How does parenting self-efficacy develop? A grounded theory study of the influences on parents' feelings and beliefs about themselves in role

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For my mum and my paleroo, who helped me to find my vocation and gave me the strength to pursue it

And for the participants, whose truths and experiences will stay in my thoughts and continue to inspire me

"I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. There is not any part of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surfaces of the water."
- D. H. Lawrence

*** With gratitude for all the interactions that have culminated in this thesis ***

Table of Contents

Tables

Figures

Illustrations

1. ABSTRACT

Parents' beliefs about their ability to perform effectively as a parent, referred to as 'parenting self-efficacy', are associated with child behaviour, socio-emotional functioning and academic achievement, as well as parenting competence and functioning (Jones & Prinz, 2005). Research has shown that the most significant neural development takes place during the period between birth and three years and that early experiences can have a lifelong impact on children's mental and emotional health, language and communication, and other key skills (Music, 2017). This research adopted a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach to explore how parenting self-efficacy emerges and develops in first-time parents. Nine participants engaged in a single semi-structured interview with the researcher via a virtual platform. Demographic information relating to the parents and their children was collected and used to inform theoretical sampling to ensure a range of perspectives and experiences were reflected in the data. Three cycles of data collection, coding and analysis were conducted; use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software supported the coding and analysis process. The findings offer new ideas to existing conceptualisations of parenting self-efficacy by presenting a transactional model for how the construct emerges and develops. Through applying a qualitative methodology that generates theory based on parents' own perspectives, the study provides a unique offering that has relevance for both theory and practice. This research will be of interest to services and practitioners that support young families; researchers and professionals who are interested in early child development or the transition to parenthood; and parents themselves.

2. PREFACE

This study set out to explore how parenting self-efficacy emerges and develops. Due to the focus on emergence, and significance of the period between birth and three years, this research investigated the experiences of first-time parents of a child (or children delivered by multiple birth) under the age of three. Although, independently, the significance of parenting self-efficacy and the critical nature of the first three years of life have gained increasing recognition, research uniting these two spheres is scarce and the evidence base for approaches that support the development of self-efficacy beliefs in parents of infants and young children is limited (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019; Wittkowski, Dowling & Smith, 2016). Throughout the implementation of this study, the urgency to understand what new parents need to thrive has only grown more acute during and in the aftermath of Covid-19. Strict implementation of government measures in the UK meant that the majority of families were unable to access childcare provision or see relatives; children's centres and libraries were closed; and visitors and birth partners were not allowed in hospitals (Petitions Committee, 2021). Given the emerging evidence of the impact of the pandemic on mental health and associations between parental mental health and parenting self-efficacy, it would be expected that parents' self-efficacy has also suffered during this time (Xue et al., 2021). In addition, the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on families who were already vulnerable and those with minoritised ethnic backgrounds highlight increased risks for certain groups (Millar et al., 2020; Pearcey et al., 2020; Pereda & Diaz-Faes, 2020; Townsend, 2020). Clearly, there is a crucial need both to address gaps within the theory and for effective practice that attends to cultural, social and ethnic differences when supporting the development of parents' self-efficacy. It was hoped that this study would begin to respond to these needs by providing a framework through which to understand the processes and

transactions involved in the development of parenting self-efficacy; and that is grounded in the experiences and perspectives of a diverse group of parents.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will first examine the construct of parenting self-efficacy, including definitions; how it has been conceptualised thus far; and its potential impact. Following this, an outline of practices which may support the development of parenting self-efficacy in new parents will be presented, with consideration given to existing approaches and how this topic is relevant to Educational Psychologists. A range of contextual factors will then be discussed. In line with the chosen methodology, the literature review was conducted after data collection and analysis in this research; therefore, this chapter will conclude with a brief overview of the topic area so that the methodology and findings can be situated within this.

3.2 The Construct of Parenting Self-efficacy

Over the last decades of the twenty-first century, the literature on parenting shifted away from a historical focus on parenting behaviours towards an examination of more cognitive and mentalistic aspects of the parenting experience (Smetana, 1994). Joining together ideas from behaviourism and cognitive psychology in his Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura derived the concept of self-efficacy, from which the construct of parenting self-efficacy originated (Bandura, 1977; 1982; 1989). Parenting self-efficacy refers to a parent's beliefs about their ability to perform effectively as a parent; it may also reflect their perceived capacity to positively influence the behaviour and development of their children (Coleman & Karraker, 1997; Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Bandura argued that understanding and skill acquisition do not fully account for actual performance of a task; instead, he suggested that self-efficacy, a person's belief in their ability to perform a particular behaviour successfully, has a mediating role between ability and implementation (Bandura, 1977; 1982). Bandura proposed that self-efficacy develops through an individual's interactions with their social environment and has four interrelated sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977; 1982). Detailed information relating to the modes of induction for each source is described by Bandura (1977) and has been helpfully summarised by Beach Copeland and Harbaugh (2017, p.10), displayed in *Table 1*. A conceptual model of Bandura's self-efficacy theory developed by Schuengel and Oosterman (2019) is displayed in *Figure 1*. Bandura contends that self-efficacy can change over time and is domain-specific; a person's self-efficacy beliefs may be different across different areas of their life (Bandura, 1982; 1989). Consequently, he applied his model of self-efficacy to the parenting domain, advocating the use of multifaceted measures that assess and combine self-perceptions related to distinct and specific parenting behaviours (Coleman & Karraker, 1997).

Source	Mode of Induction	Definition
Performance Accomplishments	Participant Modelling	Personal mastery experiences
	Performance Desensitization	Receiving gradual exposure to events
	Performance Exposure	Structured environment to event
	Self-instructed Performance	Self-appraise own performance
Vicarious Experience	Live Modelling	See others perform selected activities
	Symbolic Modelling	Observation of others from different environments and cultures. May use media.
Verbal Persuasion	Suggestion	Providing suggestions for positive coping
	Exhortation	Positive encouragement
	Self-instruction	Arranging conditions for effective performance
Emotional Arousal	Attribution	Caused by affective states
	Perceived Agitation Source	Environmental factors and influence on internal state
	Construal Bias	Pre-existing efficacy beliefs

Table 1. Bandura's Detailed Sources of Self-efficacy (Beach Copeland & Harbaugh. 2017, p.10, adapted from Bandura, 1977)

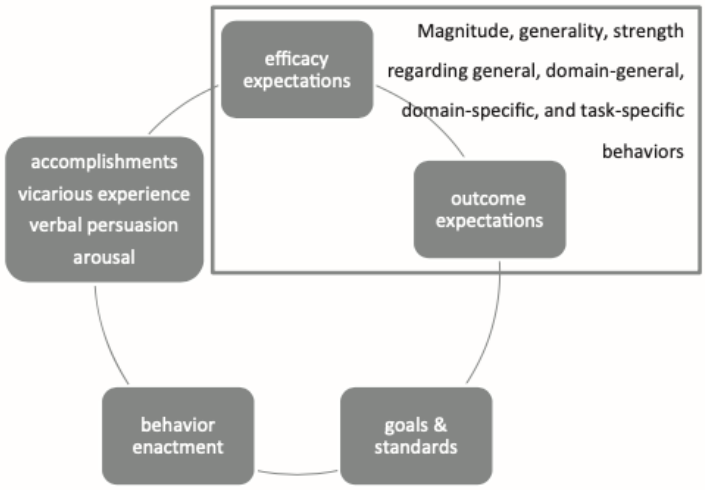


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019, p.644)

In subsequent years, application of Bandura's model to parenting has led to the development of many different measures of parenting self-efficacy. Unfortunately, only a small proportion of these are grounded in theory and many do not attend to Bandura's recommendations around combining task-specific information, instead focusing on more general perceptions of parenting efficacy, leading to issues with validity and reliability (Coleman & Karraker, 1997; Wittkowski et al., 2017). Overall, the literature on parenting self-efficacy has revolved around measuring rather than conceptualising this important construct (Jones & Prinz, 2005); although a study from 2001 provides an exception. Ardelt and Eccles (2001) outlined a new conceptual model of parenting self-efficacy in inner-city mothers of adolescents based on Bandura's self-efficacy model (1977) as well as qualitative research by Furstenberg (1993). In this model, parents' self-efficacy is related to children's developmental success and promotive parenting strategies; and situated within family and environmental contexts (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). However, aside from this study, parenting self-efficacy has undergone very little theoretical development since Bandura (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). Given that wide-ranging advances have been made across numerous relevant

disciplines since Bandura's original conceptualisation, this appears to warrant further attention.

In a review of the literature in 1997, Coleman and Karraker argued that "existing studies dramatically illustrate the gravity of [parenting self-efficacy] for understanding personal satisfaction or adjustment to parenting and the quality of the environment (both physical and psychological) that parents are able to provide for their children" (Coleman & Karraker, 1997, p.55). They also suggested that more needs to be done to further our understanding of how parenting self-efficacy emerges and develops in new parents, due to the significance of this period as a transitional and formative time in the lives of parents and children (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). Since this time, the potentially critical role of parenting self-efficacy has been further evidenced through a large body of research reporting associations with parenting competence; parental functioning (including mental state and role satisfaction); children's behaviour; their socio-emotional functioning; and academic achievement (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). Correspondingly, a great number of interventions and initiatives aiming to improve parenting self-efficacy have been developed and are being delivered in many countries across the world (Amin, Tam & Shorey, 2018). In conclusion, developing our understanding of this construct appears to be important for informing both theory and practice if we are to optimise support for parents and children (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019).

3.3 Supporting the Development of Parenting Self-efficacy

3.3.1 Existing Approaches

In response to the growing body of literature pointing towards the significance of parenting self-efficacy, a vast array of interventions have been developed which aim to improve it, many of which target families in the early years of parenthood (Amin, Tam & Shorey, 2018). In a systematic review of the literature on increasing parenting self-efficacy in parents of preschool children through group-based interventions, Wittkowski, Dowling and Smith (2016) identified fifteen studies that involved a randomised controlled trial. Although the majority reported improvements in parenting self-efficacy, only seven were rated as methodologically adequate and the authors argued that the papers did little to further understanding of the mechanisms through which changes are made (Wittkowski, Dowling & Smith, 2016). Schuengel and Oosterman (2019) reported similar problems in their systematic bibliographic analysis of the literature: although the second largest cluster of papers related to interventions, the evidence on whether and how they improve parenting self-efficacy is considered inconclusive. For example, short-term improvements have been found to be similar for interventions with very different content and delivery styles and which vary considerably in length; equally, the long-term effects of these programmes are unclear (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). Difficulties establishing the potential benefits of parenting interventions appear to be exacerbated by problems with the numerous tools used to measure parenting self-efficacy, including issues with validity and reliability (Wittkowski et al., 2017).

Despite these shortcomings, a number of policies and initiatives in the UK have focused on making group-based parenting interventions increasingly available at the local level, with central government stipulating that Local Authorities (LAs) select interventions from a small number of so-called 'evidence-based parenting programmes' (EBPPs) if they want to access funding (Lewis, 2011). The majority of chosen programmes were developed in the USA and Australia for use in clinical settings; seemingly disregarding questions around transferability EBPPs were continually extended in the UK until by 2010 they were universally available in most LAs (Lewis, 2011). In an exploratory study, Lewis (2011) highlighted a range of concerns relating to the implementation of EBPPs: high purchase and delivery costs; issues with the quality and qualifications of the staff facilitating interventions; and inadequate supervision of these staff. Although, over a decade later, services for young families have been significantly reduced, EBPPs still prevail as a method for trying to improve parenting self-efficacy (Cullen et al., 2016).

3.3.2 Relevance for Educational Psychology

Educational Psychologists (EPs), through their work in LAs, may be involved in the delivery of EBPPs, or in the supervision of staff who deliver these, and are well placed to fill these roles given their training (Morgan, 2019). They also have a diverse skillset and knowledge base that enables them to engage in a range of different work supporting the development of parenting self-efficacy, including with families new to parenthood (Laing, 2019). Furthermore, Educational Psychology is considered a profession of "scientist-practitioners" who can help to facilitate evidence-based practice as well as practice-based evidence (Hagstrom et al., 2007, p.797). EPs are therefore suitably qualified and well-situated both for

engaging in evidence-based work that supports the development of parenting self-efficacy (including specific interventions), and for conducting research that informs best practice.

Recently, Morgan (2019) demonstrated some of the ways in which EPs can contribute to the implementation of EBPPs. Reviewing the literature on the Incredible Years Parents and Babies Programme (Webster-Stratton, 1981; 1982), the author identified the absence of any qualitative findings. Within a context of concerns around existing quantitative measures, Morgan argued that qualitative research exploring parental experiences of interventions as they understand them may lead to a clearer understanding of any perceived impacts. In an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) of the lived experiences of mothers who had recently attended the Incredible Years Parents and Babies Programme, Morgan highlighted individual differences in the journeys of development experienced by parents, including how they experienced the programme. Consistent with ideas around parenting and behaviour change, differentiated patterns of experience (such as personal circumstances and experiences of being parented) were found to contribute to different beliefs and experiences of parenting; these influenced the degree of alignment between parents and programme strategies and therefore parents' experiences of the intervention (Morgan, 2019; Bornstein et al., 2003; Anderson et al., 2015; Freeman, Newland & Coyl, 2008). Morgan's study offers important insights into parents' experiences of a group-based intervention and shows the contributions that EPs can make to the delivery and evaluation of EBPPs.

In a research report for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, Lindsay and colleagues (2008) concluded that the rollout of EBPPs needed "serious thought," suggesting that 'home-grown' programmes could be used instead (Lindsay et al., 2008, p.159). Using

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Laing (2019) explored the engagement and retention of parents in a 'home-grown' group parenting programme developed and delivered by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in an inner London borough. One element of the research involved a focus group with parents who were attending the programme. The findings indicated that initial and continued attendance were perceived to be a combination of the successful application of adult learning theory (including application of personal experiences, self-directed learning, relevant material, and a non-threatening environment) (Knowles et al., 1998); as well as organisational theory (for example, a cohesive group structure, successful management, and provision planning) (Tuckman, 1965). Particular themes emerged around the importance of facilitators' 'soft skills', such as enabling parents to feel understood; included both socially and educationally; and to carry a level of authority and structure (Laing, 2019). Richer (2012) identified similarly positive effects in a 'home-grown' parenting programme developed and delivered by Northamptonshire EPS: attending the intervention was found to lead to increases in parenting self-efficacy; parental knowledge; and parent engagement with their babies. These studies offer support for the capacity of EPs to develop and deliver effective 'home-grown' evidence-based parenting programmes.

Alongside group-based interventions, Morgan asserts that EPs could add value by facilitating different opportunities for parents of young children to access support; share their experiences; and develop their self-efficacy and confidence (Morgan, 2019). EPs work with children and young people between the ages of 0 and 25; as infants and young children are dependent on their parents, working closely with parents to support this early age range seems most appropriate (Barlow et al., 2010; Evans et al., 2015). The EP role is broad and covers intervention, training, research, consultation and assessment (The Currie Report, Scottish Executive, 2002). EPs also have the capacity to work with various systems (Farrell

et al., 2006), including the different systems which support new parents, such as Health Visiting services and children's centres. In a grounded theory study of health visitor-led Child Health Clinics, Webb (2018) gathered data from mothers and professionals. She constructed a substantive theory suggesting that experiences of support at Health Clinics can be conceptualised in two processes: a didactic approach focused on weighing and monitoring; and a heuristic approach focused on reflection and compassion. The latter approach, informed by psychological theory, was associated with better outcomes in terms of promoting parenting self-efficacy (Webb, 2018). Further evidence of the benefits of psychological input into systems which support new parents is found in Soni's (2010) research examining the use of EP-delivered group supervision for Family Support Workers based in children's centres. In conclusion, EPs are well positioned and suitably qualified for engaging in a range of work that supports the development of parenting self-efficacy; both through facilitating evidence-based practice (such as developing and delivering evidence-based ways of working) and practice-based evidence (for example, conducting research into existing practices).

3.3.3 Contextual Factors

In 1997, family support became a key agenda under the new labour government (Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay, 2016). Consequently, various reports, acts and legislation related to children and families were produced, including Every Child Matters (HM Government, 2003) and The Children's Act 2004 (HM Government, 2004). Reviews commissioned by the government highlighted the effectiveness of early years intervention on children's outcomes and led to more government funding for early years provision and intervention, including education and support for parents (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Tickell, 2011; Department for Work and Pensions & Department for Education, 2011). Since this time, the financial crisis

of 2007-2008, alongside over a decade of austerity policies, has seen dramatic reductions to services for young families, with many provisions suffering funding cuts and closures (Cullen et al., 2016; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Despite recent evidence from the Social Mobility Commission (2017) demonstrating the impact of parenting on children's outcomes, funding streams have continued to be reduced, leaving LAs looking for ways to support parents with less funding and resources.

The onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic in March 2020 had extreme consequences for families, including those with young children and expectant parents (Xue et al., 2021). Strict implementation of government measures meant that the majority of families in the UK were unable to access childcare provision or see relatives; children's centres and libraries were closed; and visitors and birth partners were not allowed in hospitals, leaving a dramatic imprint on expectant parents' experiences of care and support during pregnancy and delivery, as well as postnatally (Petitions Committee, 2021). Emerging evidence suggests that the pandemic and associated measures had a significant impact on mental health; given associations between parental mental health and parenting self-efficacy, it would be expected that parents' self-efficacy has also suffered (Xue et al., 2021). Furthermore, increased levels of distress and anxiety are reported to have disproportionately affected families who were already vulnerable (due to socioeconomic factors; domestic abuse etc) and those with minoritised ethnic backgrounds (Millar et al., 2020; Pearcey et al., 2020; Pereda & Diaz-Faes, 2020; Townsend, 2020). Although the lifting of restrictions has seen services being gradually resumed, access to these remains affected by limitations to service delivery (workforce capacity; cumulative waiting lists) and by the ongoing impact of the pandemic on young families (bereavement; financial difficulties; physical and mental health) (Petitions Committee, 2021).

3.4 Overview of the Literature

In accordance with Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology, the literature review was conducted after data collection and analysis in this research (Charmaz, 2006; 2010; 2014). However, in order to develop an initial understanding of the topic area, the researcher identified three seminal reviews dating from 1997, 2005 and 2019 respectively. Each of these reviews was determined to be of excellent quality following application of Holland and Rees (2010) and CASP (2018) critical appraisal tools: for example, they report comprehensive searches; include a wide selection of relevant studies which are assessed for rigour; and the results are presented in a structured format that provides a clear picture of the accomplishments and limitations of the field. Once the high quality and systematic nature of these reviews was established, they were used to inform the following overview of the literature.

The first seminal review of parenting self-efficacy was conducted by Coleman and Karraker and was based on 18 studies (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). In this paper, the researchers describe the major components of Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; 1982; 1989) and outline the different areas of focus within the literature relating to parenting self-efficacy, including its relationship to parenting competence; child outcomes; and factors such as sociodemographic status and maternal depression. Reviewing evidence from a study by Teti and Gelfand (1991), in which maternal self-efficacy beliefs were found to act as a mediator between behavioural competence and various psychosocial variables, Coleman and Karraker suggest that many of the factors believed to impact parenting competence may do so through their effect on parenting self-efficacy rather than directly (Coleman & Karraker, 1997).

The paper then turns its attention to how parenting self-efficacy develops, considering four main sources: childhood experiences; elements of the macrosystem; actual experience with children; and cognitive and behavioural preparation for the parenting role. Exploring the possible influence of childhood experiences, Coleman and Karraker first review a study conducted by Grusec and colleagues (1994) that was informed by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). The paper provided preliminary evidence for an association between maternal self-efficacy and adult attachment orientation, suggesting that a person's experiences of being parented may impact their own parenting self-efficacy (Grusec, Hastings & Mammone, 1994). Next, macrosystemic influences such as culture and community are considered through examining Goodnow's (1985) work, in which he adopted a systems perspective when investigating the factors underpinning parental beliefs. The third avenue of influence discussed by Coleman and Karraker, actual experience with children, is informed by a number of studies which support Bandura's notion of performance accomplishment: that direct involvement with the actual behaviours (in this case, interactions with children) are a powerful source of information in the formation of efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977; 1982; 1989). Finally, the degree of cognitive and behavioural preparation for the maternal role is considered with reference to theoretical models including Winnicott's (1976) ideas around maternal 'preoccupation' or reorientation to the unborn child, and Rubin's (1984) three-stage model for prenatal preparation. Coleman and Karraker conclude that, given its potentially crucial role, future research must establish greater clarity around the processes and mechanisms that contribute to the development of parenting self-efficacy, as well as the timeframes in which they occur. They also draw attention to the limitations of a field in which the majority of studies test theory-generated hypotheses, thereby potentially reducing their capacity to reflect the actual lived experiences of parents (Coleman & Karraker, 1997).

A few years later, Jones and Prinz (2005) conducted a systematic review of 47 studies which looked at parenting self-efficacy. The researchers describe a large body of evidence highlighting associations with parenting competence; parental functioning (including depression, stress, role satisfaction and coping); and child behaviour, socio-emotional functioning and academic achievement (Jones & Prinz, 2005). Jones and Prinz state that parenting self-efficacy has been studied through four conceptual frameworks: 1) as an antecedent; 2) as a consequence; 3) as a mediator; and 4) as a transactional variable. Although the available evidence offers support for hypotheses from all four frameworks, Jones and Prinz critique the literature for its reliance on correlational and cross-sectional designs and argue that a different approach may be required to understand the richness and impact of this dynamic construct (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Following these two reviews, the field grew exponentially: a total of 788 publications were included in Schuengel and Oosterman's (2019) systematic bibliographic analysis of the literature. The researchers used VOSviewer 1.6.5 software (Van Eck & Waltman, 2016) to map the topics and themes from the publications, grouping these into clusters. Central ideas which were identified included: parenting self-efficacy mediates risk and protective factors; parenting self-efficacy, its antecedents and consequences, are related in bidirectional, transactional ways; and parenting self-efficacy guides parents' goal-setting and pursuit. The review also critically examines the literature on measures of parenting self-efficacy, arguing that the development of a cohesive body of research is undermined by the use of a vast array of tools; many of which lack reliability and validity and almost none of which account for variance across cultural and socioeconomic groups, despite emerging evidence of differences across populations (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). Moreover, the authors suggest that greater understanding of the multiple pathways through which parenting self-efficacy may

change and develop necessitates moving away from a unidirectional view towards a model in which parenting self-efficacy sits within a network of bidirectional relations (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019).

Engaging with these three reviews highlighted several limitations in the current literature. Although parenting self-efficacy has received a great amount of attention, there remains a lack of clarity around the factors that influence its development, when they start to operate, and how they interact. All three papers indicate that different designs and methodologies may be needed to extend current conceptualisations and do justice to this potentially critical construct (Coleman & Karraker, 1997; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). They also demonstrate that future research should be cautious of testing theory-generated hypotheses and should aim to reflect the actual lived experiences of parents from diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups.

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the construct of parenting self-efficacy has been explored in relation to both theory and practice. The relevance of the topic for the field of Educational Psychology and more widely has been contended through examining existing approaches and presenting an overview of the literature. The evidence considered demonstrates a pronounced need for further research into parenting self-efficacy, especially research that focuses on its development; is qualitative; and reflects actual lived experiences of parents from diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will first explore the background to this study, including the context and rationale for the research, as well as the research purpose, aims and questions. The next section will outline the theoretical position taken in this research; following this, the methodology and implementation will be described. Finally, ethical issues will be considered before concluding with some reflections on validity and trustworthiness within this research.

4.2 Background

4.2.1 Context and Rationale for this Research

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the overwhelming majority of the literature consists of quantitative studies that employed correlational and cross-sectional designs and have not provided the understanding of this rich and dynamic construct that it warrants (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). The two most recent reviews concluded that if parenting self-efficacy is to be a useful construct, a different approach is required; in particular, the sources of self-efficacy need to be better understood, including how they emerge and develop over time, as well as how different sources interact with each other (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). The arguments presented in these two reviews provide a strong rationale for this study, which aspired to provide a model for how parenting self-efficacy emerges and develops. In addition, this research aimed to generate

theory that was informed by actual lived experiences of parents as, to the researcher's knowledge, this had not previously been done within this topic area.

4.2.2 Research Purpose and Aims

This study set out to explore how parenting self-efficacy emerges and develops. Due to the focus on the emergence of self-efficacy beliefs, the researcher chose to investigate the experiences of first-time parents. An age range of between birth and three years was chosen as this is the period of a child's life in which the most significant neural development takes place (Music, 2017). It was hoped that the study would begin to address gaps within the theory and generate a model for how parenting self-efficacy emerges and develops. In addition, this research aimed to address the crucial need for effective practice within this area by providing a framework that could help practitioners and parents themselves to understand the processes and transactions involved in the development of parenting self-efficacy and plan intervention and support accordingly. The study took place in the aftermath of a global pandemic which had extreme consequences for young families and with parents who were all resident in one of the most deprived local authorities in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). It is recognised that this is a unique context in which to have conducted this research.

The purpose of this research was explanatory: to understand the emergence and development of parenting self-efficacy and provide an explanation in the form of a theory (Punch, 2000). As grounded theory is viewed to be an appropriate method when there is a lack of theory available to explain a process, it was considered a good fit for the purposes of this research (Creswell, 2007). The aim was to generate a grounded theory that was informed by parents'

own perspectives and provided a useful interpretation that can be used in everyday life to improve people's lives (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). While the researcher acknowledged that both qualitative and quantitative methods are "useful for both verification and generation of theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.17-18), qualitative research procedures that centred around the voices of participants were felt to be the best fit for the research aims (Creswell, 2007).

The study also had an emancipatory purpose, in that the researcher wanted to produce a piece of research that reflected multiple perspectives and attended to issues around diversity. This was informed by the emancipatory tradition within educational psychology, which campaigns for social justice, equal opportunities, inclusion, and ethical practice (Billington, 2000). This research hoped to amplify the voices of parents from a range of backgrounds and illuminate their views on what shapes their experiences. An additional aim was that engaging in the interview would be experienced as cathartic and empowering for participants. To this purpose, the researcher developed an interview schedule and approach that followed the lead of participants; offered them opportunities to reflect on their feelings, experiences, and beliefs; and provided a space for them to feel heard and accepted.

