both Des and Alice talked about their own mothers.