4.2.3 Research Questions

The overarching question for this research was: how does parenting self-efficacy develop in first-time parents? This question was considered to consist of two parts:

1) How do parent' feelings and beliefs about themselves in role emerge?
2) How do these feelings and beliefs change and develop in the first three years of parenthood?

4.3 Theoretical Position

4.3.1 Research Position and Beliefs

Mills and colleagues suggest that "to ensure a strong research design, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, p. 2). In this study, the research questions emerged from the researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality. In their previous work with parents, the researcher had become dissatisfied with the tools used to measure parenting self-efficacy and with interventions aimed at increasing ratings on these measures. Firstly, the measures did not appear to account for or attend to variance across cultural and socioeconomic groups. Secondly, they seemed to be underpinned by a post-positivist paradigm which, while acknowledging that parenting self-efficacy is not an observable construct, continues to aim towards objective investigation and the discovery of universal truths (Harper, 2012). While engaging in a brief overview of the literature before starting data collection, the researcher found that the reactions they had experienced as a practitioner were validated and echoed by other researchers, encouraging them to pursue this study within an alternative paradigm (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019).

4.3.2 Philosophical Paradigm and Methodology

According to Fossey and colleagues, paradigm refers to "a system of ideas, or world view, used by a community of researchers to generate knowledge. It is a set of assumptions, research strategies and criteria for rigour that are shared, even taken for granted by that community" (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p.718). Before starting this

project, the researcher explored different positions, looking for a set of assumptions which were congruent with their own beliefs. Following their interest in Grounded Theory methodology, the researcher used Levers' (2013) analysis of the philosophical paradigms associated with different Grounded Theory approaches when considering the best fit with their world view. Early versions of Grounded Theory, such as Glaser and Strauss (1967), were not considered a good fit due to their position within a post-positivist paradigm (Levers, 2013). After reviewing Interpretivist Grounded Theory methods such as Strauss and Corbin (1990) alongside the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach developed by Charmaz (2006; 2014), the researcher decided that their perspective fit best within the constructionist paradigm encompassed in Constructivist Grounded Theory; where meaning is viewed as being constructed through an interaction of the interpreter and the interpreted as situated in society (Levers, 2013; Crotty, 1998).

The researcher also considered alternative methodologies that fit the emancipatory aims of the research, for example the participatory research approaches described by Bergold and Thomas (2012). Although elements of these approaches had appeal (such as involving participants in all aspects of the methods and analysis), the explanatory aims of the research were felt to be better suited to a methodology that enabled the generation of theory. Constructivist Grounded Theory was considered to suit this aim and also to facilitate an emancipatory approach through its capacity to support critical qualitative inquiry (Charmaz, 2017).

4.3.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory

The original version of Grounded Theory, sometimes called Classical Grounded Theory, was developed in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, two sociologists who combined their different backgrounds in positivist and interpretivist schools of thought in a pioneering new methodology (Sebastian, 2019). A former student of both, Kathy Charmaz built on earlier versions and developed her own approach, Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). According to Charmaz, Constructivist Grounded Theory adopts similar methodological strategies to Classical Grounded Theory, while shifting the epistemological stance and integrating more recent methodological innovations in qualitative inquiry (Charmaz, 2017). Sebastian (2019) outlines the key differences between the three types of Grounded Theory in a table; relevant aspects of which are reproduced below in *Table 2*.

	Classical Grounded Theory	Interpretive Grounded Theory	Constructivist Grounded Theory
Philosophical Influence	(Attempts to be) free from influence	Interpretivism	Constructivism and Pragmatism
Role of the Researcher	The researcher is *distant* and *detached*.	The researcher is *engaged* with and *actively interprets* the data.	The researcher *constructs* rather than *discovers*.
Allowance of Prior Knowledge	No, the researcher and research must remain neutral. Only the information provided by the collected data should influence the progress of the research. Prior knowledge could negatively influence the direction or quality of the concluding theory.	Yes, it can be used to strengthen the overall research and data collection. Referred to as '*sensitivity*' and includes having insight on relevant issues.	Yes, it is understood that one cannot escape prior knowledge. Examine and understand how it influences the researcher and the research; do not ignore, erase or let it control the direction of the research.
Theory Creation and Verification	There is a distinct separation between theory generation (primary) and verification (secondary). Creation of a substantive or formal theory is central to the completion of a research study. Verification can only occur afterwards by quantitative analysis.	Creation of a substantive or formal theory is central to the completion of a research study. Verification occurs through multiple perspectives confirming the same data.	The constructed theory is an interpretation rather than an exact representation. The theory is dependent upon the researcher's view and cannot occur or stand without it.

Table 2. Illuminating the Types of Grounded Theory (Sebastian, 2019, p.4)

4.3.4 Methodology

Constructivist Grounded Theory retains certain key elements of Classical Grounded Theory, namely the iterative logic and inductive strategies characterising the processes leading to theory generation (Levers, 2013). These include cycles of simultaneous data collection, coding and analysis; memo-writing; and theoretical sampling. In Constructivist Grounded Theory, there are two phases of coding and analysis: (i) 'initial' coding, which involves assigning a code to all pieces of data (e.g. line-by-line, word-by-word or incident-by-incident), and (ii) 'focused' coding, in which initial codes are organised to inform the next stages of data collection, coding and analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

During the focused coding process, the researcher selects codes that have the most analytical power and are most significant for taking forward towards theoretical conceptualisation (Charmaz, 2014). In parallel to this, throughout the researcher uses constant comparison methods, such as creating analytic memos, to construct the emerging categories. In the following cycles, emerging theoretical conceptualisations are tested out against new data. Unlike other Grounded Theory approaches, Constructivist Grounded Theory allows more than one 'core' category (Charmaz, 2014). 'Theoretical saturation' is considered to have been reached when no new information about at least one of the core categories is emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2014).

4.3.5 Ontology and Epistemology

Charmaz's approach draws on pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry (Charmaz, 2014; 2017; Sebastian, 2019). Although some critics refer to a "conundrum of

ontological and epistemological beliefs" in Constructivist Grounded Theory, Levers outlines how the different elements within the approach can be understood within a constructionist paradigm (Levers, 2013, p.5). In a constructionist paradigm "truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p.8). In this conceptualisation, the researcher acknowledges a world that exists outside of their own mind and that includes constituent elements of the research but does not perceive themself as fully external to the process of emergence of theory (Levers, 2013). Instead, theory and meaning are considered to emerge from the "interaction between the 'viewer' (researcher) and the 'viewed' (subject of the research)" (Farragher & Coogan, 2018, p.5).

In contrast with the concept of emergence in Classical Grounded Theory which aims to 'discover' truths, in Constructivist Grounded Theory how the researcher constructs the emerging theory is both influenced by, and influences, the data; furthermore, the whole process is influenced by societal structures (Levers, 2013). As a result, in Constructivist Grounded Theory there is a recognition of the researcher's own social reality and the research is viewed as being located in the historical, social and situational conditions of its production (Charmaz, 2017). Charmaz argues that, instead of trying to escape the influence of their own social reality, researchers should carefully navigate their own perspectives by developing and maintaining methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2017).

In this study, the researcher's aim was to generate a grounded theory that provided a useful interpretation, rather than to discover fixed truths. As such, adopting a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach which is situated within a constructionist paradigm was felt to align closely with the researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality; and with their understanding of how meanings are generated during interactions between researchers and

participants. It was also considered to fit well with both social constructivist and social constructionist approaches within educational psychology practice (McCaslin & Hickey, 2010).

Pragmatism

Charmaz suggests that Constructivist Grounded Theory not only complements but is a "direct methodological descendent" of pragmatist philosophy (Charmaz, 2017, p.38). She contends that the influence of pragmatists such as Dewey, Mead, and Pierce, is central to Strauss's work and that of the grounded theorists who follow him, including herself (Strauss, 1959; 1961; 1987). Pragmatism addresses ontological questions about "what there is to know in the world" as well as epistemological questions around what it is possible to know and how (Harper, 2012, p.87). In pragmatist philosophy, reality is viewed as social, fluid, somewhat indeterminate and open to multiple interpretations (Mead, 1932; 1934; 1938; Dewey, 1925; 1948; 1958; 1960; Peirce, 1958). Truth is treated as conditional and assessed through what works in empirical practice, while experience is always located in a social context (Mead, 1932; 1934; 1938; Dewey, 1925; 1948; 1958; 1960; Peirce, 1958).

Charmaz (2017) argues that pragmatism can help researchers make otherwise tacit actions and processes visible, and that there are numerous commonalities between this philosophical approach and Constructivist Grounded Theory. These include the assumption that reality is fundamentally social and processual; a profound interest in the dynamic relationships between actions and meanings with a focus on temporality; and an emphasis on the significance of language and symbols in thought and action (Charmaz, 2017). Given that this study centred around parenting self-efficacy, a social construct that refers to the meanings

parents make of their experiences; and that its purpose was to elucidate the processes and transactions involved in its development, using a methodology that is rooted in pragmatism was felt to be highly appropriate.

Symbolic Interactionism

Mead's ideas bridged the pragmatist tradition with symbolic interactionism, a dynamic theoretical perspective in which self, situation, and society are perceived as being constructed from human actions (Charmaz, 2014). Similar to pragmatism, symbolic interactionism views human beings as agentic actors who interpret their situations and interactions; who can rethink, re-evaluate, and redirect their actions, particularly when they encounter problematic or new experiences; and that the meanings humans give to their situations and interactions constitute social reality and form the conditions in which action and interpretations occur (Blumer, 1969; 1979). Charmaz (2014, p.270-271) defines six premises upon which symbolic interactionism rests, the first three of which were described by Blumer (1969, p.3):

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.
4. Meanings are interpreted through shared language and communication (Charmaz, 1980, p.25).

5. The mediation of meaning in social interaction is distinguished by a continually emerging processual nature (Charmaz, 1980, p.25).
6. The interpretative process becomes explicit when people's meanings and/or actions become problematic or their situations change (Charmaz, 1980; Snow, 2002).

While research within a symbolic interactionist perspective can encompass a range of theoretical positions and methodologies, it typically focuses on what people say about their prior actions and how this is interpreted; as such, language and symbols are thought to play a crucial role in forming and sharing actions and meanings (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz proposes that Constructivist Grounded Theory gives researchers the tools to make theoretical sense of symbolic interactionist analyses of everyday experiences (Charmaz, 2014). As Constructivist Grounded Theory has a distinctive capacity for providing methods to study actions and meanings alongside process and temporality, it was considered an ideal choice for this research, which focused on the emergence and development of parenting self-efficacy during a transformational period in the participants' lives.

Critical Inquiry

Critical qualitative inquiry incorporates qualitative research that addresses power, oppression, inequality and injustice (Mertens, 2009; Denzin, 2015). It can be seen to be related to pragmatism in that the pragmatist tradition is committed to social justice; and to symbolic interactionism in its pursuit to expose different meanings and interpretations (Charmaz, 2014; 2017). Charmaz proposes that researchers can open opportunities for critical qualitative inquiry by developing and maintaining methodological self-consciousness throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2017). Developing methodological self-consciousness involves

"scrutinizing our positions, privileges, and priorities and assessing how they affect our steps during the research process and our relationships with research participants" (Charmaz, 2017, p.35). Due to the emancipatory aims of this study, Charmaz's (2014; 2017) reflexive methodology that facilitates critical qualitative inquiry was considered an excellent framework within which to conduct this research.

4.4 Implementation

4.4.1 Developing and Maintaining Methodological Self-consciousness

Reflecting on Prior Knowledge and Experience

Charmaz (2014) suggests that previous knowledge or experience can strengthen a research project, as long as it does not define or control the direction of the research. She recommends that researchers examine and reflect on how their prior knowledge and experience may influence their research and suggests they use preconceived ideas "as tentative tools […] to open up inquiry rather than shutting it down" (Charmaz, 2014, p.31). Before starting this project, the researcher had worked with parents in a variety of capacities, including co-facilitating The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program (Sanders, 2012); running universal language development sessions in children's centres; and developing, delivering and evaluating a psychology-based group intervention for new parents. The researcher had also completed a Postgraduate Diploma at the Tavistock which incorporated Infant Observation, a form of observation developed by Esther Bick that is rooted in psychoanalysis (Bick, 1964). Infant Observation offers the experience of longitudinal observation of a mother-infant pair; typically this is for one hour per week in the family home and spans from shortly after the

infant is born until their second birthday (Rustin, 2009). Throughout the experiences described, the researcher developed a deep curiosity in the transitional and formative processes involved in becoming a parent for the first time. In addition, as their roles involved working within diverse communities and environments, they became interested in how parents' experiences might be shaped by these differences.

Before starting data collection, the researcher engaged in discussions with their supervisor around how their prior knowledge and experience might influence them as a researcher and how to navigate this. Consideration was given to how a background in a psychoanalytically informed observation approach may have led to certain pre-conceived ideas, for example assumptions around the impact of participants' experiences with their own parents. Acknowledging that this might influence their questioning, the researcher developed an interview schedule that consisted of open questions and responded flexibly to what participants wanted to share. The researcher also piloted the interview schedule twice, after which they engaged in reflective discussions with the interviewees about which aspects of their interview technique had helped or hindered them from taking the interview in the direction they wanted to.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Charmaz describes methodological self-consciousness as "examining ourselves *in* the research process" (Charmaz, 2017, p.36). This includes becoming aware of our privileges and positions; defining intersecting relationships with power, identity, subjectivity and marginality for the researcher and the participants; and engaging in a dynamic process looking at how, when, why and to what extent these relationships shift (Charmaz, 2017).

Suggesting researchers need to dissect their worldviews, language and meanings and explore how these come into their research, Charmaz links methodological self-consciousness to Harding's concept of reflexivity, in which researchers are asked to imagine their research project first from the view of participants, and then from outside the social and cultural lens in which it took place (Harding, 1991). Charmaz also draws attention to positionality (Clarke, 2005), highlighting the importance of looking at the social locations of the researcher and participants, as well as examining how ways of knowing are anchored in time and place (Charmaz, 2017).

Undertaking this study as part of a professional doctorate at the Tavistock helped the researcher to develop a reflexive approach and attend to positionality, due to the psychological frameworks which are taught and applied in the rest of the training. For example, the strong emphasis within the curriculum on power, difference, systemic and structural factors, permeated the planning processes around the interview schedule and approach and during data collection, coding and analysis. In addition, keeping a reflective diary throughout and accessing ongoing supervision provided continuous opportunities for examining worldviews and meanings. Extracts from the researcher's reflective diary are displayed in Appendix 1.

4.4.2 Research Strategy and Participants

The research took place with first-time parents in an inner London borough. This location was chosen due to its diverse demographic and the researcher's connections with Early Years services and parent networks in this area through their previous employment. The flyer

displayed in Appendix 2 was developed and the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during recruitment:

- participants had to be a parent of a single child, or children delivered by multiple birth, who were under the age of 3 at the time of interview;
- participants had to be resident in the inner London borough where permission had been obtained from the council;
- participants had to have read the information sheet and signed the consent form;
- participants had to have a conversational level of English or able to bring someone with them who could act as an interpreter;
- parents who knew the researcher professionally or personally were excluded.

The flyer was circulated through a local parent community support group, leading to the recruitment of three participants. The researcher then attended two Stay and Play sessions run by a local charity, which led to the recruitment of five further participants. The first phase of data collection, coding and analysis will be referred to as Cycle 1 and involved four of the eight participants who had been recruited by this point. A few weeks later, the second phase of data collection, coding and analysis (which will be referred to as Cycle 2) took place with two participants who had already been recruited. Ahead of the third and final phase of data collection, coding and analysis (which will be referred to as Cycle 3) the flyer was circulated by a local Nursery. Cycle 3 took place a few weeks after Cycle 2 and involved two participants who had previously been recruited and one participant who was recruited through the Nursery.

In accordance with Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology, sampling was aimed towards theory construction (Charmaz, 2006; 2010; 2014). Due to the research purpose and aims, the researcher wanted to ensure that participants included parents who reflected diverse characteristics and who had children of varying ages under 3. As such, demographic information was gathered after each interview using the form displayed in Appendix 3 and taken into consideration throughout the recruitment process. Participants were informed that completing the form was optional and that they could leave any sections they preferred not to answer blank. One participant chose not to complete the form. The rest of the responses are collated and displayed in *Table 3.* As much as possible, the participants' own words have been used in the table.

		Parent Age	Child Age	Home Languages	Race	Ethnicity	Cultural Background	Gender	Occupation
CYCLE 1	**Participant 1**	26	4 months	English	Black	Black African British	(no response)	Woman	Full-time employed
	Participant 2	37	1 year 8 months	Romanian	White	Romanian	(no response)	Woman	Housekeeping manager
	Participant 3	38	11 months	English	Black	Black British	Black Caribbean	Man	Full-time employed
	Participant 4	43	2 years 11 months	Italian	White	Southern European	(no response)	Woman	Part-time employed
CYCLE 2	**Participant 5**	**chose not to complete demographic information form*							
	Participant 6	24	1 year 8 months	English	Asian	Bangladeshi	(no response)	Woman	Full-time parent
CYCLE 3	**Participant 7**	31	1 year 4 months	German	White	German/European	Christian Conservative	Man	Part-time employed
	Participant 8	42	1 year 3 months	English	Black	Black British Caribbean	British Caribbean Catholic	Woman	Actress
	Participant 9	34	2 years 11 months	English, Punjabi	Asian	Pakistani	British Muslim	Woman	Carer

Table 3. Demographic Information Provided by Participants

All the parents who expressed an interest in taking part became participants in this research. This may not have been the case if those who had expressed an interest had been a more homogeneous sample. However, as demonstrated by the information displayed in *Table 3*, the participants who came forward reflected diverse characteristics and included parents with children of varying ages under 3. During the interviews, one of the parents shared that she was a first-time parent to twins and another parent shared that her child had been diagnosed with complex medical needs during her pregnancy. As this research aimed to explore the development of parenting self-efficacy in parents with a range of different experiences, the inclusion of these participants was considered to strengthen, rather than weaken, the design. Further differences between participants emerged during the interviews, including the levels of social support they had and their access to services and professionals. For example, several participants shared that they did not have any family members living nearby whilst one mother lived very close to her sister; and one parent had experienced a lot more professional involvement than the others due to her daughter's medical needs. Participants also differed in terms of whether they had become a parent before, during or after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Once participants were identified, they were sent the information sheet and consent form displayed in Appendix 4. These had been purposely written in an accessible format using plain English. In addition to this, each participant was invited to an initial meeting to ensure their understanding of these documents before they were asked to complete and sign the consent form. Participants were also invited to bring someone with them to this initial meeting if they wished to. The initial meetings took place virtually via Zoom, or via a phone call, depending on the participant's preference.

4.4.3 Interview Schedule and Approach

After the initial meeting had taken place and the participant had completed and signed the consent form, an interview was arranged at a time that was convenient for them. Participants were given the choice of scheduling an interview either virtually or in person and were invited to bring someone with them to the interview if they wished to. The interviews all took place virtually via Zoom. All the participants had a conversational level of English and attended the interview on their own.

Each participant attended a single interview. The interview questions were displayed using the screen-sharing feature on Zoom and the researcher also read these out. Participants were asked to start with whichever question they wanted to begin with. The interview schedule used in Cycles 1 and 2 is displayed in Appendix 5. The questions were adapted slightly for Cycle 3 to include prompts aiming to develop the emerging categories. This version of the interview schedule is displayed in Appendix 6.

A semi-structured approach was taken in each of the nine interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has only a brief number of topics or questions for each interview initially and has freedom to adapt the pace, order and wording of each question according to the interview content as it emerges (Robson & McCartan, 2017). The researcher drew on the following recommendations from Charmaz (2014) in preparing for and conducting interviews:

- engaging simultaneously in data collection, coding and analysis;
- reflecting on power dynamics and difference throughout the data collection, coding and analysis process, through writing analytic memos and keeping a reflective diary;

- taking an ‘intensive interviewing’ approach which aims to allow an in-depth exploration of participants’ experience and situations through open-ended questions; a practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry; and an emphasis on understanding the participant’s perspective and meanings;
- employing an interpersonal style that conveys interest and respect through strategies such as asking questions sensitively, conveying a sense of ownership and consent for the participant around what they share, and demonstrating active listening skills.

The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 55 minutes in length. As is evident from the variability in length, some of the participants expanded on the conversation to a much greater extent than other participants. Possible reasons for this will be addressed in the Discussion chapter.

4.4.4 Data Management and Transcription

Interviews were audio-recorded using an app called Otter. The researcher listened to each audio-recording at least twice before beginning the transcription process. The interviews were then transcribed by hand and meticulously checked and corrected against the audio recording at least twice. The researcher transcribed all the interviews, to ensure consistency and limit the impact of attributed meanings. Examples from Charmaz (2014) were drawn on and a naturalised approach to transcription was adopted that incorporated pauses, nonverbal and involuntary vocalisations. This helped the researcher to attend to subtle implications and meanings throughout the different stages of considering the data (Charmaz, 2014). All data was stored securely in line with procedures for the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and the

Council, and interview transcripts, memos and all other notes have been anonymised. Example sections of transcripts are included below.

4.4.5 Data Analysis Software: NVivo

Transcripts were uploaded to a software package called NVivo (Release 1.5). NVivo is a specific computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that supports a systematic approach to conducting Constructivist Grounded Theory. The software enabled the researcher to conduct initial coding and focused coding electronically, linking each code to the relevant section within a transcript for ease of reference. The 'annotations' feature was used to write analytic memos and link these to sections within a transcript. Some examples of memos for one of the subcategories are displayed in Appendix 7. The 'static sets' feature was used to create categories and assign focused codes to categories. Examples of how the software supported coding and analysis processes are included below.

4.4.6 Data Collection, Coding and Analysis

Figure 2 is taken from Charmaz (2010) and illustrates the data collection, coding and analysis procedures involved in Constructivist Grounded Theory. Further detail on how these procedures were followed in this study will now be given.

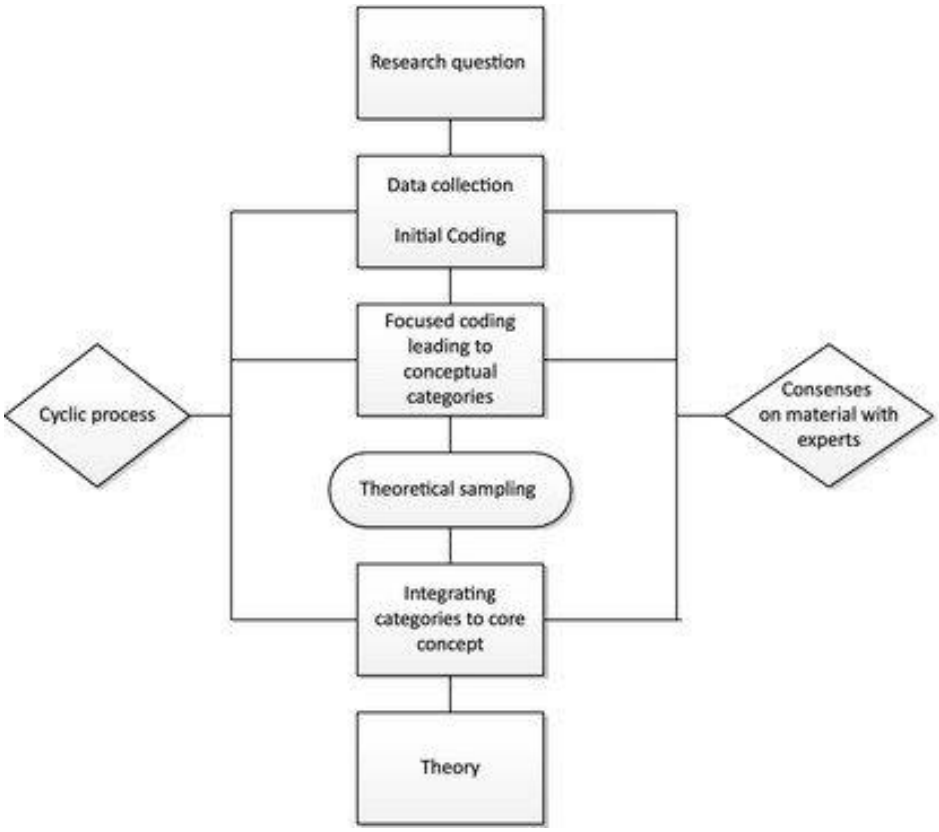


Figure 2. The Grounded Theory Process (Charmaz, 2010)

4.4.7 Initial Coding and Focused Coding

For Cycle 1, the initial coding process involved going through the interview transcripts line by line and assigning one or more initial code for every line of the transcript. *Figure 3* shows an example section of an interview transcript with the initial codes assigned on the right hand side.

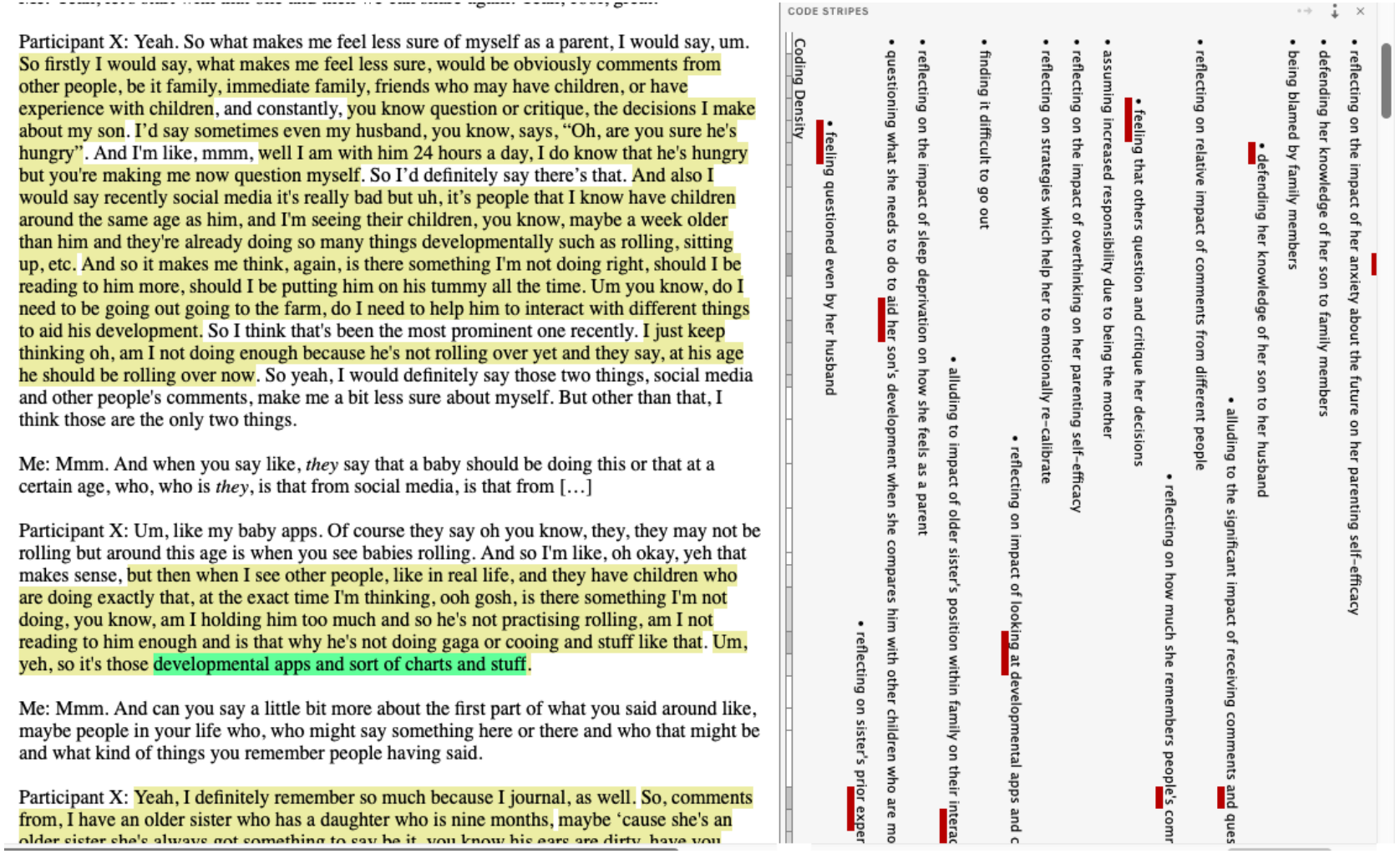


Figure 3. Example Section of Interview Transcript and Initial Codes

The number of different initial codes generated for each of the interviews is shown in *Table 4* in the column labelled ‘codes’. At times an existing initial code was assigned more than once; this is indicated by the column labelled ‘references’ which refers to the total number of times the interview transcript had a code assigned.

Interview No.	Codes	References
Interview transcript 1	95	200
Interview transcript 2	50	81
Interview transcript 3	111	170
Interview transcript 4	101	139
Interview transcript 5	79	79
Interview transcript 6	43	48

Table 4. Number of Initial Codes Assigned Per Transcript

By the end of the initial coding process for Cycle 1, 357 initial codes had been generated. At this stage of analysis the researcher moved away from the software, grouping printed initial codes into thematic clusters and creating a focused code on a post-it note for each cluster. This was then replicated with the software using the ‘higher level code’ drop-down feature, as illustrated in *Figure 4.* At the end of Cycle 1, the 357 initial codes had generated 89 focused codes.

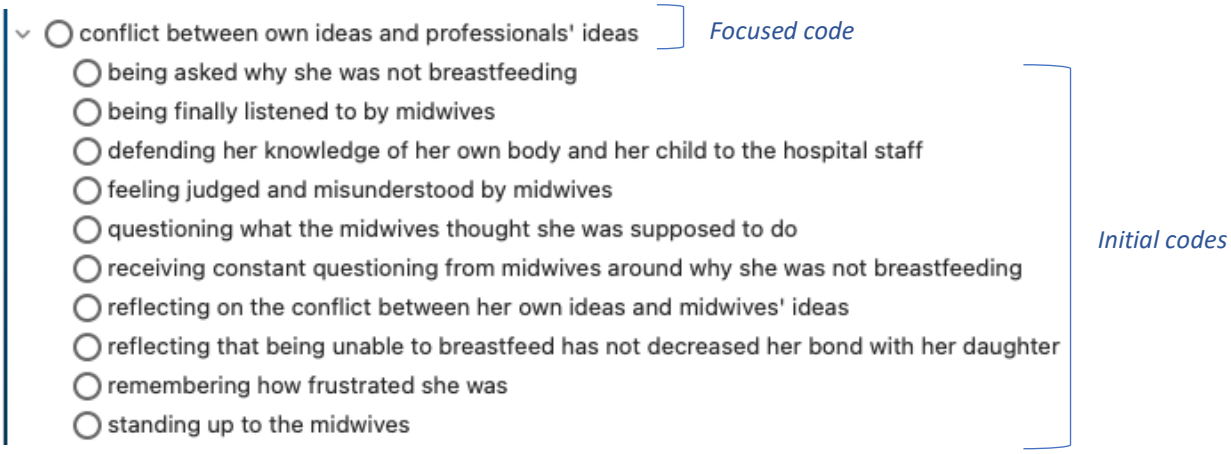


Figure 4. Assigning Initial Codes to Focused Codes Using NVivo

In Cycle 2, initial coding mostly followed the same process as in Cycle 1, apart from lines of transcript which were not relevant to the emerging theory were not coded. *Table 4* above illustrates the number of different initial codes generated for each of the two interviews in Cycle 2, as well as the total number of times each transcript had a code assigned. 122 new initial codes were generated in Cycle 2. In Cycle 2, focused coding took place using the software: after the initial codes had been generated these were assigned either an existing or a new focused code using the 'higher level code' drop-down feature as illustrated above.

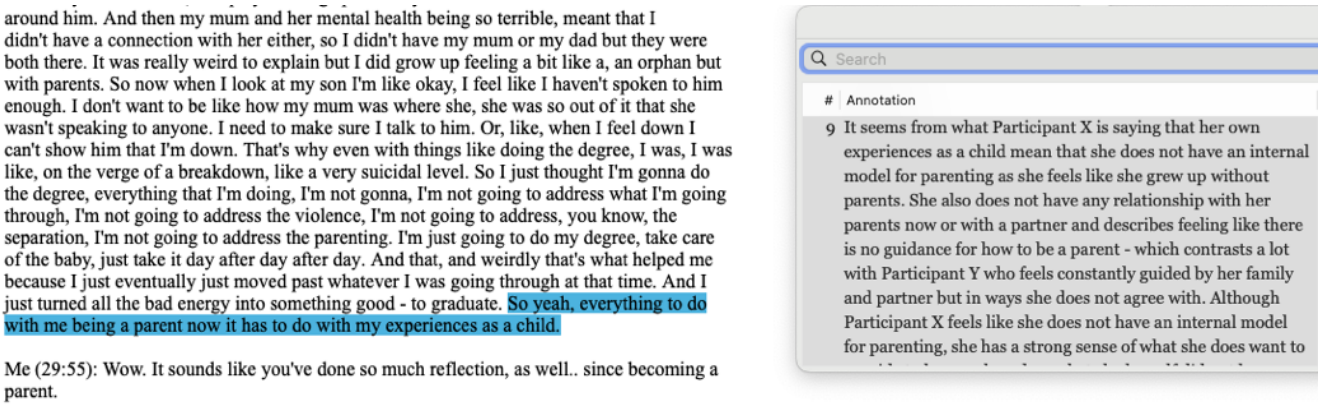
Initial and focused coding processes were discussed and reviewed by the researcher and their supervisor. Focused codes went through several stages of refinement within each phase of coding and analysis. At regular intervals throughout the processes described, emerging focused codes were analysed, compared and related to the transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and had explanatory power. At the end of Cycle 2 there was a total of 107 focused codes.

4.4.8 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is a key feature of Constructivist Grounded Theory and involves selecting new interview participants and questions to fit the emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2006; 2010; 2014). Following the first phase of data collection, coding and analysis, a theme was developing around parenting as part of a couple. This led the researcher to want to explore the experiences of single parents, therefore Cycle 2 consisted of two single parents. Further theoretical sampling took place in Cycle 3 by adapting the interview schedule to include prompts relating to the emerging concepts. All decisions relating to theoretical sampling were discussed and agreed by the researcher and their supervisor.

4.4.9 Analytic Memos and Comparative Methods

In parallel with data collection and coding, analytic memos were used in line with Charmaz's recommendations: to define the properties of codes and categories; to ask questions or provide evidence for these codes and categories; to check for gaps in analysis; and to compare incidents in the data, codes and categories (Charmaz, 2006). Analytic memos were created within the software using the 'annotation' feature; an example is given in *Figure 5.*


around him. And then my mum and her mental health being so terrible, meant that I didn't have a connection with her either, so I didn't have my mum or my dad but they were both there. It was really weird to explain but I did grow up feeling a bit like a, an orphan but with parents. So now when I look at my son I'm like okay, I feel like I haven't spoken to him enough. I don't want to be like how my mum was where she, she was so out of it that she wasn't speaking to anyone. I need to make sure I talk to him. Or, like, when I feel down I can't show him that I'm down. That's why even with things like doing the degree, I was, I was like, on the verge of a breakdown, like a very suicidal level. So I just thought I'm gonna do the degree, everything that I'm doing, I'm not gonna, I'm not going to address what I'm going through, I'm not going to address the violence, I'm not going to address, you know, the separation, I'm not going to address the parenting. I'm just going to do my degree, take care of the baby, just take it day after day after day. And that, and weirdly that's what helped me because I just eventually just moved past whatever I was going through at that time. And I just turned all the bad energy into something good - to graduate. So yeah, everything to do with me being a parent now it has to do with my experiences as a child.

Me (29:55): Wow. It sounds like you've done so much reflection, as well.. since becoming a parent.

Figure 5. Writing Analytic Memos

At the end of Cycle 2, all the analytic memos and focused codes were grouped into thematic clusters within a Word document, leading to the identification of initially 10 core categories. In a “third type of coding” (Charmaz, 2006, p.60), the properties and dimensions of each category were described and the relationships between them were explored. Areas for further investigation were also highlighted. An example is given in *Figure 6.*

CATEGORY 6: HARMONY AND COLLABORATION

What are this category's properties and dimensions so far?

1) Degree of harmony between own hopes and beliefs and those of others

Participant 4 talks about how closely aligned her and her partner's hopes and beliefs are relating to their child. This began even before they had a child with a very strong shared hope to have children. Participant 1 talks about disharmony between her ideas and those of her relatives and describes how she has a strong sense of instinct about how she wants to parent that is very different to what those around her tell her to do. This sense of harmony / disharmony goes across different levels e.g. partner, family, social network etc.

2) Degree of harmony in key relationships

Participant 5 talks about how it is difficult being a single parent but that it was even more difficult parenting her son when she was still with his father due to the inharmonious nature of their relationship. In contrast Participant 3 talks about the high degree of harmony in his and his wife's relationship and even goes so far as to say that "everything emanates from the strength of their relationship".

3) Degree of collaboration in key relationships

Participant 4 and Participant 3 talk about sharing duties, as well as discussing and deciding things together with their partner. Participant 3 also talks about him and his wife jointly recognising their successes as parents. Conversely, Participant 5 talks about "doing it all on her own" and this being very difficult.

Areas to explore further?

- Degree of congruence between own hopes/beliefs and perceived reality

Figure 6. Exploring Properties and Dimensions of Categories

4.4.10 Theoretical Integration and Saturation

In Cycle 3, the three remaining interview transcripts were screened for material which was relevant to the emerging theory. New analytic memos were created within the software then added to the Word document and integrated into the existing categories. As the information emerging from the data fit within the existing categories, no new categories were created and the research was considered to have reached theoretical saturation, where no new information about at least one of the core categories is emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Decisions relating to theoretical integration and saturation were discussed and agreed by the researcher and their supervisor.

4.4.11 Theory Generation

Throughout Cycle 3, focused codes were continually refined and related to the transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and had explanatory power. A coding hierarchy showing the final refined set of focused codes and initial codes is displayed in Appendix 8. In parallel, the categories were also refined and the developing theory was documented throughout its different conceptual stages by creating graphic representations. These are displayed in the chronological sequence in which they were developed in Appendix 9. The graphic representations were revised and discussed by the researcher and their supervisor until a final version of the theory was reached.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

4.5.1 Regulatory Approvals and Protection of Personal Information

Prior to commencing the study, the researcher contacted the Intervention Service Manager at the Council to request permission for conducting the proposed study with residents in the borough. The researcher has full clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and shared a copy of their DBS certificate with the Council. Written permission for the research to go ahead was received from the Council on 19th February 2021 and is displayed in Appendix 10. Ethical approval was sought from the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and proof of ethical approval is displayed in Appendix 11. This was shared with the Council.

Personal information relating to the participants was protected through the following methods:

- participants received information about how their data would be stored securely in line with Tavistock and Council procedures;
- participants received information about how all interview transcripts, memos and notes would be anonymised and kept confidential;
- participants were informed that all sections of the demographic information form were optional and could be left blank if preferred;
- participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research any time up until one month after their interview, and the methodological reasons for this timeframe were explained.

4.5.2 Consent

Participants were asked to give informed consent before participating in the research. The researcher took several steps to ensure that consent was obtained based on a comprehensive understanding of what taking part in the research would entail, including:

- designing an information sheet and consent form that used plain English;
- offering to adapt the information sheet and consent form if for any reason these were not accessible for the participant;
- offering participants an initial meeting in which they could discuss the information sheet and consent form;
- inviting participants to bring someone with them to the initial meeting and to their interview if they wished to;
- following participants' preferences when organising the date, time and location of all meetings.

4.5.3 Cultural Responsiveness and Attention to Power

Due to their previous experience, the researcher was aware that a significant proportion of residents in the borough where the research took place are vulnerable due to social and economic factors (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, displacement) and anticipated that some of the participants may be vulnerable in these ways (Public Health England, 2015). Undertaking this research as part of a professional doctorate at the Tavistock helped the researcher to draw on psychological frameworks applied during other elements of their training in the research interviews. For example, texts such as Schein's work on power imbalances (Schein, 1999; 2011) and the Power Threat Meaning

framework (BPS, 2018), supported the researcher to reflect on their interactions with participants, as well as the content that was shared. Burnham's (2013) model of social GGRRAAACCEEESSS, as well as Sakata's (2021) framework for culturally responsive practice were also used to guide discussions between the researcher and their supervisor.

During the interviews, the researcher aimed to be sensitive and responsive to cultural differences and to attend to power imbalances by:

- following participants' preferences when organising the date, time and location of the interview;
- informing participants at the start of the interview that they could decline to respond to any question with which they were not comfortable;
- informing participants that they could take a break or terminate the interview at any time if they wished to;
- being sensitive to the feelings displayed by the participant throughout the interview;
- responding to the participants' cues and requests.

4.5.4 Mitigating Risk and Promoting Wellbeing

The BPS Code of Ethics states that research should be undertaken with the "aim of avoiding potential risks to psychological well-being, mental health, personal values, or dignity" (BPS, 2009, p.19). Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, it was anticipated that the interviews held some risk of causing distress to participants. In order to mitigate against this risk and minimise any distress, the researcher took the following precautions:

- all interviews were conducted by the researcher, an experienced Trainee Educational Psychologist, and supervised by a research tutor at the Tavistock who is also a qualified Educational Psychologist;
- the researcher's interpersonal style during the interviews was informed by therapeutic ideas, including unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957) and the container-contained relationship (Bion, 1959);
- the interview questions and approach were developed with the aim of being non-judgemental and participants were not asked to rate or evaluate their parenting self-efficacy at any point during the interview.

4.5.5 Debriefing and Signposting

At the end of the interview, each participant was offered up to half an hour to debrief and process the experience of taking part in the interview. Most of the participants took this up and used the space to reflect on how the interview had felt. The researcher also asked the participant if there were any services, supports or resources they may be seeking and shared relevant information where this was requested (details of local health visitor clinics, perinatal support, database of local nurseries etc).

4.6 Validity and Trustworthiness Issues

Qualitative research studies have often been scrutinised by the same validity criteria as quantitative research, with objectivity, reliability and generalizability held as core components of these (Yardley, 2008). As the qualitative literature has grown, thinking around how reliability and validity principles can be met in qualitative research has developed to

reflect its different aims and priorities. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the concept of trustworthiness, suggesting this consists of (i) credibility; (ii) transferability; (iii) dependability; and (iv) confirmability of findings. Creswell (2007) described the following features of qualitative research with high validity: rigorous data collection procedures; an evolving rather than fixed design; a focus on participants' views; use of a recognised paradigm; detailed account of the methods used; validation of the accuracy of the data; persuasive and engaging writing; sensitivity to ethical considerations; and clear description of the researcher's position within the research.

As discussed previously, the majority of research on parenting self-efficacy has been quantitative (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2017). As this is one of the first studies within the field to employ qualitative methods, the researcher wanted to convey high levels of validity and trustworthiness, whilst also showing that, unlike quantitative research, it is neither appropriate or necessary to draw on a unanimous set of criteria when demonstrating these qualities. Yardley suggests that there are many ways in which a study can fulfil the characteristics of good qualitative research and that due to the numerous approaches based on different assumptions and procedures, validity cannot be guaranteed by following a set of guidelines or criteria (Yardley, 2000; 2008; 2017). She suggests that the core quality of qualitative research is to "evoke imaginative experience and reveal new meanings" (Yardley, 2008, p.260) and outlines four sets of characteristics underpinning qualitative studies that are high in validity and trustworthiness; these are displayed below in *Table 5* (Yardley, 2000; 2008).

Characteristics of good (qualitative) research. Essential qualities are shown in bold, with examples of the form each can take shown in italics.
Sensitivity to context *Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participants' perspectives; ethical issues.*
Commitment and rigour *In-depth engagement with topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis.*
Transparency and coherence *Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method; reflexivity.*
Impact and importance *Theoretical (enriching understanding); socio-cultural; practical (for community, policy makers, health workers).*

Table 5. Characteristics of Good (Qualitative) Research (Yardley, 2000, p.219)

Yardley's work resonated with the researcher as it does not prescribe a particular approach but helps researchers to reflect on and justify the methods they use. As such, validity and trustworthiness within the design and implementation of this research will now be thought about in relation to Yardley's four sets of characteristics.

4.6.1 Sensitivity to Context

Validity in qualitative research involves being sensitive to the data and to the context of the data; for example, the researcher should carefully consider the meanings generated during the analysis and avoid imposing pre-conceived categories on the data (Yardley, 2017). The processes involved in the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (e.g. reflecting on prior knowledge and experience, engaging in reflexive practice, and developing and maintaining methodological self-consciousness) supported the researcher to continually explore their own biases and perspectives and embed triangulation of data throughout each stage of data collection, coding and analysis, for example through writing analytic memos, constant

comparison methods, and making use of a reflective diary and regular supervision (Charmaz, 2006; 2014).

4.6.2 Commitment and Rigour

Yardley (2017) proposes that thorough data collection, expertise and skills in employing methods, and detailed, in-depth analyses help to demonstrate commitment and rigour. In the case of Grounded Theory studies, she suggests that theoretically sampling a wide enough range of people increases validity, alongside developing a detailed description and explanation of the study topic (Yardley, 2008, p.258). As described above, this research followed the rigorous procedures of Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014); included a substantial sample size of nine participants who represented diverse characteristics and a wide range of experiences; and led to a detailed description and explanation of the topic.

4.6.3 Transparency and Coherence

In a qualitative study with high validity, the reader should be able to see clearly how the interpretation was derived from the data (Yardley, 2017). Furthermore, when employing Grounded Theory methodology, the validity of the data is greatly increased by reaching the point of theoretical saturation (Birks & Mills, 2015). This study aimed to create transparency around how theory was generated by systematically recording and reporting each stage of coding and analysis using NVivo, a specific computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Cycles of data collection, coding and analysis continued until theoretical saturation was felt to have been reached by both the researcher and their supervisor; the generated

theory then underwent further revisions until it was considered to have sufficient explanatory power (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

4.6.4 Impact and Importance

Yardley suggests that for qualitative research to have validity, it needs to "generate knowledge that is useful – whether in terms of practical utility, generating hypotheses, or even changing how we think about the world" (Yardley, 2017, p.295). Constructivist Grounded Theory acknowledges that what is generated is *a* theory that relates to a specific set of data and to the specific context of that data (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Although this approach does not allow researchers to claim generalizability of their findings, its capacity to generate useful knowledge is upheld by its rigorous methods, which enable recipients to ascertain how relevant or adaptable for their own situation the findings might be (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). By closely following Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology and reporting on this in detail, this research hopes to offer hypotheses and explanations that can shed light on, and be thought about in relation to, a range of situations and contexts.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has given an overview of the context and rationale for this research, including the research purpose, aims, and questions, and explored the beliefs that informed its theoretical position. The ontology and epistemology have been described and reflected on in relation to the implementation of Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology. The relationships between this approach and the traditions of pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry have been considered and its rigorous procedures have

been illustrated through detailed descriptions and examples, including reflections on developing and maintaining methodological self-consciousness. A range of ethical considerations were presented, demonstrating how reflexive practice underpinned each step of the research process. Finally, the validity and trustworthiness of this research was examined using Yardley's characteristics of good qualitative research (Yardley, 2000).

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, an overarching view of the proposed theory will be outlined, followed by an in-depth exploration of each category. Throughout, relationships between the different categories will be considered and pictorial representations of the model will be provided.

5.2 Transactional Model for the Development of Parenting Self-efficacy: An Overview

The proposed theory offers a transactional model for how parenting self-efficacy develops in first-time parents. The model focuses on intrapsychic and physiological factors relating to the individual and how these interact with the environment and other people when the individual becomes a parent. These interactions lead to different psychological processes, which have been clustered into four distinct areas: *power and positioning; understanding and validation*; *connection and belonging*; and *congruence, harmony and collaboration*. In this model, the construct of parenting self-efficacy is underpinned by these four clusters of psychological processes and evolves over time in response to the dynamic interplay between the different categories. The transactional model for the development of parenting self-efficacy is presented in *Illustration 1*.

Illustration ***Number 1***

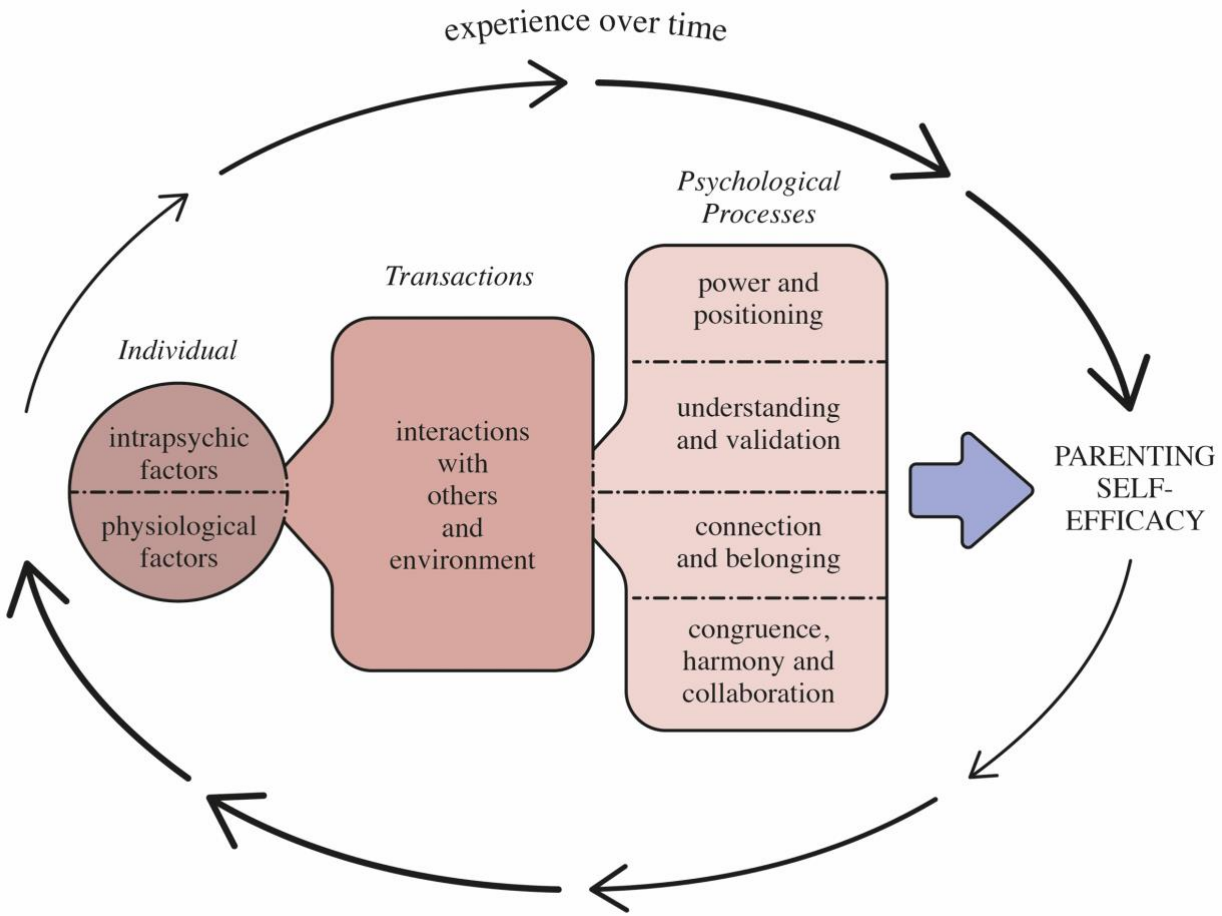


Illustration 1. Transactional Model for the Development of Parenting Self-efficacy

5.2.1 Intrapsychic Factors and Physiological Factors

In *Illustration 1.*, intrapsychic factors and physiological factors are represented by two halves of a circle, separated by a permeated line. These factors relate to the individual and are closely intertwined. For example, intrapsychic factors may influence physiological factors and vice versa, as represented by *Illustration 2.*

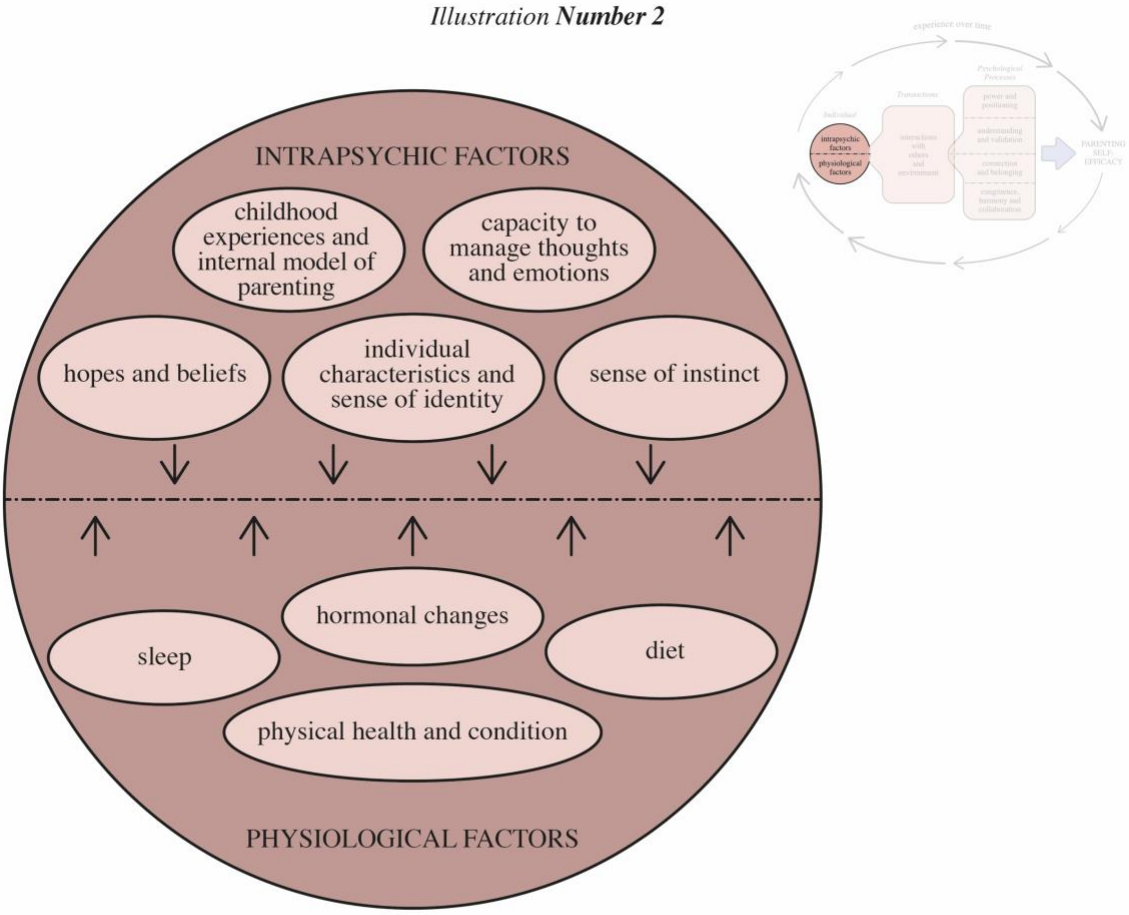


Illustration 2. Intrapsychic Factors and Physiological Factors

The intrapsychic factors identified in *Illustration 2.* exist within an individual before they become a parent and may evolve over time in people who are not parents. However, becoming a parent (or preparing to become a parent) can trigger both conscious and unconscious intrapsychic responses, for example reflection on one's hopes and beliefs, or instinctive reactions. In a different but parallel way, becoming a parent typically leads to physiological changes, for example to one's sleep levels or hormones. These evolving intrapsychic and physiological factors influence first-time parents' interactions with other people and the environment as they shift into their new role.

5.2.2 Interactions with Others and Environment

An individual becomes a first-time parent within a specific set of circumstances. Factors such as the socio-political context, legislation and social norms all contribute to parents' experiences, as do their living conditions, financial resources, level of support, and lifestyle. Interactions with others take place within, and are influenced by, this specific set of circumstances. For example, parents have varied access to relationships with family members, professionals, and social networks, and receive different types of feedback during their interactions.

Interactions between a parent and their child also take place within, and are influenced by, their specific set of circumstances. Factors such as the child's health, level of development, and individual characteristics all relate to the wider context and affect the feedback a parent receives from their child and from others around them.

5.2.3 Interplay Between *Intrapsychic Factors and Physiological Factors* and *Interactions with Others and Environment*

The transactional model positions parents' experiences within the wider context whilst also highlighting the interplay between the interactions a parent has with the external world and how they relate these to themselves. For example, two parents could have a similar set of interactions but perceive and internalise their experiences in contrasting ways due to differences in intrapsychic factors and/or physiological factors. In *Illustration 1.*, this is shown by a permeated line between *Intrapsychic factors/Physiological factors* and *Interactions with others and environment* to indicate the multidirectional influences between these.

5.2.4 Psychological Processes

The interplay between the intrapsychic and physiological factors relating to a first-time parent, and their interactions with other people and their environment, gives rise to a range of psychological processes. For example, a parent with health complications who has difficulties managing their thoughts may experience a particular interaction with a health visitor in a way that decreases their sense of understanding and validation, while a similar interaction may leave another parent with a different reaction. How a parent experiences these psychological processes can feed back into their interactions with other people and their environment, and even to some of the intrapsychic and physiological factors relating to them as an individual. This is depicted in *Illustration 1.* by permeated lines interlinking each of these categories. In the transactional model, psychological processes are clustered into four distinct areas: *power and positioning; understanding and validation*; *connection and belonging*; and *congruence,*

harmony and collaboration. These four clusters interact with each other and together they underpin the construct of parenting self-efficacy. This is shown in *Illustration 1.* by permeated lines between the four clusters and an arrow pointing towards parenting self-efficacy.

5.2.5 Experience Over Time

Parenting self-efficacy evolves over time in response to the dynamic interplay between intrapsychic and physiological factors, interactions with others and environment, and psychological processes. The same parent can have a greater or lesser sense of parenting self-efficacy at different times. For example, a parent's psychological processes could be altered by a new stage in their child's development, a change in their own physical health, or a particular comment from another person, leading to a shift in parenting self-efficacy. This is depicted in *Illustration 1.* by permeated lines representing multidirectional influences between the first seven categories, with all of these situated within a sphere representing the final category, *experience over time*.

Each of the eight categories in the transactional model for the development of parenting self-efficacy will now be explored in more detail.

5.3 Intrapsychic Factors

This category refers to the internal psychological experiences an individual brings to their interactions. These can be both conscious and unconscious. Collectively termed 'intrapsychic factors', they exist within an individual before they become a parent but on becoming a

parent (or preparing to become a parent) may become activated in new ways. Five subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.3.1 Childhood Experiences and Internal Model of Parenting

Many of the participants talked about their own experiences of childhood in relation to their individual approach and ideas about parenting. Relationships with caregivers and experiences of childhood were spoken about by some participants in terms of wanting to recreate these for their own child, for example Participant 4 described wanting to share the values her parents had given her with her daughter while Participant 5 summed up her perspective in the following way:

"I've got the best parental relationship I want. So I have to put that one in my children as well."

Other participants talked about aspects of their childhood which they wanted to avoid repeating with their own child, for example Participant 2 felt that difficult experiences with her own mother had deterred her from becoming a parent for many years and that much of her current approach had been consciously developed in direct resistance to her own experiences.

Although contrasting perspectives were presented, they seem to suggest that these participants have an internal model of parenting that they may want to recreate or reject based on their own experiences, and that influences their own behaviour as a parent. However, this was not the case for all participants. Participant 6 shared that she feels she lacks any sense of

guidance as due to her parents' mental health difficulties she felt *"like an orphan… but with parents"*.

5.3.2 Sense of Instinct

The idea that many of the participants have an internal model of parenting was supported by references to a sense of instinct about how to parent their child. For example, when talking about being told to sleep train her baby, Participant 1 said *"it just didn't feel right in my soul"*. Participant 7 spoke about how his default ways of reacting were *"not particularly conscious"* and reminded him of how he interacted with his younger siblings when he was a child. Participant 4 described how quickly she was able to understand her daughter:

"During those first five days in hospital we have linked a lot, and I understand her much easier than I could ever imagine. So you understand instantly when she's hungry or when she's upset or when she's happy."

5.3.3 Capacity to Manage Thoughts and Emotions

Several of the participants spoke about managing their thoughts and emotions during the interviews. This area of parents' internal experiences appeared to relate strongly to their interactions with others, for example Participant 3 talked about himself and his wife supporting each other to manage their thoughts and emotions, whereas Participant 1 described how criticism from family members had led her to develop coping strategies such as journaling.

These accounts suggest a certain fluidity to this construct, which is echoed by comments made by Participant 4 and Participant 7 about the impact of sleep and diet on their capacity to

regulate their thoughts and emotions. However, other participants indicated this is a more fixed aspect of their experience. For example, Participant 5 linked it to how she was raised by her own parents and to her culture:

"You know that encouragement from my parents, you can do it [...] so have confidence in yourself that you can do it. When you have confidence in yourself, I'm not sure, not anything else will not put you down. Whatever challenges you face you come back from it."

"You know…we are from Africa, so we are not born here. So we have faced a lot of challenges that didn't shake us back […] back home where we come from we don't have benefits, we struggle to take care ourselves […] so we have to be on top."

5.3.4 Hopes and Beliefs

Some participants made a connection between their capacity to manage their thoughts and emotions, and their hopes and beliefs. For example, Participant 4 talked about how motherhood was something she had desperately wanted and how knowing this helped her to focus on trying to enjoy her daughter, despite the challenges of parenthood.

In addition, links were made between parents' self-efficacy and their hopes for themselves or their child. During her interview, Participant 6 spoke about her preferred future for herself and her child and the impact of feeling she was making steps towards this:

"The most I can do […] is just to make sure I have a good career, so that he has someone to look up to. And also, as he grows up, it would be the norm for him to see, oh, my parents… my parent, my mum, she goes to work every day, she comes home to me… and that's just how life goes. But we're happy […] I think maybe when I managed to graduate from that degree of mine […] I thought to myself, I managed to kind of not bring down his mood from my own mood while I was doing like, my dissertation and things for my undergrad. That was a proud moment because I was doing something for myself. And also… doing things for him."

Religious and spiritual beliefs were also spoken about in relation to parents' feelings about themselves in role. For example, Participant 1 shared that her faith is a source of strength for

her and Participant 9 described how her beliefs give her a sense of purpose and confidence in herself as a mother:

"As a parent, religiously we're taught that, as…the right of my child, first and foremost, that my child is given to me as a blessing…and she belongs to God, but she's my child that on this Earth I do the best for her. And the rewards I will gain from looking after her, and especially a child with needs, the rewards that I will gain for that. So not only am I doing what I do for her on a daily basis but I have that belief that for me, if I'm the best mum for her, I will get rewarded for that in the Hereafter. And also, the reward of what a mum's entitlement is…like in this world, what we believe in my religion, is that above anybody, any relation, a mum comes first."

5.3.5 Individual Characteristics and Sense of Identity

The above quote emphasises how Participant 9's religious beliefs and gender interact to give her a very strong purpose as a mother. The influence of individual characteristics and sense of identity is also apparent in the following extract from Participant 8:

"Coming from a black family, there was a sense of you having to work harder, which hasn't really left me […] most probably, I would probably… sort of be teaching him how hard he will need to work in a way, even though I guess things really have changed in some sense but that probably will be part of my parenting, I think."

These examples demonstrate some of the ways in which individual characteristics can form part of how someone constructs their identity as a parent, as well as how this impacts their interactions with the external world. It is suggested that this influence is bidirectional, for example Participant 7 notes that practical differences such as working from home during lockdown have *"more power in shaping identity than I thought they had"* as he now feels less of a distinction between his identity as a father and the other parts of his life.

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 2* above.

5.4 Physiological Factors

This category refers to the physiological experiences an individual has. Similarly to intrapsychic factors, people have different physiological experiences over time but becoming a parent typically triggers particular changes. Four subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.4.1 Physical Health and Condition

Some participants spoke about how they had been affected by changes in their physical health and condition following the birth of their child. For example, Participant 4 spoke about the impact of having a C-section delivery:

"When I had the baby, I did not even think about how my physical circumstances would affect me. So things like the fact that I had a C-section for example, it meant that I needed a lot more support than I had. I needed people to help me use, like, because with a C-section they cut through everything - your muscles, your skin, like everything, so you can't even sit up by yourself, you need someone to pull you up if you were just lying down. That meant when the baby cries at night, someone needs to pull you up to kind of help you breastfeed you know, or certain things like that. Or even to eat, cooking was such a difficult thing, um when I first had him."

Participant 4 described how she had ended up with long-term mastitis after being repeatedly told to continue trying to breastfeed, despite not being able to produce milk:

"Every shift, change of shift. There was one nurse coming to me asking me why I was not breastfeeding the baby […] They put me the, you know the breast, the breast pump… they put me on that and said, this will help you, it's gonna make the milk come […] It was one of the worst experiences I've ever had, you know, in a UK hospital. They were just pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing … what for. I ended up with a, a mastitis, that still hasn't recovered completely."

5.4.2 Hormonal Changes

In the two examples above, physiological factors appeared to have long-lasting effects on parents. However, other factors were described as having a more transient influence. For instance, some of the participants described how hormonal changes affected their mood, suggesting a relationship between physiological and intrapsychic factors. Participant 4 spoke about noticing the impact of hormonal changes on her capacity to regulate her thoughts and emotions:

"What I've noticed is that when my period is coming then it might almost get me a bit crazy so I'm becoming emotional and sometimes I, I hope, I try not to transmit it to [my daughter] that I'm a bit more anxious, of what's going on."

5.4.3 Sleep

Most of the participants spoke about sleep deprivation and the significant impact of this on their lives. Participant 7 said he felt lack of sleep has altered his perception, making it *"foggy,"* and that he feels like he is not totally in control of his memories. Participant 4 described the interaction between her energy levels and capacity to manage her thoughts and emotions:

"You are more confident when you are full of energy […] Definitely sleep helps […] But if you're tired you just start, you just start doubting everything that you do, say what am I doing wrong, is she taking it the right way…"

5.4.4 Diet

As well as sleep, Participant 7 said that making sure he ate enough had an impact on how he felt:

"I focus a lot on, kind of, when I, I focus a lot on kind of eating, sleeping enough, because I know I'm going to feel worse if I don't."

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 2* above.

5.5 Interactions with Others and Environment

This category encompasses the social interactions a parent has as well as interactions with their environment. Four subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.5.1 Interactions Between a Parent and their Child

All of the participants spoke about interactions with their child and the significant impact of these on how they felt about themselves as parents. For example, Participant 2 and Participant 4 talked about the influence of feeling they have a strong bond with their child and Participant 3 described feeling a sense of compatibility between himself, his wife and his child:

"We're fortunate enough that so far, certainly, it appears we've got a kid that, you know, fits in with, in some way, shape or form, with, you know, our own sort of personality traits so […] it's a, b, and c… but it's not a, b, and you know, p, for instance. So, even at this early stage […] we can see attributes of both of us in him, and that certainly makes it easier."

Some parents shared examples of times when they felt a sense of disconnect with their child. For example, Participant 2 spoke about the impact of such moments on how she feels as a parent:

"Sometimes if I see him that he refuse me even to come to kiss me or something it make me to feel bad, or to feel that maybe I was not good with him. […] when I put him some limits for something I saw and I'm seeing him very upset after."

5.5.2 Interactions Between a Parent and their Partner

Several of the participants talked about being able to share responsibilities and practical tasks with their partner, and the impact of this. For example, Participant 4 spoke about how she did not realise how much she relied on her husband's help until a recent trip without him, observing how difficult she had found this. Participant 6, a single parent, described the challenges of taking care of her son without practical support from anyone, making a connection between levels of support and intrapsychic and physiological factors:

"You really do feel like you have no sense of control over your life, or over yourself. You feel like you can't even sleep when you want to sleep, eat when you want to eat, you know, go to the bathroom, take a shower, certain type of basic things for your life, for your day to day life, is taken away from you. These things really affect your mental health […]"

Other participants made links between support from a partner and psychological processes such as understanding and validation. For example, Participant 3 talked about himself and his wife *"gaining assurance"* from each other during some of their conversations. Participant 7 also spoke about the beneficial impact of discussing things with his partner:

"I think probably talking about it with my wife is the most fruitful thing because I think, whether it's just doing what I wanted to do anyway, or doing something else, it definitely makes me think it through, like one level deeper… rather than just kind of taking on what I

would do instinctually which is often kind of obviously what I've been brought up with… but is probably always quite good to check that that's still what I would want to do."

Some participants referred to triadic interactions involving themselves and their partner and the capacity for these to trigger emotional responses. For example, Participant 2 described how certain interactions between herself, her child and her partner can make her feel jealous, while Participant 1 suggested that her husband questions her more when they are around other family members, leading her to feel less confident.

5.5.3 Other Social Interactions

Most of the participants spoke about social interactions with family members and how these affected them. For example, Participant 7 talked about getting practical support from his mother, such as help with household tasks and childcare, which had a direct impact on his energy levels and generated a sense of collaboration. Interactions with friends and wider social circles were also referred to and observed to influence psychological processes such as parents' sense of connection and belonging. For Participant 6, who no longer had contact with her family or her son's father, a relationship with a friend had been particularly significant:

"The thing that helped me was one of my friends always coming to check on me […] she was always coming through to kind of say hello, you know, just see how we're doing, play with my son, and it didn't exactly give me a break because I was always there, she doesn't know anything about taking care of kids, but it helped me on, like, mentally, because of the fact that there's just another human being there to talk to, to feel normal with, this is someone that was in my life before having the baby, not someone that just came in after. So, it made me feel like I was starting to get my identity back because you know there's someone there to kind of share my memories."

Participant 1 explained that for her, online interactions with others, such as following certain social media accounts, have a really positive effect:

"I think what's been helping me feel more sure as a parent is genuinely certain Instagram accounts that I follow […] they just helped me so much in terms of just not putting a lot of pressure on myself."

References were also made to interactions with professionals and with an array of other people and sources of information, including books, blogs and apps. Participant 3 alluded to this:

"There is a vast majority of well intention. There is a cascade of advice that you receive from all directions before, during […] and after pregnancy."

5.5.4 Interactions Between a Parent and their Environment

The examples given demonstrate the varied types of interactions parents can have with others. Similarly, differences in parents' interactions with the environment were evident. For example, Participant 6 talked about the impact of her financial situation on how she feels as a parent:

"So, it goes back to, like, I had my son in the middle of my degree, so I don't really have a job right now, and I don't get childcare money coming in from his father… I don't have it from my family or anything either, so it's just me and it's government money basically. And then that makes me feel a certain way as a parent because I feel like, oh, I'm not giving him everything he really needs. I can't even pay enough to take him nursery, where there's other people, or I can't get him all the toys that I want or the clothes that I want to give him."

Participant 7 also acknowledged the influence of financial resources:

"What really helps, I think, is having money and the kind of space to be able to kind of buy your way out of mistakes. And knowing that you can do that."

Several participants spoke about aspects of their lifestyle, for example Participant 3 described how his stage of life and position in his career allow him to make choices about how he spends his time that feel congruent with his priorities:

"You get where all of your priorities change […] I'm comfortable with where I'm at in my career […] and as a result of that, I'm a lot more at ease and a lot more open, thankfully, to just spend time with [my son] and not feel like I'm, you know, I'm short-changing anyone."

Some of the participants talked about their anxieties around safety in their local area and how this made them feel about raising their child. For example, Participant 1 said:

"It affects the way I feel because I'm thinking about the future, I'm thinking about okay, you know, I don't really want to raise him in London, there's so much knife crime, gang crime, I'd rather be outside of London. So sometimes it makes me feel a bit anxious."

Participant 8 described feeling similar and highlighted the interplay between interactions with the environment and individual characteristics:

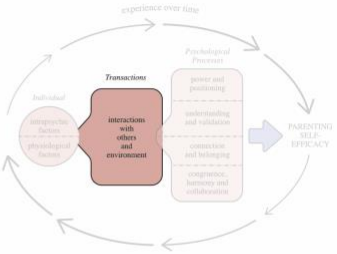
"I feel like I'm quite aware of having a black son, as opposed to a daughter […] I guess that's part of the whole moving and wanting to be somewhere that's better, safer."

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic was also referred to by parents. Participant 8 felt that having her husband working from home during the pandemic had been beneficial for her and her son, while Participant 4 spoke about how pandemic-related restrictions had impacted her capacity to provide different opportunities for her daughter:

"With the Coronavirus and stuff we are not really allowed to go out and get together […] It's tough, sometimes makes you feel powerless."

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 3* below.

Illustration ***Number 3***



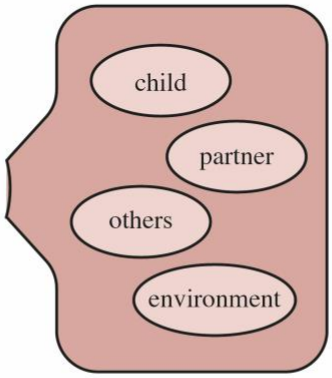


Illustration 3. Interactions with Others and Environment

5.6 Power and Positioning

The interactions described by participants gave rise to four categories which each consist of a cluster of psychological processes. The first of these is *power and positioning*. This category refers to how parents position themselves and feel positioned by others and their environment, and to the power dynamics involved in these processes. Two subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.6.1 Power and Positioning in Parents' Interactions with the Environment

The examples given above demonstrate how parents can become positioned in different ways during interactions with their environment. Diverse factors such as career level, access to financial resources, and government legislation appeared to influence the degree of power participants felt they had over their circumstances. Parents with a greater sense of power spoke about having the freedom to make choices that were congruent with their hopes and values, whereas parents in a position of less power appeared to experience a tension between the kind of parent they wanted to be and the kind of parent they felt like they were. Participant 8's comment about the intersectionality between her son's race and gender highlighted the interplay between interactions with the environment and individual characteristics, hinting at possible effects of structural inequalities on parenting self-efficacy.

5.6.2 Power and Positioning in Parents' Interactions with Others

Individual characteristics were also spoken about by Participant 6, who described how she was positioned by her family for having her son with someone outside of their culture, and the impact of this:

"My family didn't really want anything to do with me because …because my son as you can see is mixed race basically. So, I went out of the culture. So I felt as though I was not doing very good as a parent because I had lost a lot of connections that my son should have growing up… like, aunties, uncles, father, cousins, things like that."

Some of the participants spoke about feeling positioned in relation to gender roles. For example, Participant 6 felt she had more responsibility as a mother, while Participant 7 described feeling a difference in status as a father:

"[My wife] is kind of the go to point for confidence, safety, which sometimes… I wouldn't say hurts, but, it's a bit disappointing… that I don't get, have that status but I think that's just how it is and how the world works, or like a healthy mother daughter relationship works."

Other power dynamics were also referred to in relation to developing parenting self-efficacy. For example, Participant 1 talked about how her older sister constantly told her what to do with her son, reflecting that perhaps this was *"because she's an older sister"*. In addition, several parents spoke about how they had felt during interactions with professionals. For example, Participant 8 described feeling unable to challenge medical professionals:

"I had gone to see the doctor, it must have been for immunisations […] And I remember that the nurse or doctor there, she must have asked me about three times [if I was] breastfeeding […] and afterwards I was thinking, I should have said, why are you asking this so many times? But you never really feel like that with medical professionals, you never really feel that you can […] challenge those moments."

She also spoke about the impact of paperwork from health visitors:

"[We] got this form to fill out. So I think it was possibly 9 months and then there's all these stages that you tick to […] I mean it was a tick list of, I don't know, can they do X, can they do Y, I don't know, different skills. And I guess, if your child is doing those things, then you're, you feel pretty good and you feel sure of yourself, but then if your child is not doing those things, then it will work completely the opposite way."

Participant 8 went on to explain that some of the parents she knew had experienced significant anxiety or guilt about aspects of their parenting or their child's development following these types of interactions, while she felt she had managed to hold on to her belief that every child is different. Participant 9 also referred to the influence of mindset when describing a very challenging interaction with a doctor:

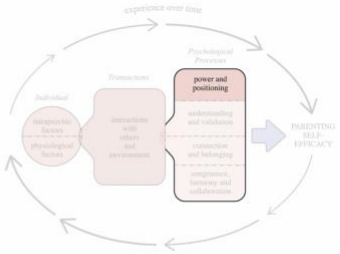
"I had [my daughter] at that point and we went for an appointment, and he was like, well didn't you know about [your daughter's] condition. And I was like, I did, and we obviously decided to continue. And he was like, yeah but did you not realise the kind of life you're

giving her […] and then he continued even more and he's like, next time round if you get pregnant and they tell you, he goes, don't continue […] that was probably the one, more than anyone, that has always kind of just stuck in the back of my head. Um… for a doctor to say that… and those were very harsh and hurtful things… and again, I think… it all goes back to mindset. And I think again I'm quite strong-willed when it comes to my daughter, just because I have to be… and if I took that as a negative, that would really have messed with my head."

These examples demonstrate how parents can experience feeling positioned, or position themselves, into roles associated with differing levels of power, responsibility, or vulnerability. Some of the participants described feeling that intrapsychic factors such as their beliefs had helped to protect them when they were placed in a position of less power, while others suggested that these types of interactions had an influence on intrapsychic factors. This interplay between interactions with others, intrapsychic factors, and psychological processes such as *power and positioning*, is central to the transactional model for the development of parenting self-efficacy.

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 4* below.

Illustration ***Number 4***



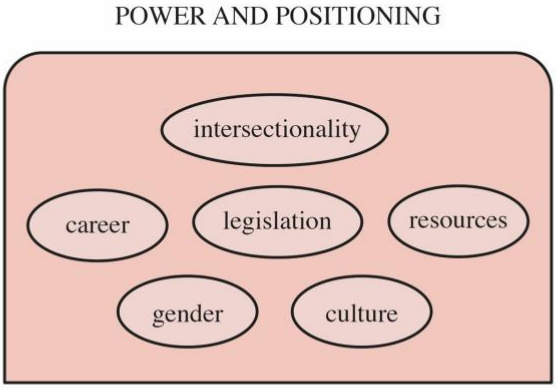


Illustration 4. Power and Positioning

5.7 Understanding and Validation

In this model, the four clusters of psychological processes are inter-related. The second cluster of processes, *understanding and validation*, has a clear link with the previous category, as experiences which position parents with differing levels of power can have a direct impact on their sense of feeling validated and understood. Two subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.7.1 Feeling Understood

During her interview, Participant 9 contrasted the experience outlined above with her interactions with a particular neurosurgeon. From her description, it appears that she felt he positioned her as an expert in her own life, which made her feel understood and helped her to start developing confidence in herself:

"I remember the first time I met [my daughter's] neurosurgeon […] and he said to me, he goes, I'm not going to sit here and tell you the pros and cons [of continuing the pregnancy] because the fact that you're in my office, it's because your decision is already made. So he goes, my job now, is to give your daughter the best life possible […] And I…that was the first time when I was pregnant I left an appointment thinking, I've got this, I can do this."

Participant 1 also talked about the impact of having opportunities to feel heard and accepted, without feeling judged:

"She hasn't got a child and she's not married, either, but she just understands. She doesn't understand on a, with regards to having the experience of it, but she's such a good listener, that I feel like I can just air out how I'm feeling, no judgements, you know, she just hears me out. She doesn't offer solutions, she just hears me out and it's what I need."

In contrast, Participant 6 explained how she got the sense that others do not understand her situation:

"You still have that feeling that people don't understand, because they've not lived through your life and you, you spend a lot of time explaining what's happened that you can't even go into how you feel properly."

5.7.2 Feeling Validated

Several parents talked about the influence of their interactions on whether they felt validated. For example, Participant 1 described how she felt reassured by encountering other parents who had had similar experiences on social media:

"I feel like I've been reassured by the people that I follow on Instagram saying that you're, you're not the only one who feels that way."

Participant 9 commented on how she experiences positive feedback from family members and professionals:

"Everyone's like, she's doing really well. Like even family have, like my side of the family have always said it. But when you hear like the physio saying it, or you hear nursery saying it, that definitely kind of gives you that bit of validation, that I think really helps."

Participant 7 made a distinction between how he felt during interactions with a friend who was not a parent compared to during interactions with people with shared experience:

"I think talking to other people who felt similar is helpful […] I'm kind of starting to acquire other dads within my circle of friends. I think that's helpful and comforting because it kind of makes you feel less alone […] I have one good friend that I can see still a lot […] but for weeks and weeks and weeks, or like whenever we met, he just couldn't imagine what would take so much time. He just kind of thought, it's quite relaxed having a baby […] I suppose that's what's nice about having friends who have a mutual understanding and a connection… if there's like, if they don't really get like what's 90% of my life now, it's just one step further away and you need to work harder to bring your difference together."

The extracts given describe some of the different ways in which parents develop, or don't develop, a sense of feeling understood and validated. They also highlight some of the inter-relationships between this and the other clusters of psychological processes. For example,

Participant 7's quote above nicely links *understanding and validation* with the next category, *connection and belonging*.

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 5* below.

Illustration ***Number 5***

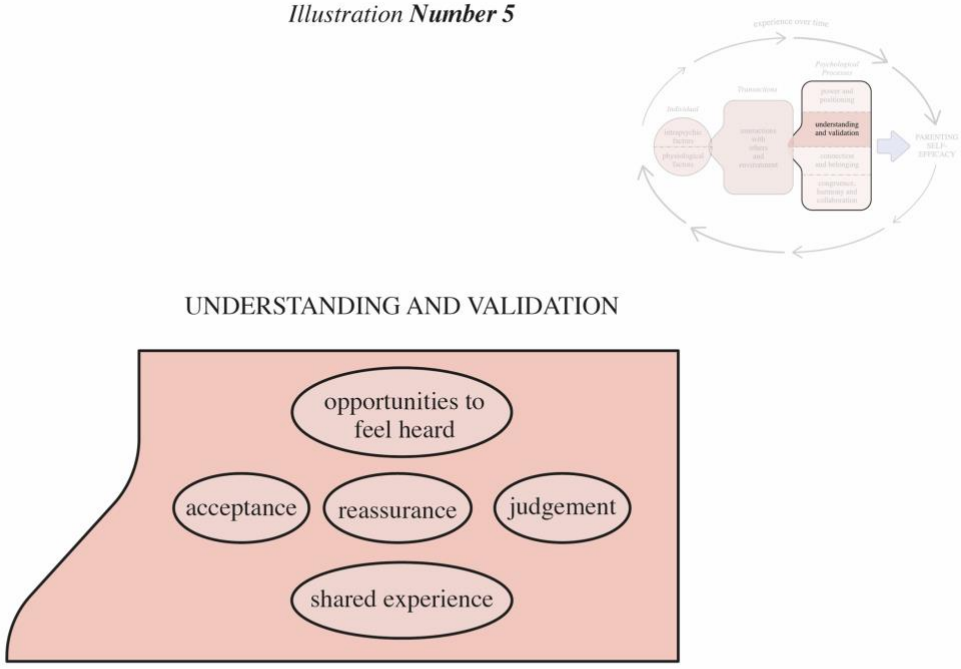


Illustration 5. Understanding and Validation

5.8 Connection and Belonging

This category refers to a parent's sense of belonging and connection with others. Two subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.8.1 Sense of Belonging

Similar to the sentiments expressed by Participant 7, Participant 1 talked about how she had lost her sense of belonging within a previous group of friends since their lives became less compatible, referring to how she felt after not being invited to one of their birthday parties:

"That actually really hurt me. I understood why I can't take him to a bar and he's not taking the bottle so I can't even leave him at home with my husband. But yeah, it just made me feel a bit down actually, a little bit lonely and isolated thinking oh wow like, I'm not even being invited to birthdays anymore just because I have a child."

This example demonstrates how parents' sense of connection and belonging interact with individual characteristics relating to themselves and their social circle. Both Participant 1 and Participant 7 talked about being relatively young and the first within their friendship circles to have a child. In contrast, Participant 3 spoke about the benefits of being the last in his group of friends to become a parent:

"We're like the last of […] my respective groups of friends to have children, which is great because you basically get gifted everything […] fortunately, [my son] does have a bit of a peer group, in terms of our friends, there's […] at least half a dozen kids that are like between the ages of, you know, where he's at and two years old."

Participant 1 later referred explicitly to the interaction between belonging and sense of identity in the following extract about attending a parent group:

"When I'm there, I don't really feel like, although the attendees, the parents are super friendly, but they just don't seem like my kind of people, so I don't really talk to them."

There was also an absence of belonging in the way Participant 2 spoke about her experiences of attending groups:

"I'm not that keen on [interacting with other parents] to be honest, I'm not that social […] I don't really like or I'm not so keen to meet new people or to make new friends. I don't know, this is me."

Although Participant 1 and Participant 2 both described experiencing a lack of belonging, it seems that Participant 1 is seeking but not finding this, whereas Participant 2 appears to suggest it is not in her nature to want to belong. There is therefore a sense that lack of belonging may be more likely to impact Participant 1's parenting self-efficacy, due to how it interacts with intrapsychic factors such as her hopes and beliefs, and sense of identity. This again highlights the interplay between intrapsychic factors, interactions with others, and the psychological processes that underpin parenting self-efficacy in this model.

5.8.2 Feeling Connected with Others

Some of the extracts presented bring focus to the relationship between a parent's sense of connection with others and their parenting self-efficacy. For example, Participant 3 described the impact of feeling a strong sense of attachment and attunement with his son:

"In terms of, you know, how you know you're sure [of yourself as a parent], you take your cues from the kid, really, that's the best, even though they can't say a single word, their expressions and their behaviour is a way of, if you watch closely and you listen carefully, it's a very good indicator of […] if you're going on the right path, basically. Because they're, even though they can't say a word, or at least can't say a word at this point, you know, how they're feeling is pretty much either written on their face or in what they do."

He also expressed how he feels that the source of his parenting self-efficacy stems from the strong connection between him and his wife:

"I mean it will be our 10th anniversary of being together in November, so if we weren't together for that long and we didn't know each other so well […] then we wouldn't have been in a position whereby we can say well actually, that doesn't fit either of us so we're not going to do it, or actually yeah that might be an idea so we'll give it a try, but if it works – great, if it doesn't, it doesn't. So I think it's very much, I guess the short answer is […] that strength or that confidence comes from the strength of the relationship between myself and my wife, our relationship first, and then everything kind of emanates from that."

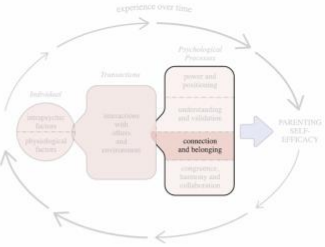
In contrast, Participant 6 talked about losing attachments with most of her family and friends and how this could not be replaced by support from professionals:

"I feel like there's something that, like, you know, no matter how you try to help us, like… do you know how there's support workers and there's health visitors and there's this and there's that, they are people who are just doing their job, like you know they're not your friends, they care enough to be in this job, and they want to help you but there's so much, so many rules around what they can and can't do, that they can't really support you the way that you need them to."

In these examples, links are made between parents' sense of belonging and connection with others, and their parenting self-efficacy. Different perspectives indicate that the relationship between these is stronger for some individuals than for others, which may relate to intrapsychic factors, and that this is affected by interactions which can vary significantly between individuals.

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 6* below.

Illustration ***Number 6***



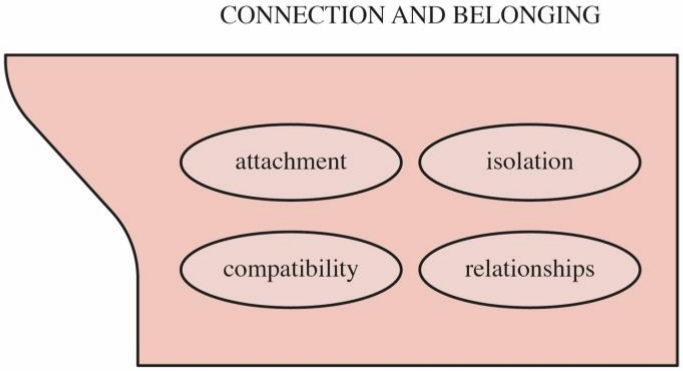


Illustration 6. Connection and Belonging

5.9 Congruence, Harmony and Collaboration

This category refers to qualities within a parent's relationships, as well as the degree to which their hopes and beliefs correspond with their perceived reality. Three subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.9.1 Degree of Harmony and Collaboration in Relationship with Partner

Several parents spoke about the degree of harmony and collaboration in their relationship with their partner. Participant 3 described shared hopes and mutual decision-making with his wife, referring to a sense of harmony even in their choice to become parents:

"We both wanted children, that was never sort of a topic for discussion once we got together […] We did talk a little bit about it before we found out we were pregnant in terms of how we wanted to raise our child, how we might sort of… things we wanted to do and how we, how we, how we wanted to encourage, how we live, but ultimately to, you know, to let [the child] live, before having [our son]. So we spoke about it on that level, before we had him, and then afterwards, I think we were, we would have, we have had ongoing discussions about it, and we have, for lack of better way of putting it, stuck to our guns in the sense of, you know, this is, this is, this is what we, this is how we want to, this is the environment we want to create for the kid. This is what we believe, this is the environment that we would have, that we either had or wanted when we were younger. And this is really how we want to live going forward."

Participant 4 said that herself and her partner *"align 99% of the time on rules and education"*

and described how they support each other on a practical level:

"It's a matter of splitting tasks. So if I'm changing her, he starts preparing meals, if I'm preparing meals he changes her […] We are, we are kind of, when somebody is doing something the other one is doing something else."

Participant 8 described feeling supported by her partner and the influence of this:

"You know when you have the other person there, and when they're supportive […] then you know you can take time out. I mean there was one time when he was just crying, crying, crying and it was a long day and I was so tired, I literally said to [my husband], I'm going in the car, I'm going for a drive and I'll be back in about 15 minutes, and I did. And that was all I needed, just to be like, right, come back and be calm. But you can only do that when you've got someone who is supportive with you."

In contrast, Participant 6 spoke about having a different experience:

"My relationship with his dad was not very good around that time. Some people it's like, [having a baby] can affect your relationship, but how the other person responds kind of determines how things are going to be… if they know, if they understand your mental health and they can support you then you can keep going. If they don't, then it can just get worse."

While there was a sense that parents experience different degrees of harmony in their interactions with their partner, Participant 8 also suggested that the approach which is taken towards instances of disharmony has an impact:

"I suppose I'm fortunate [my partner] is not critical, you know I think there can be some relationships where one person might be very critical of the other. And again, I might make comment but I'm a bit like […] that's ok, we just do things differently, that's absolutely fine."

5.9.2 Degree of Harmony and Collaboration in Relationships with Others

Participant 7 talked about receiving practical support from his mother, suggesting that this had helped to generate a sense of collaboration in the early days of becoming a parent:

"I mean quite practically what really helps, is like, people who help you […] Yeah, so in the first couple of weeks, my mum came over, and, and just did lots of cleaning and it was… I mean, [my daughter] was really small. She just had her on her lap, and we could sleep. That was really helpful."

In contrast, Participant 1 felt she had experienced frequent disharmony during interactions with family members, which affected her thoughts and emotions:

"Recently because he was ill, oh gosh, my mother […] and my mother-in-law because he was ill, it was constant. Oh, is he feeding enough, do you need to be offering him the bottle because he's not taking the bottle. So one thing again, was I was being blamed for not giving him the bottle enough. Why weren't you expressing enough, why weren't you doing this or doing that […] It made me feel really down […] I start to overthink, it makes me feel like I don't know my child even though I'm with him all the time. Yeah, it just makes me question myself so feeling inadequate, not doing enough, but mainly I just feel down."

Some parents spoke about interactions with professionals which had led to feelings of conflict, while Participant 9 described the impact of engaging in Physiotherapy sessions for her daughter that had felt collaborative:

"[The physiotherapist] encouraged me to hold [my daughter] and whatnot and I was like, Wow, okay. And I think, had I not had that person come in at that point, I maybe would have been so delicate with her… and that made a huge difference […] I think it just, it all depends on how somebody approaches something, I think."

References were also made to the degree of harmony between parents' own ideas and approach, and common or assumed parenting practices. For example, Participant 1 described initially feeling constrained by certain assumptions:

"I always thought, you know, I've read that you know babies need to be asleep by seven o'clock and so, and my husband gets home quite late from work, so he was just like oh but if you put him down at seven I'm never going to see him, and I said yeh well unfortunately I've read that's what he needs, so he was just like, why can't we just do it in accordance to our family timetable, you know, can it not be that he goes to sleep a little bit later, just so I can spend some time with him. And I said, yeah, do you know what, you're actually right, we don't have to be so rigid, you know we can be flexible, we don't have to follow oh seven o'clock, we just have to do what's right for our family."

5.9.3 Congruence Between Own Hopes and Beliefs and Perceived Reality

Several of the parents spoke about the effects of feeling a sense of congruence, or incongruence, between their hopes and beliefs and their perceived reality. For example, some parents said they felt parenthood was much harder than they ever imagined it would be and seemed to be struggling to reconcile the inconsistencies between their earlier expectations and current experiences. Participant 6 shared her perspective:

"When I was first pregnant, I had a very… I guess, it was a more optimistic and less realistic kind of idea of what parenting is and what having a child is. Um, you know like a lot of the times we're not told the truth about what it is to be a mum, especially for women, what it is to be a mum […] We just, like, for me, I just thought, I mean I kind of knew there's all that responsibility but it really didn't help, it didn't actually hit me that every single second of the day is baby, baby, baby, baby…"

Parents also spoke about the extent to which feedback from interactions with their child reflected their hopes and beliefs about themselves, and the impact this had. For example, many of the parents talked about wanting their child to be happy and healthy, suggesting that when they received feedback indicating this was the case, they felt a sense of congruence between their hopes and reality. This is illustrated in the following passage from Participant 2:

"If my kid is happy and he interact properly with me […] it's more than enough to know that I'm a good parent. […] of course, this is what I want for him, to be healthy and to develop to his age and so on, but mostly if we have a good relation, this is coming after."

Relating his instincts to being an older sibling, Participant 7 spoke about how he wanted to protect his daughter and described feeling like a good parent following interactions in which he felt he had done this:

"So like if I kind of get the feeling… yeah, my daughter, kind of, she seeks protection from me and confidence, safety and that kind of thing […] So events in terms of when […] when she's looking for comfort and safety… those make me feel, I don't know, like I'm able to do something for her, and I'm able to make her happy, feel safe… that kind of quite important things, I would think."

Conversely, interactions that left parents feeling unable to meet their hopes, such as protecting their child from harm, had a negative impact. For example, Participant 8 recalled how she felt after one of her son's earliest accidents:

"[It] was a disaster, like for me, it was just really horrible."

Some participants also referred to the degree of congruence between their hopes and beliefs about themselves as parents, and the feedback they received from others. For example, Participant 3 spoke about wanting to prioritise making time for his son and feeling reassured

when his wife commented positively on how much time he spent with him. In contrast, Participant 9 explained:

"People around you impact the kind of parent you feel like you are. Be it positive or negative. And I think that was a lot of… given what the situation I'm in today…was the fact that, as I mentioned, I've just separated from my partner…but again it was a lot down to do with that. Just because of the kind of relationship he and I had, and me not feeling like a worthy mum. Which isn't ok to kind of feel like when I know I'm…I'm a dab good mum. Like I know, you know your own worth at the end of the day."

The examples given demonstrate how a parent's interactions with others and their environment involve varying degrees of harmony and collaboration. It seems that parents who feel that others support their approach and are willing to collaborate and help them are likely to have higher parenting self-efficacy than those who do not. Equally, when parents feel able to behave in accordance with their own hopes and beliefs, they appear to develop an internal sense of congruence, which can be reinforced or destabilised by feedback from interactions with others, including their child.

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 7* below.

Illustration ***Number 7***

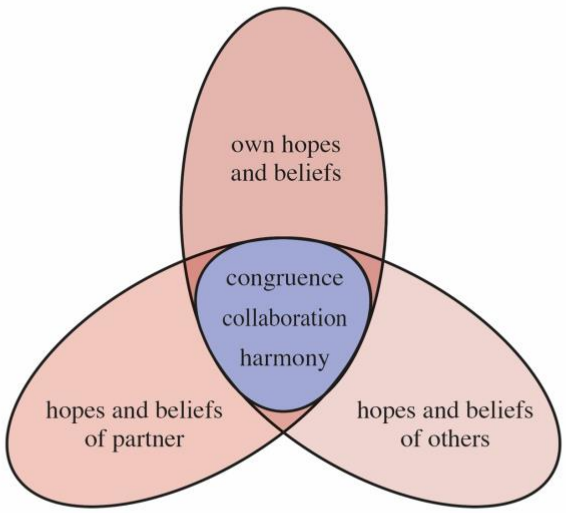


Illustration 7. Congruence, Harmony and Collaboration

5.10 Experience Over Time

This category refers to how parenting self-efficacy develops and changes over time. Four subcategories emerged through the cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis and will now be considered in relation to the data collected.

5.10.1 Previous Experience with Children

Some of the parents spoke about their previous experience with children having an influence on their parenting self-efficacy. For example, Participant 8 described how she feels her background as a teacher has helped:

"I think possibly having that background, having worked with children, I think that's probably made that difference. Yeah, you know what I think it is, it's being comfortable knowing well there's nothing wrong with him […] he's fine, he'll just, you know, he'll do it when he wants to."

Participant 5 talked about having developed relevant skills and ideas prior to becoming a parent and the influence of this:

"I've already practised it back home in my country. And I put a few ideas here. But the lot, the 80% of it is back, back home where I come from. Because people will tell me they don't know the strength I have, I can take care because I have done that kind of job before. Helping people to take care of their kids. They will go to farm and come back. They will go to work and come back. I help them to take care of their kids. Maybe I can get three or four kids in my possession."

5.10.2 Gaining Knowledge

Some parents made references to the impact of gaining knowledge. There was a sense that some forms of knowledge had a more positive influence than others, for example Participant 1 suggested that specific information she had accessed via Instagram relating to cluster feeding had helped her to understand some of the things her baby was doing and why. On the other hand, Participant 8 indicated that information that is overly prescriptive or tries to standardise child development is less helpful:

"A friend gave us a book and it was kind of like what to expect…it's quite nicely written actually in terms of like week by week…but yeah, this is where, you know if your baby is not doing those things, it's not gonna work for you, it's gonna go completely the opposite way."

5.10.3 Formative Experiences

Some parents felt that particular experiences had been influential in developing their parenting self-efficacy, as well as their identity as a parent. For example, Participant 3 described how, due to his wife's C-section, *"from the day [my son] was born I was sort of in it,"* sharing that he felt this experience had shaped him as a father. Participant 4 explained that in her daughter's first few days of life, she had had an intuition that she was not taking in any milk but followed insistent advice from midwives to continue trying to breastfeed, although this had gone against her instincts. After being admitted to A&E and learning that her intuition had been correct, she resolved to *"trust her own gut"*, reflecting that:

"It helped me to build the kind of confidence in what my parenting skills are… because I know [my daughter] better than anybody else."

5.10.4 Change and Development Over Time

The participants who took part in this research had been parents for varying lengths of time, ranging from four months to almost three years. Their different responses gave a clear indication that parenting self-efficacy undergoes change and development over time. For example, there was a sense from Participant 1, whose son was just four months old, that she was experiencing lots of things for the first time, whereas Participant 3 referred to feeling increasingly reassured as time passed:

"It's just being able to kind of give [my wife] the confidence that actually, [our son] is fine. He's fine, we're fine. You're doing the right, we're doing the right thing… and ultimately, you know, we're almost, we're coming up to 11 months. And you know, you see him bubbling along nicely."

Participant 5 talked about the impact of seeing her twin sons reach certain milestones, such as learning to walk. Participant 8 spoke about how, as her son had started to communicate more and they had developed routines, she began to understand him better:

"I think you come home with this baby and you're just like […] oh my goodness, what do I do […] and I suppose at the beginning you don't know why they're crying. […] You know, the communication between the two of you improves so much, that you can, you've got a better understanding […] And also slipping into routines. And so, even though the routine does change, so like sleep can change and things like that, there is those routines and so, yeah you can come to expect something or know kind of the next thing that is going to happen. So yeah it's kind of that familiarity, I think definitely that time together and that communication makes…makes you feel confident, I'd say."

Participant 7 explained that he felt his parenting self-efficacy had increased over time in response to receiving more and increasingly sophisticated forms of feedback during interactions with his daughter:

"I would say, so far, [how sure I feel as a parent] has increased in line with [my daughter's] ability to communicate. Or…yeah, also on the amount of things you can do together. Or also her kind of degree of freedom, that she can go, you know go away for three minutes into another room and then come back, and then be happy to see me or something […] So, I think, as she's more able to communicate […] that's also kind of a bigger variety of instances where it can happen […] Of course you get more feedback […] maybe also getting more sophisticated ways of feedback."

Several participants spoke about how their parenting self-efficacy had fluctuated over time in response to changes in their interactions with their child, and with others. For example, Participant 4 talked about a particularly challenging period when her daughter first learned to walk, while two of the parents described feeling differently after separating from their ex-

partners. Furthermore, Participant 7 suggested that his parenting self-efficacy shifted over time in correspondence with what he felt his role as a parent required:

"I can't point to a specific event… but at some point maybe one, two months ago, I was thinking that she's getting out of the stage where she […] just needs to be physically fine […] she was doing something that a small baby can do… but a toddler at some point shouldn't anymore. […] And I was thinking like well this is all fine for now, but at some point, we're going to have to… I don't know, at some point, this needs to be addressed somehow. I don't really know how. I don't know which way. But this whole kind of stream of parenting has to start at some point, whereas in the beginning it's more like kind of, maintaining her basic living functions, so that she is fairly clean, warm, that kind of thing."

A pictorial representation of this category is shown in *Illustration 8* below.

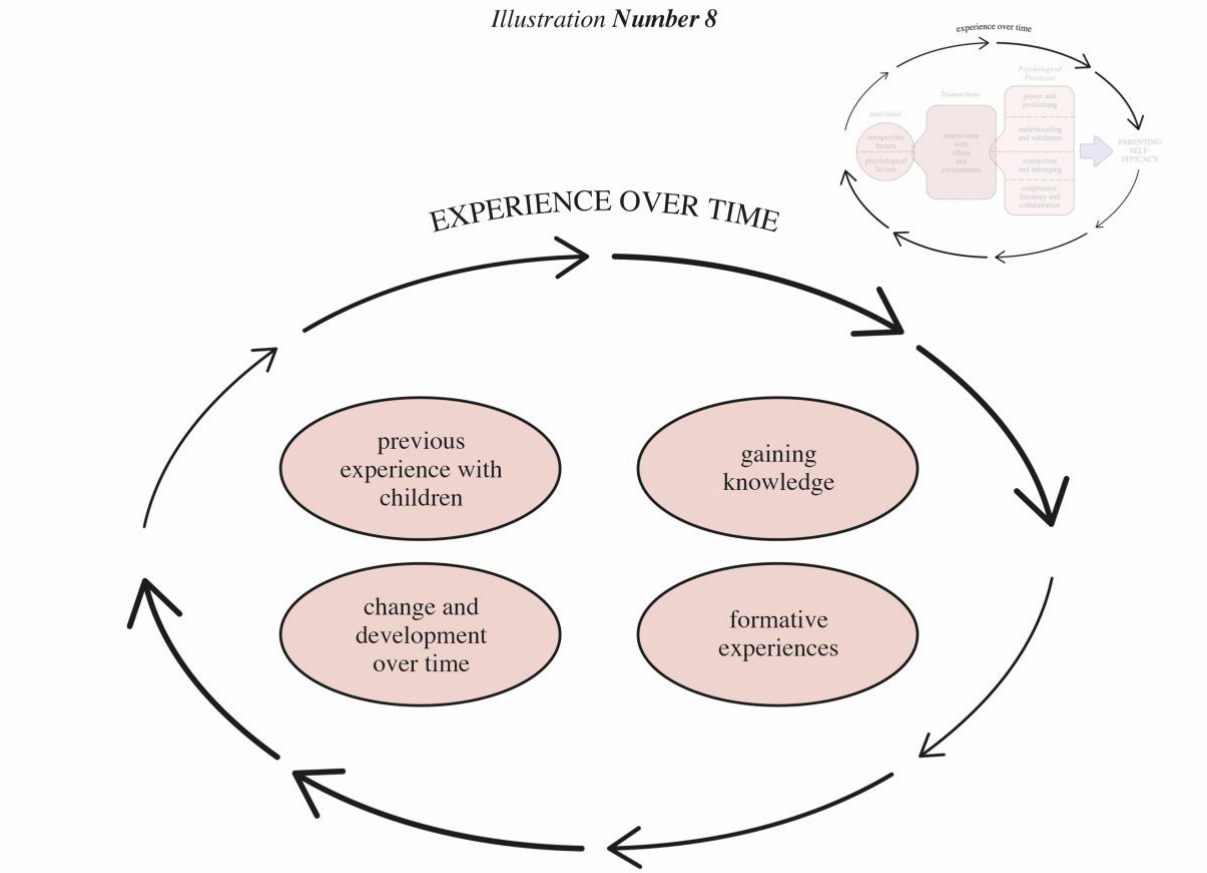


Illustration 8. Experience Over Time

5.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overarching view of the proposed theory and outlined each of the eight categories in detail, whilst considering the relationships between them. The accounts given above demonstrate the changing nature of parenting self-efficacy and show how the data gave rise to a grounded theory which acknowledges these fluctuations whilst providing a lens through which to understand them: parenting self-efficacy develops and evolves over time in response to the dynamic interplay between intrapsychic and physiological factors, interactions with the external world, and the resulting psychological processes.

6. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will first describe the literature search conducted by the researcher. Following this, a systematic review of the literature will be given. In the systematic review, the reviewed papers are grouped into clusters, each of which relates to a relevant category from the proposed theory. For each cluster, a summary of research is given, followed by a critical appraisal of the strengths and constraints identified within this set of papers. Critical appraisal of the papers is addressed through application of Holland and Rees's (2010) framework, which is displayed in Appendix 12.

6.2 Literature Search

A literature search for relevant research papers was conducted using EBSCO host. 16 databases were searched using the following key terms in Search 1: *'develop* parent* efficacy OR new parent* efficacy OR first time parent* efficacy OR transition parent* efficacy'*. To ensure that papers relating specifically to mothers or fathers were included in the results, in Search 2 the term *'parent'* was replaced with *'mother'* and in Search 3 with *'father'*. As identified in the initial overview of the literature in the Introduction chapter, in 1997 Coleman and Karraker conducted a systematic review into parenting self-efficacy which addressed its sources and development; therefore, in this search papers published before this date were not included as they were covered within the scope of the previous review.

All searches were conducted on 21st March 2022 and verified a second time on 1st April 2022. A PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2020) was used to record the identification and screening process and is displayed below in *Figure 7*. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are displayed in *Table 6*. The focus of the papers was established through screening both the title and the abstract. A full list of included papers is displayed in Appendix 13.

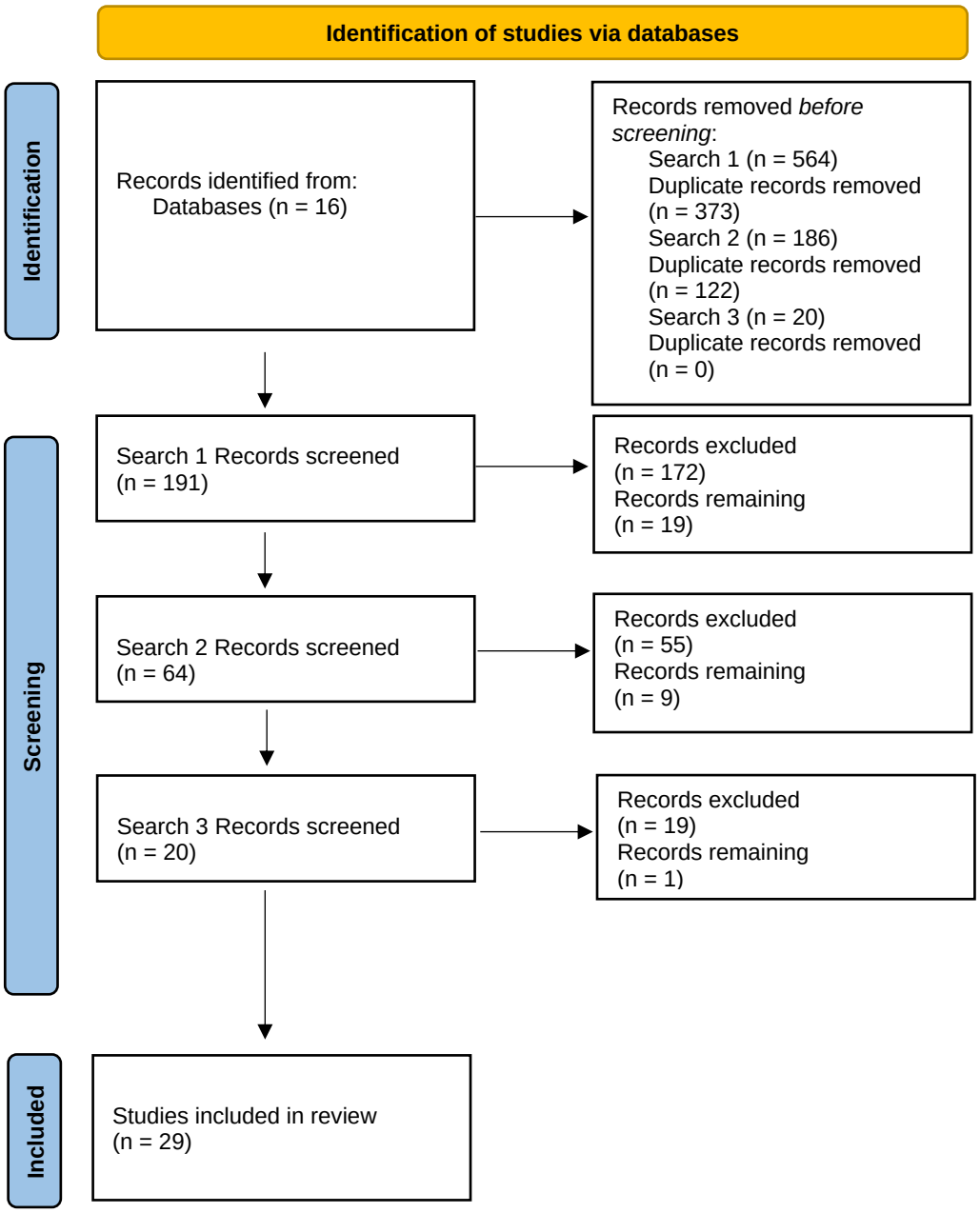


Figure 7. PRISMA Flow Diagram (Page et al., 2020) Illustrating the Identification and Screening Process

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Papers which were available in English	Papers published before 1997 and therefore covered within the scope of Coleman and Karraker's previous systematic review into the development of parenting self-efficacy
Papers that referred to the emergence of parenting self-efficacy in first-time parents or expectant first-time parents	Papers with a sole focus on the development of a measure of parenting self-efficacy
Papers that referred to the early development of parenting self-efficacy in first-time parents or expectant first-time parents	Papers with a sole focus on the development of or impact of parenting interventions
	Papers with a sole focus on parenting self-efficacy as a predictor or moderator for another aspect of parenting
	Conference posters

Table 6. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

6.3 Systematic Review of the Literature

6.3.1 Intrapsychic Factors

Summary of Research

Eight of the papers identified within the literature search relate to the relationship between parenting self-efficacy, and parents' mood and mental health. Mihelic, Filus and Morawaska (2016) explored associations between maternal mood, prenatal self-efficacy and prenatal parenting expectations in first-time mothers entering parenthood. In a cross-sectional design, a sample of 255 expectant mothers completed a variety of questionnaires relating to their mood, prenatal self-efficacy, prenatal parenting expectations, and levels of social support.

Higher scores on a range of measures relating to mood and maternal adjustment were associated with better prenatal self-efficacy, and predicted by higher levels of social support. Mothers with better prenatal self-efficacy also had more realistic prenatal parenting expectations, which appear to be a protective factor against poor maternal adjustment in the postnatal period (Flykt et al., 2014; Harwood et al., 2007).

Investigating the relationship between parenting self-efficacy and depressive and anxiety symptoms in a sample of 822 expectant first-time mothers, Kunseler and colleagues (2014) found that fewer prenatal mood symptoms were associated with more increases in parenting self-efficacy postpartum, and that higher postpartum parenting self-efficacy predicted fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms. They concluded that parenting self-efficacy may be both a result of mental health and a predictor for the course of mental health in first-time mothers. Law and colleagues (2019) also found a predictive relationship between maternal self-efficacy and stress and depressive symptoms in a group of 66 first-time mothers studied over the first 6 months postpartum. Their results indicated that stress and depressive symptoms were at their highest, and maternal self-efficacy was at its lowest, at 3 weeks postpartum. Barboza and Schiamberg (2021) explored the trajectories of postpartum parenting self-efficacy and depressive symptoms in 682 first-time mothers, identifying three groups: a ‘low risk’ group with low levels of depression and high levels of parenting self-efficacy (88%), an ‘early risk’ group with high levels of depression that decreased over time and low levels of parenting self-efficacy that remained fairly stable (6.3%), and a ‘late risk’ group with initially low levels of depression and significantly fluctuating levels of parenting self-efficacy (4.9%).

A small amount of research has attended to the experiences of fathers. Drawing on a sample of 150 first-time mothers and fathers, Gross and Marcussen (2017) found that parenting self-

efficacy was negatively associated with postpartum depression for both mothers and fathers from the prenatal period to 4 months postpartum. Pinto and colleagues (2016) identified a similar effect in a sample of 86 fathers. In an analysis of the developmental path of paternal self-efficacy, findings indicated that fathers' self-efficacy increased over time from the first trimester of pregnancy to 6 months postpartum, and that fathers with higher anxious symptoms had lower levels of parenting self-efficacy and smaller increases between timepoints. A predictive effect was also found between perceived coparenting support and paternal self-efficacy. More recently, Wroe and colleagues (2019) investigated the relationships between negative thoughts, parenting self-efficacy and symptoms of depression in 300 first-time fathers during their first year of parenthood. Their findings suggest that postnatal negative thoughts are common in new fathers and that higher frequencies of these are linked to lower levels of parenting self-efficacy and increased symptoms of depression.

Focusing in on fathers, one study identified within the literature search explored interactions between parenting self-efficacy and a combination of intrapsychic factors relating to personality and upbringing. Donithen and Schoppe-Sullivan (2022) obtained survey data from 182 first-time fathers regarding their rearing history, personality and personal characteristics during the third trimester of pregnancy. At three months postpartum they administered measures of parenting self-efficacy and perceptions of coparenting; following this they conducted hierarchical regression analyses. Factors associated with lower parenting self-efficacy included greater attachment anxiety, higher levels of neuroticism, negative beliefs around fathers' caregiving skills, and modelling childrearing on their own fathers. Positive perceptions of the coparenting relationship were associated with higher parenting self-efficacy. This paper builds on the other studies which have been reviewed, which look predominantly at mood and mental health, expanding the focus to a wider range of

intrapsychic factors which may influence the development of parenting self-efficacy. Cognitions and beliefs, as well as parents' own experiences of childhood, emerge as possible predictors for self-efficacy; the reviewed research also points towards the interplay between intrapsychic factors and parents' interactions with others through its attention to social support and the coparenting relationship.

Strengths and Constraints within the Literature

The studies reviewed make considerable contributions to the growing body of knowledge around the development of parenting self-efficacy in new parents. They provide useful information on the relationships between intrapsychic factors, including those that occur prenatally as well as postnatally, and parents' self-efficacy. Collectively, this group of studies benefits from attending to the development of parenting self-efficacy in fathers, as well as mothers, which enables a greater understanding of the experiences of new fathers than has previously been possible. Application of Holland and Rees's (2010) framework to these papers highlighted impressive methodological rigour; for example, the majority involved large samples, low drop-out rates, and sophisticated forms of analysis. However, constraints were also identified; for example, in some studies, participants experiencing multiple disadvantages were under-represented across the sample (Mihelic et al., 2016); while in others these participants were over-represented (Barboza & Schiamberg, 2021).

A major limitation of the studies reviewed is their reliance on cross-sectional data and correlational designs. Many of the researchers acknowledge that this leaves the field with pressing questions around causality in the relationships between variables such as parenting self-efficacy and depression or anxiety. With the exception of Donithen and Schoppe-

Sullivan (2022), the emphasis on mood and mental health within the reviewed papers restricts the breadth of intrapsychic factors which could be investigated in relation to parenting self-efficacy. In addition, although the interplay between intrapsychic factors and parents' interactions with others emerges through some of the findings, the lack of flexibility within study designs prevents any meaningful exploration. Gross and Marcussen (2017) reflect on the implications of attempting to isolate variables, concluding that many interacting factors may have been missed as a result. It appears that future research would benefit from adopting other methodological approaches.

6.3.2 Interactions with Others and Environment

Summary of Research

While areas of the literature focus on parents' self-efficacy almost as if it develops in isolation, an increasing number of papers are investigating the influence of an array of factors relating to parents' interactions with others and with their environment. The literature search identified a total of thirteen studies that attend to relationships which may be significant in shaping self-efficacy, including those between new parents and their child; partner; social support network; and wider environmental context.

Porter and Hsu (2003) found that mothers' perception of infant temperament accounted for a significant proportion of variance in reports of parenting self-efficacy, suggesting that the nature of parents' interactions with their child and how they perceive these may be influential. Troutman and colleagues (2012) examined the development of maternal self-efficacy in mothers of infants with high negative emotionality. A sample of 24 infants classed

as irritable and 29 infants classed as non-irritable were selected using the Neonatal Behavioural Assessment Scale (Brazelton, 1973). At 8 weeks postpartum, mothers of infants classed as irritable had significantly lower domain-specific parenting self-efficacy than mothers of infants classed as non-irritable; however, both domain-specific and domain-general parenting self-efficacy increased significantly between 8 weeks and 16 weeks postpartum in mothers of infants classed as irritable. Vance and colleagues (2020) investigated the development of parenting self-efficacy in mothers of infants diagnosed with a complex chronic condition. At the point of admission to hospital, mean scores for maternal self-efficacy for the 67 participants indicated clinically low self-efficacy. These increased significantly over time across the following two timepoints (discharge from hospital and three months after discharge) and mean scores were above the clinical index at the third timepoint. The researchers speculate that improvements in maternal self-efficacy may be related to mothers accessing more opportunities to interact and engage with their baby, as well as decreases in infant medical complexity over time.

The study also explored the influence of family functioning on parenting self-efficacy development, finding that being married was associated with lower maternal self-efficacy in this sample. It is hypothesised that mothers in co-parenting relationships may have experienced additional stress, either from including the partner in infant caregiving or from "doing for" the partner in addition to the infant (Vance et al., 2020, p.8). The impact of the relationship between parents has also been considered by other researchers. Biehle and Mickelson (2011) used a variety of tools including the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), and their own measure of pregnancy responsibility, to examine associations between expected parenting self-efficacy, feelings of pregnancy responsibility, relationship satisfaction and mental health in 104 expectant couples. Better relationship

satisfaction and mental health were related to higher levels of parenting self-efficacy for both mothers and fathers. For mothers only, perceived levels of shared pregnancy responsibility were associated with expected parenting self-efficacy, relationship satisfaction and mental health.

Together, these papers highlight the potential significance of parents' relationships with their child and with their partner on their self-efficacy development. They also point to the dynamic interplay between mothers' and fathers' self-efficacy. This is explored in greater depth by Binda and Crippa (2017), who analysed longitudinal data in 60 expectant couples and modelled interactions between mothers and fathers' prenatal and postnatal self-efficacy; global satisfaction; self-esteem; and perceptions of the climate of their extended family. In their proposed models, the researchers suggest that for mothers, more positive perceptions of the climate of their own extended family appear to create a "protective umbrella" for the relationship with their own baby, producing a direct impact on prenatal self-efficacy and postnatal global satisfaction, which in turn directly affects postnatal self-efficacy (Binda & Crippa, 2017, p.123). For fathers, prenatal self-efficacy is directly linked to self-esteem. After the birth, paternal self-efficacy is predicted by the mothers' self-efficacy but not vice versa; fathers' self-efficacy is also related to their global satisfaction. Binda and Crippa suggest that prenatal parenting self-efficacy in expectant couples is related to their identities and confidence in themselves; and that these protective factors extend over time and work indirectly through effects on their interpersonal relationships (Binda & Crippa, 2017).

Binda and Crippa's study is unique in attending to the possible influence of extended family in new parents' emerging identities, as well as the interactions between identity and parenting self-efficacy. More common are papers which focus on the impact of social support following

the birth. Using regression analyses, Eaton (2007) found that level of perceived social support significantly predicted maternal self-efficacy in mothers of all age groups. Leahy-Warren, McCarthy and Corcoran (2011) identified significant relationships between maternal self-efficacy, postnatal depression, and social support, particularly from family and friends. Kerrick (2017) tried to refine the role of social support and how it can facilitate the development of mothers' self-efficacy in a piece of mixed methods research. The qualitative element of the study involved interviewing a subsample (n=2) of the participants at around 12 weeks postpartum and analysing interview transcripts using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The findings indicate that social support influenced the trajectory of self-efficacy in these two mothers by providing opportunities for tangible support from family (for example, sharing care duties thereby facilitating sleep); role modelling from friends who have children; and informational and affective support gained through having a community. Kerrick points out that the impact of social support is often considered to be explained by the vicarious experience and verbal persuasion components of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model; yet parents' own accounts of how this occurs are scarce (Kerrick, 2017).

In addition to informal sources, more formal sources of social support also exist. For example, parenting interventions often aim to increase parents' access to social support with the hope that this will positively impact their parenting self-efficacy (Amin, Tam & Shorey, 2018). Unfortunately, an examination of parenting interventions was considered beyond the scope of this literature review; however, future research should attend to the mechanisms through which parenting interventions support self-efficacy development, including comparing differences between group and individual interventions (Amin, Tam & Shorey, 2018). Bates (2020) explored the impact of engaging in child development assessments on

parenting self-efficacy, finding that the process appears to support parents' confidence, understanding and management approaches. Possible positive effects of engaging with professional services were also considered in the study conducted by Vance and colleagues (2020) reviewed above.

Relationships between parenting self-efficacy and wider ecological factors have been explored in a selection of papers. For example, Eaton's research described above attended to the impact of parents' financial resources, finding a significant correlation between self-efficacy, depression and annual income (Eaton, 2007). Anicama (2018) investigated parenting self-efficacy in 88 low-income, immigrant mothers. The sample consisted of Mexican American mothers and Chinese American mothers. Results indicated that mothers with stronger orientations towards American culture had greater self-efficacy and identified differences between the two groups, both in overall levels of parenting self-efficacy and in patterns of correlations among variables. Research conducted by Roh and colleagues (2017) also highlighted complex interactions between parenting self-efficacy and cultural and contextual factors. Analysis of questionnaire data from 125 Asian immigrant, first-time mothers suggested that maternal self-efficacy was influenced by identity and original nationality, as well as levels of support from partners. Most recently, an interest in the unique contextual factors relating to Covid-19 led Xue and colleagues (2021) to explore how pandemic-related restrictions affected parenting self-efficacy in new parents. In line with expectations, parents experienced lower parenting self-efficacy during strict pandemic measures in comparison with before and after.

One of the papers identified within the literature widens the lens by using the Social Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) to identify a range of ecological factors which

appear to impact the development of parenting self-efficacy. Smith (2015) examined the predictive quality of the following identified factors in 684 first-time mothers: mothers' age; knowledge of infant development; depression; parenting stress; social support relationships (e.g. father of baby, family member, friend, or other supportive person); and community support (e.g. from community organisations). The researcher found that there was no statistical difference between parenting self-efficacy scores which were predicted using the ecological variables and those obtained from the sample, suggesting that the personal, interpersonal and community factors identified are all influential in contributing to mothers' self-efficacy.

Strengths and Constraints within the Literature

The collection of papers reviewed explore an extensive range of variables relating to parents' interactions with others and the environment, and their associations with parenting self-efficacy. Together, they create an emerging picture of a complex construct that sits at the centre of multiple interacting relationships, although individually most of the papers fail to provide this perspective. Smith's application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Social Ecological Model (Smith, 2015) is particularly innovative and moves the field towards a more insightful conceptualisation of parenting self-efficacy.

Kerrick (2017) is the only study reviewed which included qualitative findings. Furthermore, application of Holland and Rees's (2010) framework highlights several shortcomings with the qualitative element of Kerrick's study; most notably, the very small number of participants and the degree of fit between the research aims and methodological approach. The quantitative designs employed in the remaining studies place numerous restrictions on

the data that are gathered, reducing the possibilities for rich explanations. In addition, fathers' experiences continue to be under-represented. The field would benefit from adopting different methods for further exploring the interweaving relationships described in this section across representative samples.

6.3.3 Psychological Processes

Summary of Research

Two of the papers identified within the literature search relate to the psychological processes involved in the development of parenting self-efficacy. Leerkes and Burney (2007) combine and extend the findings from two previous studies into mothers' efficacy (Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2002; Porter & Hsu, 2003) into a new model, testing this out with first-time mothers and fathers. While both previous studies were influenced by Bandura's (1977) model of efficacy development, Leerkes and Crockenberg (2002) focused on associations between postnatal efficacy and self-esteem, remembered parental warmth, perceived social support and perceived infant soothability; whereas Porter and Hsu (2003) explored relationships between prenatal and postnatal efficacy, previous experience with children, depressive symptoms, and perceived infant reactivity. Proposing the model illustrated in *Figure 8*, Leerkes and Burney (2007) hypothesise that previous experience with children and low levels of depressive symptoms will be linked to high levels of prenatal efficacy, as will remembered parental warmth from the same-sex parent, mediated by self-esteem. According to the model, the same factors will be associated with postnatal efficacy, although these will be mediated by prenatal efficacy beliefs; in addition, the degree of parental involvement with the child, as

well as the parent's perceptions of social support and infant temperamental characteristics, are expected to influence postnatal efficacy.

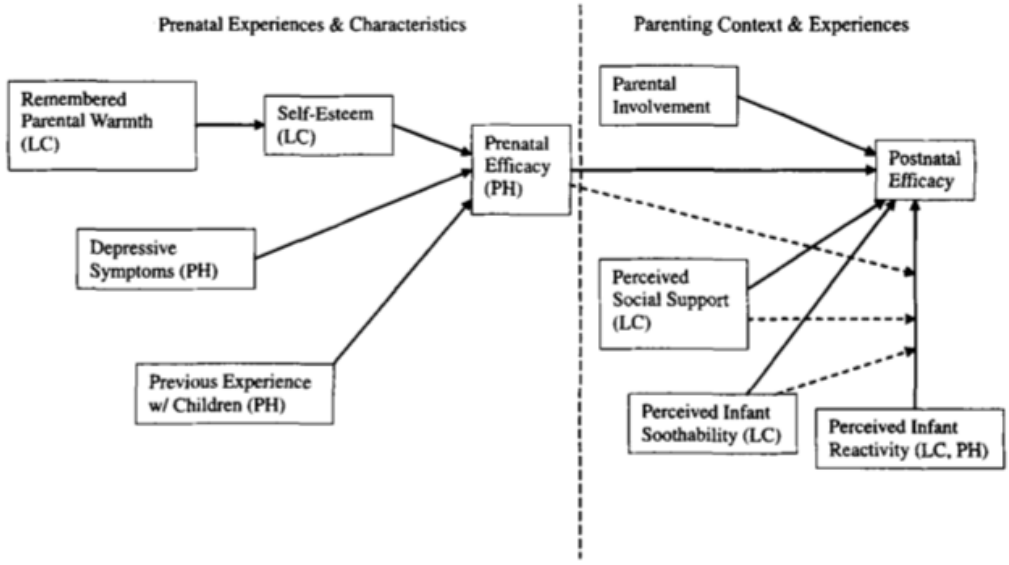


Figure 8. Proposed Model of the Predictors of Prenatal and Postnatal Efficacy (Leerkes & Burney, 2007, p.47)

The method involved recruiting expectant first-time mothers and fathers through local birthing classes during their last trimester and gathering a range of data prenatally and at six months postpartum. Measures consisted of existing tools such as the Global Self-Esteem Scale (Messer & Harter, 1986) and the Infant Behavior Questionnaire-Revised (Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003), as well as questionnaires developed by the authors for this study. The final sample consisted of 115 mothers and 73 fathers. The drop-out rate was approximately 10% and those remaining in the study were more likely to be white and have higher family incomes. The sample included seven single mothers; the rest of the participants were in a couple.

Leerkes and Burney (2007) attend to psychological processes both within their proposed model and in the interpretation of their findings, primarily by drawing on Bandura's (1977)

model of efficacy development. The results provide support for all but one element of the proposed model (the relationship between depressive symptoms and prenatal efficacy), while highlighting a number of differences in how efficacy develops in fathers and mothers. For mothers, postnatal efficacy was predicted by prenatal efficacy, which in turn was predicted by remembered maternal warmth, as mediated by self-esteem. The authors suggest these findings can be explained by Bandura's (1977) model: first, higher levels of maternal warmth provide a form of vicarious experience, and second, mothers whose emotional needs were met in childhood develop a positive sense of self, which through a process of domain generalization translates into a positive view of self as a mother. Previous experience with children was found to predict prenatal but not postnatal efficacy in mothers, which Leerkes and Burney attribute to changes in performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977): previous interactions with other children are less likely to inform efficacy beliefs once a mother is receiving feedback from interactions with her own baby. For fathers, prenatal efficacy did not predict postnatal efficacy. It is proposed that this may be due to parenthood being less part of fathers' identity during the pregnancy phase than for mothers, which may mean fathers are less likely to develop a coherent view of themselves as parents before the birth of their child (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). Instead, the findings suggest that postnatal efficacy in fathers is strongly influenced by their level of involvement in the baby's care and by the amount of social support they perceive. Higher levels of involvement are thought to lead to a greater sense of efficacy due to increased opportunities for performance accomplishments, while social support is considered to increase efficacy beliefs both through the mechanism of verbal persuasion and by reducing the difficulty of parenting, thereby impacting emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977).

More recently, Beach Copeland and Harbaugh (2017) analysed first-time mothers' interview responses, relating these to their maternal competence scores and Bandura's self-efficacy framework (Bandura, 1977). The purpose of the study was to compare differences among first-time, low-income mothers who reported high and low levels of maternal competence, and to explore the relationship between mothers' responses and Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal.

The sample consisted of eight mothers recruited through a Women, Infants, and Children Clinic providing nutritional support for low-income families. All participants reported their racial status as white and had given birth within the last two to four months to a healthy infant. Measures included the Parent Sense of Competence (PSOC; Gibaud-Wallston, 1977) instrument and a semi-structured interview guide that was informed by Bandura (1977) and adapted from Ruchala and Halstead (1994). Maternal competence scores were evaluated using percentiles and directed content analysis was used to analyse the interview data, with the aim of validating or extending Bandura's framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In line with guidelines for directed content analysis, interview data was initially hand-coded with pre-determined codes based on Bandura's model. Following this, data that could not be coded was analysed for new categories. A second investigator reviewed and verified the interview data, percentile sorting and content analysis.

Beach Copeland and Harbaugh's findings indicate that mothers with both high and low levels of efficacy had similar concerns regarding transitioning to the maternal role. Although mothers with low self-efficacy reported more negative experiences, all participants were affected by a wide range of issues relating to their physical and emotional wellbeing, and

management of self and family. Through a process of relating emerging data and themes to categories corresponding with the four sources of self-efficacy, the authors provide empirical support for the applicability of Bandura's framework to mothers transitioning to parenthood. Beach Copeland and Harbaugh propose that their results validate Bandura's model by demonstrating that the majority of experiences shared by mothers in both percentile groups fit within the four categories corresponding with the sources of self-efficacy. In addition, they argue that their research extends Bandura's framework by developing three further categories. 'Managing Life' emerged as a category through mothers expressing concerns about managing work and personal activities alongside being a parent; 'Managing Conflicts' through mothers' describing conflicts with their partner or other family members, and 'Personal Space' through mothers expressing their difficulty with finding time for themselves.

Strengths and Constraints within the Literature

Both studies offer useful contributions to the field. Leerkes and Burney's (2007) findings support key aspects of their model that could helpfully inform policy and practice around supporting new mothers and fathers. For example, preliminary evidence suggesting postnatal efficacy is predicted by prenatal efficacy for mothers, indicates that opportunities to improve efficacy beliefs could begin during pregnancy. In addition, confirmed hypotheses around the influence of social support highlight possible areas for preventative or early intervention approaches. Beach Copeland and Harbaugh (2017) provide insight into the experiences of low-income mothers, shedding light on the wide range of issues they face and emphasising the consistency in concerns around transitioning to the maternal role across mothers with both high and low levels of efficacy.

In terms of furthering understanding of the psychological processes involved in the development of parenting self-efficacy, the two studies reviewed are limited by relying heavily on Bandura's (1977) model of efficacy development. For example, Beach Copeland and Harbaugh use Bandura's four sources of efficacy to inform almost every aspect of their study, from their interview schedule to their analysis. As a result, opportunities to explore different explanations are missed and the paper risks suffering from confirmation bias. Combined with methodological limitations identified through application of Holland and Rees's (2010) framework, such as the homogenous sample (all white mothers) and addition of three further categories which lack explanatory power and depth, the authors' claims that their extended version of Bandura's model serves as an "excellent theoretical framework" should be interpreted with caution (Beach Copeland & Harbaugh, 2017, p.21). Similarly, Leerkes and Burney draw largely on Bandura's framework in the development of their model and in their interpretation of the findings, again limiting the scope of their research. Neither paper permits itself to fully explore the different possible explanations for their findings outside of Bandura's framework, leaving the dynamic, transactional and temporal aspects of parenting self-efficacy poorly understood. Furthermore, application of Holland and Rees's (2010) framework highlights a number of limitations in Leerkes and Burney's study, including the use of tools which had not been validated and a dropout rate that disproportionately affected participants with minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

Both papers reviewed acknowledge limitations relating to their homogenous samples. The possibility that the development of parenting self-efficacy varies according to individual differences is alluded to but not examined, leaving it as a recommendation for future research to include mothers and fathers who represent greater diversity with respect to race, ethnicity,

culture and risk factors. Similarly, suggestions are made that parenting self-efficacy should be explored using designs which focus on perceptions over time; and which attend to more nuanced differences in parents' experiences, as well as the effects and interactions between these. It appears important that future researchers learn from existing limitations within the literature and consider these issues throughout the process of designing and implementing their studies.

6.3.4 Experience Over Time

Summary of Research

Importantly for such a dynamic construct, some researchers have turned their attention to how parenting self-efficacy changes and develops over time. Six of the papers identified within the literature search highlight the changing nature of parenting self-efficacy. Hudson, Elek and Fleck (2001) explored the development of infant care self-efficacy in the first four months after the baby's birth, examining differences between mothers and fathers. The Infant Care Survey (Froman & Owen, 1989) was used to assess infant care self-efficacy in 44 couples at four timepoints: 4, 8, 12, and 16 weeks after the infant's birth. Mothers and fathers completed separate questionnaires. Mothers' reports of infant self-care efficacy increased linearly during the first three months, while fathers' efficacy increased linearly across all four months. At all timepoints, fathers reported significantly lower infant care self-efficacy than mothers. The researchers explore possible explanations for their results in the discussion. Most notably, they suggest that differences between mothers and fathers may relate to when they return to work and, correspondingly, the amount of opportunities they have to experience and receive encouragement relating to caring for their infant. For instance, the

majority of fathers returned to work after 7 days, suggesting they have fewer opportunities in which to develop their self-efficacy; whereas the majority of mothers resumed work after 3 months, which may explain the lack of significant increase in mothers' self-efficacy between 3 and 4 months.

Hankel, Kunseler and Oosterman (2019) explored the relationship between early breastfeeding self-efficacy and experiences, and parenting self-efficacy trajectories in first-time mothers. Expectant mothers completed a questionnaire exploring maternal self-efficacy at 32 weeks of gestation; this was then repeated alongside questionnaires on breastfeeding self-efficacy and breastfeeding experiences three months after giving birth. Data from 817 mothers who had started breastfeeding and completed both sets of questionnaires was included in the analyses. Hankel and colleagues found that high breastfeeding self-efficacy significantly predicted increased maternal self-efficacy and that the effect was fully explained by a successful breastfeeding experience. Although the study does not offer insight into longer-term effects of early breastfeeding experiences on maternal self-efficacy, it provides preliminary evidence that very early parenting experiences may be influential in forming parents' emerging identities and efficacy beliefs. This may be particularly relevant for experiences relating to meeting infants' primary needs (such as feeding) and could help identify early targets for enhancing parenting self-efficacy in both mothers and fathers.

In a longitudinal study, Weaver (2008) looked at how parenting self-efficacy changes over the first two years of motherhood. A racially diverse sample of 684 first-time mothers aged between 15 and 35 was used and associations between patterns of change and maternal risk factors were also explored. Data was collected at four time points: prenatally, 6 months, 12 months, and 24 months after birth. A measure of maternal self-efficacy specifically related to

parenting that had been designed for this project was used; in addition, demographic information and histories of maternal abuse and neglect during childhood were collected. Analytical approaches including a latent growth curve model and growth mixture modelling were used to model trajectories over time. Results indicated that changes in parenting self-efficacy were nonlinear, with most items showing an initial increase followed by a decline as children entered toddlerhood. Early childbearing and maternal histories of abuse both had a negative effect on prenatal efficacy; however, underlying mechanisms for these relationships and whether they endure over time was not explored. Weaver argues that the findings demonstrate that parenting self-efficacy is a dynamic process that responds to changes in the demand of associated tasks, environmental contexts, and developmental levels of the child; toddlerhood appears to present particular challenges which may be associated with these changes.

Focusing in on how self-efficacy develops over time in response to an increase in knowledge, Albarran and Reich (2014) investigated the impact of educational books about child development and parenting on mothers' self-efficacy. In their longitudinal study with a randomized three-group design, the researchers found that maternal self-efficacy increased during the first eighteen months of parenthood for all three groups (who were given educational books, non-educational books, and no books), with the greatest increases seen in the group who were provided with educational books. 167 mothers between 18 and 40 years old were included in the analysis; 63% of participants were African American and the sample was varied in terms of educational background, relationship status and whether the pregnancy was planned. Research by Hackett (2005) provides contrasting findings regarding the relationship between knowledge and parenting self-efficacy. A group of 95 first-time parent couples completed a number of self-report indices in the 3-month period following their

child's birth, including an index of parents' knowledge of child development adapted from Tamis-Lemonda, Shannon and Spellman (2002) and the Parent Sense of Competence (PSOC; Gibaud-Wallston, 1977). The findings indicated there was no relationship between knowledge of child development and parenting self-efficacy. Explanations explored by Hackett include the possibility that knowledge of child development may become more significant in later stages of infancy; and that parents with less knowledge may have higher efficacy as "ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge" (Darwin, 1871, p.3).

It is worth noting that Albarran and Reich's (2014) findings related to knowledge of both child development and parenting, whereas Hackett looked only at knowledge of child development. In another study, Elliott (2007) investigated mothers' knowledge of both child development and parenting, assessing relationships between parenting and developmental milestone knowledge, social support and parenting self-efficacy. Survey data were collected from 115 first-time mothers of 4-month and 10-month old infants. Elliott found that mothers of infants at both ages had better knowledge about milestones that happen nearer the current age of their child; and that they used informal sources of information (e.g. family, friends, internet searches) to a greater extent than formal sources (e.g. medical and education professionals, books, classes) when seeking parenting and child development knowledge. Elliott's findings did not support either parenting or developmental milestone knowledge as predictors of parenting self-efficacy; however, they did indicate that mothers with higher levels of social support used information sources more often than those with low levels of social support, and that higher levels of social support were predictive of better maternal self-efficacy.

Collectively, these papers suggest that parenting self-efficacy changes over time in response to a range of factors, including opportunities for experience and encouragement, as well as shifts in tasks, environmental contexts, and developmental levels of the child. The findings indicate that specific early parenting experiences may be influential in forming parents' emerging identities and efficacy beliefs, especially those related to meeting infants' primary needs such as feeding; and that longitudinal data could help to identify key transition points and targets for support. In addition, it appears that first-time parents may be most receptive to knowledge that relates to more recent or immediate experiences with their child; that this knowledge may be accessed in a variety of ways; and that the role of knowledge in the development of parenting self-efficacy remains unclear, requiring further exploration.

Strengths and Constraints within the Literature

The collection of papers reviewed highlight a number of issues which are important to consider in relation to the development of parenting self-efficacy and how this changes over time. Application of Holland and Rees's (2010) framework identified several strengths within the papers reviewed. For example, many of the studies present comprehensive reviews of the literature and draw on the existing knowledge base to identify gaps and develop clear hypotheses. The researchers use their findings to develop recommendations, both for application to practice and for future research. Studies such as that of Hankel, Kunseler and Oosterman (2019) are particularly useful as they help to identify areas which may be key for informing intervention and support, for example the impact of early formative experiences such as breastfeeding. In addition, longitudinal research such as that undertaken by Weaver (2008) offers new insights and makes important contributions to our understanding of how parenting self-efficacy changes and develops over time.

Although some of the papers within this cluster have more diverse samples (Albarran & Reich, 2014), generally the research remains severely limited by the homogeneity of the populations studied. Many of the authors acknowledge this in their limitations and recommend that future research reflects more diversity in respect to race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status and educational level. Furthermore, a large majority of the papers reviewed are from the USA. Elliott (2007) points out that childrearing practices differ across different parts of the world, suggesting the field would benefit from research taking place in diverse geographical locations. It is also problematic that where differences between groups are highlighted, these are not always explored due to restrictions in the design of the study. For example, Hackett (2005) reports that Asian and Asian-American respondents scored significantly lower on parenting self-efficacy measures than other respondents but does not investigate why.

Homogeneity within samples can present associated methodological issues; for example, Elliott (2007) describes how the mothers in her sample were very knowledgeable and had high self-efficacy, meaning that measures of these constructs were positively skewed. Other methodological shortcomings identified through applying Holland and Rees's (2010) framework include issues around the measures used. Some of the research reviewed used tools which had low reliability or had been developed a substantially long time ago, while others used measures which were developed for their study and had not been previously validated. In her discussion, Weaver (2008) reflects on the wording of items in the tool she developed. She highlights the possibility that overuse of words which may imply judgement (such as 'good') might have led participants to rate their self-efficacy less accurately; and points out that items relating to providing for the material needs of the child should not have been included due to their emphasis on access to financial resources. It is notable that,

consistent with Bandura's assertions (Bandura, 1982; 1989), Coleman and Karraker (1997) found that task-specific measures of parenting self-efficacy have greater predictive validity than more general, domain-level items; they are also more effective at identifying potential targets for intervention. However, many of the studies reviewed employed domain-general measures. Overall, the reliance on measures that lack reliability and predictive validity, together with the homogeneity of populations studied and associated effects, continues to present significant limitations to the field. Future research would benefit from including diverse samples and taking place in different geographical locations. In addition, use of reliable and valid measures which facilitate isolating specific domains of parenting self-efficacy and understanding their relative importance in how efficacy unfolds over time, is paramount for informing targeted interventions.

6.3.5 Conclusions

The literature touches on several of the same areas as the proposed theory and offers insights into the influences of intrapsychic factors; interactions with the external world; psychological processes; and experience over time. Intrapsychic factors such as parents' mental health and attachment style have been considered within the literature, whilst investigations into the impact of parents' interactions with the external world have been presented by looking at associations between social support, partner relationships and a range of other ecological factors. Two studies have explored the psychological processes involved in developing parenting self-efficacy, and increasingly some of the research is starting to attend to how self-efficacy beliefs might change and develop over time. Notably, one of the categories in the transactional model, physiological factors, was not addressed in any of the studies which were reviewed; reasons for this will be considered in the Discussion chapter.

Collectively, the reviewed literature builds an emerging picture of a rich and dynamic construct that sits at the centre of multiple interacting relationships. However, individually, the majority of papers fail to provide this perspective. As highlighted in previous reviews, a major limitation within the literature is the reliance on cross-sectional data and correlational designs; this leaves the field with pressing questions around causality in the relationships between parenting self-efficacy and other variables. In fact, even some of the authors acknowledge that their restricted designs and attempts to isolate variables may have led to different factors and the interactions between them being missed (Gross & Marcussen, 2017). Meaningful exploration of the dynamic, transactional and temporal aspects of parenting self-efficacy is restricted even in the two studies which model psychological processes, due to an over-reliance on Bandura's (1977) framework. In addition, methodological issues present significant limitations; for example, use of tools which have low reliability, have not been validated or were developed a substantially long time ago. Homogeneity within many of the samples and the associated effects of this is also a considerable concern. In conclusion, future research would benefit from including diverse samples and attending to differences between groups; using reliable and valid measures; and incorporating different designs which provide possibilities for attending to multiple interacting relationships in a way that captures nuance and change over time.

6.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the literature search conducted by the researcher has been described and a systematic review of the literature has been presented, followed by some conclusions. The grouping of papers into clusters that correspond with categories from the proposed theory has provided some initial ideas around how the findings from this research relate to the literature; these will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will first give an initial overview of what is offered by the transactional model for the development of parenting self-efficacy. Going through each category in turn, we will then examine how the findings relate to pre-existing theories and the wider literature; before considering contributions from this research and outlining other relevant theories that support the theoretical developments proposed in this model. Following a critical appraisal of this study, the implications of the findings for theory and practice will be discussed and future directions will be considered. Finally, recommendations for practice will be given and the planned dissemination strategy will be described.

7.2 Contributions to the Literature and Development of Theory

The presented theory offers a transactional model for how parenting self-efficacy develops in first-time parents. In the transactional model, becoming a parent (or preparing to become a parent) is proposed to trigger both conscious and unconscious intrapsychic responses, as well as physiological changes. Intrapsychic and physiological factors are closely intertwined and have bidirectional influences on each other as they evolve over time; they also influence parents' interactions with other people and the environment as they shift into their new role. The transactional model posits that any given individual becomes a parent within a specific set of circumstances and that their interactions with others, including their child, take place within, and are influenced by, this specific set of circumstances. Positioning parents'

experiences within the wider context, the transactional model highlights the interplay between the interactions a parent has with the external world and how they relate these to themselves. This interplay gives rise to a range of psychological processes; how a parent experiences these psychological processes can feed back into their interactions with other people and their environment, and even to some of the intrapsychic and physiological factors relating to them as an individual. In the transactional model, psychological processes are grouped into four clusters: *power and positioning; understanding and validation*; *connection and belonging*; and *congruence, harmony and collaboration*. According to the proposed framework, the construct of parenting self-efficacy is underpinned by these four clusters of psychological processes, which interact with each other and evolve over time in response to the dynamic interplay between the different parts of the model.

The transactional model for the development of parenting self-efficacy is grounded in parents' own experiences and perspectives. To the researcher's knowledge, a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach has not previously been used in this topic area. Its use in this study allowed the researcher to actively pursue the inclusion of parents with diverse individual characteristics, who had children of different ages under three. Consequently, the transactional model reflects multiple experiences whilst capturing temporal aspects. In addition to being the first theory that is based on parents' own perspectives and reflects change and development over time, the model has a unique structure that attends to multiple interacting relationships whilst capturing nuance and change over time. Elements of the transactional model support findings from the reviewed literature as well as components of previous theories, whilst other areas add new dimensions to existing conceptualisations of parenting self-efficacy. Each category will now be examined in turn.

7.2.1 Intrapsychic Factors

The first category builds on existing research and aspects of Bandura's model, adding new elements. The main finding identified by the reviewed literature was that parents' mood and mental health interact with their parenting self-efficacy; which was also captured in this research through the subcategory *capacity to manage thoughts and emotions*. The transactional model provides support for pre-existing hypotheses around the bidirectional influences between these factors, offering insight into the mechanisms through which this may occur by exploring interactions between this subcategory and other parts of the model. For example, some parents described feeling that their capacity to manage thoughts and emotions is directly influenced by the levels of support they receive from others or by physiological factors; while another parent thought it came from her upbringing and culture. The data which informed the proposed theory suggested that the relationship between parents' capacity to manage thoughts and emotions and their self-efficacy was fluid and responsive to a variety of other factors in some individuals; while in others this was more fixed. This echoes Barboza and Schiamberg's (2021) research which found that parenting self-efficacy remained fairly stable in some parents while fluctuating significantly in others; and Morgan's (2019) finding that parents are on individual paths of development.

One of the subcategories, *childhood experiences and internal model of parenting*, corresponds to some extent with one of the sources of efficacy in Bandura's model: vicarious experience. According to Bandura (1977), one can gain self-efficacy through observing others; viewing their success or failure in a particular situation; and relating this to ourselves. As every parent has themselves been parented or cared for, they all have some vicarious experiences of parenting. Similarly to Bandura, the proposed theory highlights the impact of

parents' own experiences of being parented, suggesting that this may lead them to develop an internal model of parenting which they can draw on. However, the findings in this research indicate that having a less positive internal model can be responded to in different ways; it appears that this is accounted for by interactions with other parts of the model. For example, some of the participants felt they had internal models which they would not want to recreate but that reflecting on this had led them to develop clear hopes around the kind of parent they did want to be and parenting approaches that were very different from those they had experienced, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy. This resonates with Donithen and Schoppe-Sullivan's (2022) findings that first-time fathers who reported modelling childrearing on their own fathers had lower self-efficacy. It appears that a parent's internal model is only one part of the picture; what may be more important is how they process and respond to this.

As well as conscious processes, vicarious experiences may inform unconscious processes; this is portrayed in the transactional model through the subcategory *sense of instinct*. Some of the participants in this research seemed to consider their sense of instinct a fundamental source of self-efficacy, while others did not refer to instinct or intuition at all. Within the literature, a small number of studies have reported associations between parents' attachment styles and their self-efficacy (Grusec, Hastings & Mammone, 1994; Donithen & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2022). Binda and Crippa (2017) offer a possible explanation for this, suggesting that protective factors such as high-quality relationships with family members may extend over time and impact parenting self-efficacy indirectly through effects on their interpersonal relationships. It is possible that, in this study, when participants spoke about their sense of instinct, they may have been referring to the kind of unconscious processes described by Binda and Crippa. The transactional model suggests that parents' own experiences of

interpersonal relationships and attachment may be significant for some parents in developing self-efficacy, but for others (perhaps particularly those who have had less positive experiences), other mechanisms may be more influential.

Two of the subcategories which emerged through the data do not appear to have been addressed in the literature or in Bandura's model; these are *hopes and beliefs* and *individual characteristics and sense of identity*. It is interesting that, in this research, when using a methodology which did not test out existing theories or hypotheses but aimed to generate theory based on parents' own perspectives, new areas came to light. These two subcategories will now be discussed in relation to the findings and to other psychological theories which support their inclusion in the proposed model.

In this research, links were made between parents' self-efficacy and their hopes for themselves or their child. For example, one parent said that knowing how strongly she had desired to be a mother helped her to regulate her emotions when she encountered challenges, which made her feel like a better parent. Another participant, who felt she had limited sources of self-efficacy, spoke about an imagined future for herself and her child and the impact of feeling she was working towards this. Visualising preferred futures and noticing the steps which have already been taken towards these can have a profound effect on people's beliefs and behaviours; and have been harnessed in therapeutic approaches such as Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (de Shazer et al., 2021). The influence of hope on parenting self-efficacy is therefore a new but not unexpected finding. Similarly, this research highlighted a relationship between parents' self-efficacy and their religious or spiritual beliefs, which has not previously been considered but would not be surprising when looked at from a *bio-psycho-socio-cultural-spiritual* perspective (Nwoye, 2020). While sociocultural-spiritual influences

are rarely discussed in research from within Eurocentric traditions, their impact on human subjectivity and psychological experience are greatly emphasised elsewhere (Freeman, 2012; 2014a; 2014b). Again, this points to the importance of conducting research that includes participants with different perspectives; and that adopts methodologies where these can be authentically explored.

The other subcategory which adds new dimensions to the literature and to Bandura's model is *individual characteristics and sense of identity*. In this research, parents' individual characteristics and the interactions between them were reported to impact their self-efficacy. For example, one participant's faith and gender intersected in a way that gave her a very strong sense of purpose and confidence in her role as a mother. This suggests that intersectionality theory may offer helpful contributions when considering how parenting self-efficacy develops. Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993), intersectionality theory posits that identities are not reducible to one dimension and seeks to understand the complexity of social identity by focusing on "the great axes of social differentiation" (e.g. gender, class, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion) and "their interplay in the production and reproduction of social inequalities" (Bilge, 2010, p.58).

The existing literature has failed to attend to individual characteristics and their impact on parenting self-efficacy; even more so to intersections between different aspects of identity. Qualitative research offers opportunities to explore intersectionality in relation to parenting, so long as it is not based on a pre-existing theoretical focus which may simplify, reduce and misrepresent peoples' experiences (Crenshaw, 1993). By including participants with different perspectives and allowing them to explore their own experiences in a free-flowing way, this research provides insight into multidirectional relationships between parenting self-efficacy

and aspects of identity. For instance, one mother spoke about coming from a black family and how that might come into her parenting; while one of the fathers reflected on how he felt the part of his identity related to being a parent had been amplified during the months he had been working from home. These examples offer parallels with the literature on identity development, demonstrating how parents may view different aspects of their identity as more or less important; and how this can both influence and be influenced by the meanings they perceive in their environment (Burke & Stets, 2009). Given that parenting self-efficacy refers to parents' beliefs about themselves, the inclusion of identity within the construct would appear to be important for future theoretical developments.

7.2.2 Physiological Factors

The second category adds to existing conceptualisations of parenting self-efficacy, which appear to have ignored physiological factors as a source of influence. Physiological factors are not acknowledged in Bandura's model; neither were they attended to in any of the reviewed literature, despite findings which may hint at their potential significance, for example that maternal self-efficacy is at its lowest at 3 weeks postpartum (Law et al., 2019). In this research, participants made links between their self-efficacy and the four subcategories identified within this category: *physical health and condition*, *hormonal changes*, *sleep*, and *diet*. For instance, some of the mothers described the impact of challenges associated with having a C-section delivery, developing mastitis, and the effects of hormones; both mothers and fathers referred to the influence of sleep deprivation; and one father noticed the impact of diet. In some examples, the relationship between parenting self-efficacy and physiological factors appeared to be mediated by other factors. For instance, developing mastitis had affected one mother's sense of identity as she was unable to take up her role as a mother in

the way that she had hoped (breastfeeding), which had impacted her parenting self-efficacy. In this example, the effects of physiological factors appeared to be longer-lasting, whereas factors such as sleep and diet were described as having a more transient impact by most parents.

In his studies of Asian healing traditions, Yasuo Yuasa (1987) found that many of them do not typically separate the mind from the body. In contrast, in the West, disciplines such as psychiatry and psychology have been characterised by a mind-body dualism, which is considered to have originated in Cartesian philosophy (Kasulis, 1987). However, the growing fields of neurophysiology, psychoneuroimmunology, and neuroscience have shown that the mind and the body can no longer be seen as separate domains (Berrios, 2018); indeed, Litrell argues that "the proliferating results demand an appreciation of the interconnection between mental states and physical processes" (Litrell, 2008, p.18). Physiological experiences such as illness and surgery are known to impact psychological functioning in many individuals; the reverse is also increasingly well documented (Litrell, 2008). Futhermore, a growing body of evidence demonstrates direct relationships between neurophysiological and hormonal changes, and psychological processes (Music, 2017). Given these findings, it seems important that research relating to early parenthood, a period of major physiological change (most obviously for mothers but also for fathers through the impact on sleep), should attend to interactions between physiological and psychological factors. While this does appear to have been the case in the literature around perinatal mood (Ross et al., 2005), the same cannot be said for parenting self-efficacy.

7.2.3 Interactions with Others and Environment

The next category builds on aspects of Bandura's model and areas of the literature, whilst adding new insights. One of the subcategories, *interactions between a parent and their child*, corresponds with one of the most important determinants of self-efficacy according to Bandura: performance accomplishments. In Bandura's (1977) model, performance accomplishments, in other words, experiences of performing a task successfully, increase expectations of future success. This component of Bandura's model is mirrored in the literature; for example, parenting self-efficacy has been found to increase over the first few months of parenthood in response to gaining experience (Pinto et al., 2016; Troutman et al., 2012). The data gathered in this research offers further support for the impact of performance accomplishments on self-efficacy. For instance, several participants spoke about feeling like a good parent when they perceived they had a strong relationship with their child; in contrast, one parent felt that having her affections rejected by her son decreased her self-efficacy. Whereas the literature has focused on the influence of factors relating to the child's health and temperament, this research highlighted the potential importance of parents' perceptions of compatibility with their child. Some of the descriptions given imply that parents find it easier to maintain self-efficacy when they feel there is a good fit between their child's emerging personality and their own. This suggests that the psychological space between, rather than within, the parent and the child, may hold significance in informing parenting self-efficacy.

Two of the other subcategories, *interactions between a parent and their partner* and *interactions with others*, again link to the existing literature and Bandura's model whilst pointing to the influence of connections between and across people and systems. The

reviewed literature highlighted relationships between parenting self-efficacy and social support, suggesting that interactions with others (including a partner) can provide opportunities for tangible support; role modelling; and informational and affective support (Kerrick, 2017). Within the literature, these factors are often explained using different components of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model. For example, role modelling provides a source of vicarious experience; affective support can offer a source of verbal persuasion and may help with emotional arousal; and tangible and informational support can reduce the difficulty of the task, thereby impacting emotional arousal and increasing opportunities to experience successful performance. However, some of the existing research points to limitations with Bandura's model. For instance, it is difficult to see how the model accounts for results from a study by Vance and colleagues (2020), in which being married was associated with lower maternal self-efficacy. Similarly to the literature, the data which generated these two subcategories indicates that interactions with others such as a partner, family members, or professionals, can directly and indirectly influence parenting self-efficacy in a range of ways and provides evidence for some of the processes described by Bandura, particularly the influence of practical support and verbal feedback. Yet it also presents questions and challenges which are not accounted for in Bandura's model, such as why the same feedback might be received in contrasting ways by different parents.

Some researchers have moved away from Bandura when looking for explanations of their findings. Binda and Crippa's (2017) explorations of their data led them to attend to the interplay between new parents' emerging identities, and their interactions with each other and their extended families. Their analysis shares key features with the systemic therapy tradition, which grew out of a need to explain complex patterns of interactions (Pellegrini, 2009). Systems theories such as General Systems Theory (GST, von Bertalanffy, 1968) attend to

interactions between elements of a system and offer nonlinear explanations of events and behaviours. Systemic approaches would therefore appear to be helpful for exploring a dynamic and multi-faceted construct such as parenting self-efficacy, and certainly seem relevant to the perspectives shared in this research. For instance, being a parent who was part of a couple seemed to be experienced in a very different way to being a single parent. For parents who were part of a couple, the relationship between partners appeared to relate in multidirectional ways to their relationships with the child and their other relationships. To illustrate, one mother described how observing certain interactions between her partner and her child lowered her self-efficacy; while another mother felt that her husband became more critical of her parenting when they were around his family members. The transactional model can be viewed as sitting within a systems theory perspective and aims to provide a framework through which to explore the complex, multidirectional, and inter-related interactions that affect parenting self-efficacy.

The final subcategory, *interactions between a parent and their environment*, addresses factors which are not acknowledged in Bandura's model but have been intermittently attended to in the literature through consideration of variables such as financial resources; orientation towards the dominant culture; and the Covid-19 pandemic. In this research, participants described different sequences of interactions with the environment, some of which were felt to be strongly related to their parenting self-efficacy. For example, a single mother described how relying on minimal funds from the government made her feel a certain way as a parent and that she could not give her son everything he needs. Several parents spoke about their anxieties around safety in their local area, with one mother reflecting that the intersection of her child's race and gender are compelling her to try and move somewhere safer. Pandemic-related restrictions were perceived to have impacted parents' capacity to provide different

opportunities for their children, leading to decreased self-efficacy; while being in a good financial situation and having a stable career were felt to positively impact self-efficacy beliefs. The accounts given in this research highlight the interactions between parents' self-efficacy and a range of environmental and contextual factors, including financial and material resources, neighbourhood, government legislation, and societal values and beliefs. In this way, the proposed theory fits well with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which postulates that individuals exist within a set of nested systems and that their transactions with these systems inform their behaviour and cognitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Clearly, parents with different intrapsychic and physiological experiences will relate to transactions with others and their environment in different ways. Certain experiences and interactions may be associated with risk factors, and others with protective factors, in the development of parenting self-efficacy. The proposed framework facilitates exploration of where the risk and protective factors might lie for a particular individual and may help to identify areas of strength and resource.

7.2.4 Psychological Processes

In the transactional model, the interplay between parents' intrapsychic and physiological factors and their interactions with other people and the environment, gives rise to a range of psychological processes; these are clustered into four interacting areas: *power and positioning; understanding and validation*; *connection and belonging*; and *congruence, harmony and collaboration*. How a parent experiences these psychological processes may also feed back into their interactions with other people and their environment, and even to some intrapsychic and physiological factors. The multidirectional relationships between different parts of the model follow unique patterns in each individual that underpin their

parenting self-efficacy; due to these differences, self-efficacy can fluctuate more in some parents than others.

Within the literature, only two studies were identified which focus on the psychological processes involved in developing parenting self-efficacy. Both of these were heavily influenced by Bandura's (1977) theory to the extent that opportunities to explore different explanations were missed and the studies risked suffering from confirmation bias. In contrast, this research did not rely on any existing framework and employed a methodology which helped to generate theory based on parents' own perspectives. Through this process, the transactional model came to inhabit a structure that is quite different from previous models, and to incorporate new aspects, such as its attention to four interacting clusters of psychological processes. Whilst the inclusion of these adds a new dimension to the conceptualisation of parenting self-efficacy, certain areas within the clusters have been referred to in the literature and by Bandura. Each of the four clusters will now be examined. Where there are links with existing research and Bandura's model these will be considered, and new findings will be related to other relevant psychological theories which support their inclusion in the proposed model.

7.2.5 Power and Positioning

This category, which consists of two subcategories, *power and positioning in parents' interactions with the environment* and *power and positioning in parents' interactions with others,* is not acknowledged in Bandura's model or in Leerkes and Burney's (2007) study. Beach Copeland and Harbaugh (2017) attended to power and positioning through focusing on the experiences of low-income mothers. Their findings highlighted a wide range of issues

faced by parents with low incomes, particularly through the identification of an additional category beyond those informed by Bandura's framework: 'Managing Life', which captured mothers' concerns about managing work and personal activities alongside being a parent. However, this category does not offer much depth or explanatory power and the authors do not consider how their findings might relate to other psychological theories.

In this research, participants described feeling different levels of power over their circumstances and opportunities. Parents with a greater sense of power appeared to feel able to make choices that were congruent with their hopes and values; for example, choosing when and where their child would attend playgroups or nursery, and having possibilities to provide their child with the resources and relationships they felt they needed. In contrast, parents in a position of less power seemed to experience a tension between the kind of parent they wanted to be and the kind of parent they felt like they could be in their circumstances. Related to power, several experiences which were shared indicated that how parents felt positioned in their interactions with others had an impact on their self-efficacy. Accounts were given of feeling positioned in different ways by partners, extended family members, professionals and by society. In several examples, links were made between positioning and individual characteristics. For instance, one father described feeling unable to have the same status as a mother would; while some of the mothers felt they were positioned in other specific ways related to their gender, such as having more responsibility. Several parents spoke about experiences with professionals where the professional appeared to hold negative assumptions about them or position themselves as the expert. On some occasions, parents felt they had been positioned in a certain way on the basis of individual characteristics relating to their child; for example, one participant described how her family members had not accepted her son as he had dual cultural and ethnic heritages. The experiences shared suggest that both

the degree of power parents feel they have, and their positioning in the systems they exist within, strongly influence their self-efficacy beliefs.

These findings resonate with the literature on positioning in groups and systems. According to positioning theory, a person's social world is generated through conversations with others (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). Alderfer (1997) describes how, whenever we enter into a new group, system or relationship, we bring with us multiple affiliations (race, culture, gender, age, religion, social class, ability/disability, sexual orientation, social and professional) that we cannot leave behind. Through our affiliations and interactions, we receive and internalise messages about different groups that are influenced by both present and historical relationships between these groups (McRae & Short, 2010). As a result, every interaction is impacted by the messages that individuals have received about their own groups and those represented by others (Alderfer, 1997). The perspectives shared in this research demonstrate this point: interactions were perceived by parents as being informed by messages which positioned them in a certain way. Unsurprisingly, it appears that when parents experience interactions that are influenced by positive messages about the group they are being identified with, they will be more likely to feel comfortable with how they are being positioned, which in turn may help them to internalise positive beliefs about themselves.

Power refers to an ability or capacity to effect outcomes (Morriss, 1987). Given that parenting self-efficacy refers to a parent's beliefs about their ability to positively influence their children's outcomes (Coleman & Karraker, 1997), it is not surprising that the parents in this research related their self-efficacy to feelings of power or control over the circumstances in which they were parenting their child. Frameworks such as intersectionality have highlighted how power is experienced differently by different groups, particularly groups

who have historically been oppressed based on varied intersecting characteristics (Crenshaw, 1993). It has also now been evidenced that the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated structural inequalities between groups, disproportionately affecting families who were already vulnerable and those with minoritised ethnic backgrounds (Bowleg, 2020; Millar et al., 2020; Pearcey et al., 2020; Pereda & Diaz-Faes, 2020; Townsend, 2020). Furthermore, pandemic-related restrictions had extreme consequences for young families and expectant parents, including being unable to see friends and relatives; have visitors and birth partners present during hospital stays; or access childcare provision, children's centres and libraries (Petitions Committee, 2021). This research took place in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic in one of the most deprived local authorities in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). Although this context may have had an especially polarising effect on participants' experiences of power, its influence could potentially be critical to parenting self-efficacy and should continue to be attended to in future research.

7.2.6 Understanding and Validation

This category, which consists of two subcategories, *feeling understood* and *feeling validated,* is partly addressed in the literature through reference to the emotional arousal and verbal persuasion components of Bandura's model. Bandura asserted that stressful events may bring about emotional arousal and physiological states which in turn may impact a person's self-efficacy by lowering expectations for success (Bandura, 1982). He also described how, when an individual is supported with both verbal persuasion and material support for achievement of a task, they are more likely to believe in their abilities and perform successfully, which builds their self-efficacy; in addition, individuals are more likely to believe they can cope with a situation when they receive verbal persuasion from people they view as credible

(Bandura, 1982). Beach Copeland and Harbaugh's (2017) study emphasised that mothers with both high and low levels of efficacy consistently had concerns around transitioning to the maternal role and found that all their participants were affected by a wide range of issues relating to their emotional wellbeing. Leerkes and Burney's (2007) findings indicate that concerns and issues related to wellbeing are likely to emerge during pregnancy, given the strong associations reported between mothers' postnatal efficacy and prenatal efficacy. However, neither study attends to the mechanisms through which parents' concerns and wellbeing may be supported during pregnancy or after the birth, or the impact this may have on self-efficacy.

Some researchers have referred to the effect of support on emotional arousal, for example, Kerrick (2017) noted the influence of affective support gained through having a community on self-efficacy; and relationships between parents' confidence and positive interactions with professionals have been considered (Bates, 2020; Vance et al., 2020). The data gathered in this research suggests that supportive interactions which help parents to feel understood and validated may have significant effects on their self-efficacy beliefs, both prenatally and postnatally. In line with Bandura's model, positive feedback from other people helped parents to feel more able to cope with a situation, particularly when those individuals were viewed as credible. For instance, several participants spoke about feeling reassured and validated during interactions with others, with one mother highlighting the differential impact of positive feedback depending on who it is given by. A number of parents spoke about the importance of feeling understood, without being judged, on their ability to build confidence in themselves. Examples were given of conversations with a particular friend or professional that had provided opportunities to express what they were experiencing and feel this was received and accepted by the other person. In one case a mother described how, while she

was pregnant, an interaction with a medical professional who seemed to understand and accept her decision to continue with the pregnancy, helped her to believe she "could do this".

The accounts given by participants in this research illustrate some of the processes described within the psychoanalytic literature. Bion (1959) wrote about how in container-contained relationships, difficult feelings can be experienced and delivered back to an individual in a form that they can take in and process. Within a therapeutic process, Rogers argued that unconditional positive regard is one of the fundamental conditions which appears to be effective in bringing about change, defining it as follows: "[unconditional positive regard] involves as much feeling of acceptance for the client's expression of negative, 'bad', painful, fearful, defensive, abnormal feelings as for his expression of 'good', positive, mature, confident, social feelings, as much acceptance of ways in which he is inconsistent as of ways in which he is consistent. It means caring for the client, but not in a possessive way or in such a way as simply to satisfy the therapist's own needs. It means a caring for the client as a separate person, with permission to have his own feelings, his own experiences" (Rogers, 1957, p.225). Although the participants in this research were not referring to specifically therapeutic relationships, some of the interactions they described seem to have embodied similar qualities. The perspectives shared suggest that, both prenatally and postnatally, relational experiences which help to contain difficult feelings and make parents feel accepted, understood, and validated, can positively affect their self-efficacy.

7.2.7 Connection and Belonging

This category, which consists of two subcategories, *sense of belonging* and *feeling connected with others*, is not attended to by Bandura or through the categories generated in Beach

Copeland and Harbaugh's (2017) study. Although social support is included in Leerkes and Burney's (2007) model, it is considered to increase efficacy beliefs through the mechanism of verbal persuasion and by reducing the difficulty of parenting, rather than through any effect on parents' feelings of connection and belonging. However, these concepts were indirectly referenced in some of the literature reviewed. For instance, Anicama (2018) found that immigrant mothers with stronger orientations towards the dominant culture had greater self-efficacy; while Elliott's (2007) findings suggested that higher levels of social support were predictive of better maternal self-efficacy and appeared to provide parents with more opportunities to connect with others and seek informal sources of information. Connection and belonging within the couple relationship and relationships with extended family have also been identified as potentially significant, with some researchers suggesting that parents' feelings about how they relate and fit in with their own families may be important in shaping their emerging parenting identity (Biehle & Mickelson, 2011; Binda & Crippa, 2017).

This research provides support for the potentially significant role of connection and belonging on parenting self-efficacy. Clear links were made by some parents between their feelings of connection with others and their self-efficacy beliefs. For example, one of the fathers felt that strong attachments with his wife and son were some of his main sources of self-efficacy. In contrast, one mother described how lost connections with family members and friends had impacted her capacity to provide her child with the relationships she felt he needed and had significantly affected her social life and emotional wellbeing. A number of participants related their transition to parenthood with losing connections with certain individuals or their sense of belonging within particular groups. This appeared to be particularly pertinent for two parents who described being the first within their friendship groups to have children. However, one father explained that being one of the last among his

peers to start a family had several benefits, including that his son always had other children to play with at parties and gatherings. The social context in which participants had become parents seemed to affect how they experienced this identity transition, with some appearing to feel like they were 'joining the club' and others finding the process very isolating. Parents differed in their level of desire or need to establish new connections with other parents; for example, one mother described feeling reluctant to interact with other parents and related this to her personality. Another participant shared that the other parents in a group she had joined did not seem like her "kind of people", suggesting that she wanted to belong to a group who shared other aspects of her identity beyond the part related to being a parent.

These findings resonate with theories relating to adult attachment and social belonging. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), attachment behaviours from early childhood continue to influence how we relate to others and our perceptions of psychological safety throughout adulthood (Sperling & Berman, 1994). This may explain why many parents appear to feel a drive for connection with others and why the absence or presence of such connections can have such a significant psychological impact. In addition, the literature on belonging suggests that "the need to belong is a powerful, fundamental and extremely pervasive motivation" and serves as a protective factor for mental wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.1). Sense of belonging has also been found to be a contributing factor in feeling valued and part of a community (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Shaw, 2019). The accounts shared in this research suggest that feelings of belonging can be a source of self-efficacy and positive wellbeing, although this was not the case for all parents. They also indicate that feelings of belonging relate to perceptions about one's own identity and the identity of others. These findings have important implications as they demonstrate the need to attend to identity and difference when supporting new parents.

7.2.8 Congruence, Harmony and Collaboration

This category consists of three subcategories: *degree of harmony and collaboration in relationship with partner; degree of harmony and collaboration in relationships with others;* and *congruence between own hopes and beliefs and perceived reality.* Similarly to some of the other clusters of psychological processes, aspects of these came up in the literature and can be related to areas of Bandura's model, while others do not appear to have been explored previously in relation to parenting self-efficacy. Relevant to the degree of collaboration parents experience, within the reviewed literature Bandura's framework has been used to explain how social support impacts parenting self-efficacy through the mechanism of verbal persuasion and by reducing the difficulty of parenting, thereby affecting emotional arousal (Leerkes & Burney, 2007; Kerrick, 2017). The degree of harmony in parents' relationships with others (including their partner) may also link to Bandura's concept of verbal persuasion in the sense that positive encouragement from others implies that these interactions are harmonious. A number of studies have referred to the influence of relationship dynamics within co-parenting relationships (Vance et al., 2020; Biehle & Mickelson, 2011) and relationships with extended family (Binda & Crippa, 2017). The impact of disharmony was highlighted in Beach Copeland and Harbaugh's (2017) study through the creation of a new category: 'Managing Conflicts', which referred to mothers' conflicts with their partner or other family members. Although this is a useful addition, Beach Copeland and Harbaugh (2017) did not explore the mechanisms through which conflict or disharmony may affect parents' self-efficacy. The last subcategory, *congruence between own hopes and beliefs and perceived reality*, is not addressed by Bandura or within the literature and offers a new conceptual development.

In this research, participants described how important it was for them to feel they could approach the task of parenting collaboratively with others, and the impact of this on their self-efficacy. In several cases this involved collaborating with their partner; for example, sharing practical duties or being able to have time for themselves when their partner was caring for the child. For some parents, they had gained a sense of collaboration through support from family members or professionals. While feelings of collaboration were spoken about mostly in relation to practical aspects of parents' lives, the degree of harmony they felt seemed to refer to how they experienced the psychological space between themselves and others. For instance, one mother spoke about how her values and parenting approaches aligned very closely with her partner's; while a different mother described feeling her ideas about how to parent often seemed to conflict with those of her family members and sometimes even with societal values or assumptions. Another psychological process which came to light through this research was the effect on parents of feeling a sense of congruence between their hopes and beliefs, and their perceived reality. Some of the parents spoke about feeling that parenthood was much harder than they ever imagined it would be and seemed to be struggling to reconcile the inconsistencies between their earlier expectations and current experiences. A further factor which appeared to impact parents was the extent to which feedback from interactions with their child reflected their hopes and beliefs about themselves. For example, two parents spoke emotively about how difficult they had found it when, following their child's first accident, they had felt compelled to question their beliefs around being a parent that could keep their child safe. In addition, some of the accounts given indicate that comments from others can reinforce or destabilise the sense of congruence that parents have built internally, and that this in turn affects their self-efficacy.

The findings in this research resonate strongly with Leerkes & Burney's (2007) suggestion that social support impacts parenting self-efficacy by reducing the difficulty of parenting, which affects emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). Social support can come from different sources (such as a partner, family member, or professional) but its absence or presence appears to have a significant impact. The conceptual developments related to the effects of harmony and congruence in the proposed model are supported by cognitive dissonance theory. According to Leon Festinger, who proposed the theory, psychological representations or 'cognitions' can be either consistent or inconsistent with each other; and "the holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions arouses the state of cognitive dissonance, which is experienced as uncomfortable tension. This tension has drive-like properties and must be reduced" (Festinger, 1957, quoted in Cooper, 2007, p.7). Festinger's description of this process helps to explain why disharmony and lack of congruence were experienced by parents as psychologically uncomfortable; and it is not surprising that these feelings were perceived to have negative effects on self-efficacy. It is also noteworthy that for some individuals, the uncomfortable tension this had provoked did appear to have driven them to make changes in their lives that helped to reduce it. It seems that attending to factors which affect the degree of harmony and congruence parents feel may have important implications for their self-efficacy beliefs, as well as for their overall wellbeing and satisfaction.

7.2.9 Experience Over Time

This final category is not addressed explicitly in Bandura's model, beyond the idea that receiving greater levels of exposure to vicarious experiences and performance accomplishments will help to increase self-efficacy. However, the existing literature helps situate the four subcategories identified in this research: *change and development over time*;

previous experience with children; *gaining knowledge;* and *formative experiences.* For instance, a number of the reviewed studies attended to temporal aspects and collectively suggested that self-efficacy beliefs are likely to change over time in response to a range of factors, including opportunities for experience and encouragement; shifts in tasks; environmental contexts; and developmental levels of the child (Hudson, Elek & Fleck, 2001; Weaver, 2008). Other relevant findings were that previous experience with children predicted prenatal but not postnatal efficacy in mothers (Leerkes & Burney, 2007); parents appear to be most receptive to knowledge that relates to more recent or immediate experiences with their child (Elliott, 2007); and that early breastfeeding experiences may potentially be influential in forming mothers' efficacy beliefs (Hankel, Kunseler & Oosterman, 2019).

The previous categories have highlighted how, in most cases, parenting self-efficacy appears to be a relatively fluid construct that is responsive to interactions with others and the environment, as well as intrapsychic and physiological factors relating to the individual. In addition, the data relating to this category suggest that, even if these factors were to remain relatively stable, the passing of time itself influences the development of self-efficacy beliefs. This is an expected finding in that young children change dramatically over a short period of time, corresponding with shifts in parenting duties. In this research, seeing children grow and develop and reach certain milestones was reported to help increase parents' self-efficacy; developing routines was also associated with improvements. Several parents described how their self-efficacy had increased over time in line with their child's ability to communicate. One father explained that as his daughter had got older, he received increasingly sophisticated forms of feedback during their interactions, which helped him to feel more secure in his parenting approach. On the other hand, some parents felt that certain developmental stages

had brought new challenges that required different parenting skills, which had made them question themselves more.

One of the reviewed studies found that previous experience with children predicted prenatal, but not postnatal efficacy (Leerkes & Burney, 2007). The researchers hypothesized that postnatally performance accomplishments with one's own child would have more influence and previous experience with children would become less relevant. However, in this research some of the parents made direct links between their previous experience with children and their current levels of self-efficacy. For example, one mother felt she had "already practised" the skills involved in raising children by caring for other people's children in the past; while another parent related her ease around when her child reaches developmental milestones to her background in teaching. Resonating with existing literature, in this study gaining knowledge was not always associated with positive effects on parents' self-efficacy. In fact, some participants described how information that was overly prescriptive or appeared to try and standardise child development had a negative impact on them. However, one parent found that following accounts of her choice on Instagram made her feel reassured and validated in her parenting approach. Related to Hankel and colleagues' (2019) findings, some participants described how specific early experiences had been influential in developing their self-efficacy and forming their parenting identity. For example, one father felt that the implications of his wife having a C-section delivery had shaped his identity as a father; while one of the mothers spoke about how an experience she had in hospital shortly after her child's birth had set her on a trajectory of conviction in her own parenting instincts.

Eriksson and colleagues (2018) argue that studies which use concepts from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory can result in the most useful recommendations for public mental health

policy and practice. They also note that later revisions of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) are particularly helpful due to their inclusion of 'chronosystems', which take into account changes over time, both within the person and in the systems they exist within (Eriksson et al., 2018). Although this research was not informed by any particular theory, it could be considered to align with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in that the experiences described by participants echo many of its components. In line with ecological ideas, this study provides a rich exploration of the transactional and temporal aspects of parenting self-efficacy and offers a framework through which to consider how the interactions within, between and across the systems relating to a parent may affect the development of self-efficacy beliefs over time.

7.3 Critical Appraisal

The overwhelming majority of research into parenting self-efficacy has consisted of quantitative studies which sit within a post-positivist tradition (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019; Harper, 2012). Unfortunately, this has left the sources of self-efficacy beliefs poorly understood in terms of how they operate and interact with each other (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019). With the aim of increasing understanding of the emergence and development of parenting self-efficacy, this research adopted a different methodological approach to previous literature. Qualitative research procedures were selected that would enable the researcher to generate an explanation in the form of a theory (Punch, 2000). The study was informed by the emancipatory tradition within educational psychology and was designed to amplify the voices of participants; reflect multiple perspectives; and attend to issues around equality, diversity, equity and inclusion (Billington, 2000). The researcher chose to conduct this study using Constructivist Grounded Theory as this approach supports

critical qualitative inquiry through enabling the generation of theory where meaning is viewed as being constructed through an interaction of the interpreter and the interpreted, as situated in society (Charmaz, 2017; Levers, 2013; Crotty, 1998).

Some of the most significant contributions of this study result from its adoption of theoretical and methodological approaches that have not previously been represented within the literature. Unlike previous research, the design for this study enabled the inclusion of participants with children of different ages and actively sought parents with diverse individual characteristics. In addition, during the interviews, one of the parents shared that she was a first-time parent to twins and another parent shared that her child had been diagnosed with complex medical needs during her pregnancy. Consequently, the data which informed the transactional model reflects the perspectives of parents with a wide range of different experiences; and captures the temporal aspects of the development of parenting self-efficacy through retrospective accounts and comparisons between participants who had been parents for differing lengths of time. By using a qualitative methodology, the study has been able to address clearly identified gaps in the literature, offering new insights into the sources of parenting self-efficacy; how they operate and interact with each other; and changes and developments over time.

While the methodological approach taken was very different to previous studies, Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory (2006; 2010; 2014) was followed methodically at each stage and provided a rigorous and transparent framework for conducting the research. This is reported on in detail within this paper. A particular strength of the chosen approach is the application of methodological self-consciousness throughout all stages of its implementation. In this study, the researcher examined and reflected on how their prior knowledge and

experience might influence their research and engaged in discussions with their supervisor around how to navigate this. The researcher's pre-conceived ideas were acknowledged while taking steps to reduce the influence of these, for example developing a semi-structured interview schedule that consisted of open questions and responding flexibly to what participants wanted to share. Furthermore, through supervision and keeping a research diary, the researcher tried to become aware of their privileges and positions; define intersecting relationships with power, identity, subjectivity and marginality for themselves and the participants; and dissect their worldviews, language and meanings, exploring how these came into their research (Charmaz, 2017). The result of this process is a reflexive exploration of the emergence and development of parenting self-efficacy, which centres on parents' own accounts about their experiences.

The study also has a number of limitations. This research took place in a unique context: the aftermath of a global pandemic which had extreme consequences for new parents and young children. Many of the participants had been significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and their recent experiences of parenthood cannot be considered typical. Although Constructivist Grounded Theory does not aim to generate findings which are generalizable, its intention is to enable recipients of the theory to ascertain how relevant or adaptable for their own situation the findings might be (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Given that the data were gathered at a very unusual time, the findings may be less relevant and adaptable to different situations than would otherwise have been the case. On the other hand, conducting this research amidst the polarizing effects of Covid-19 may have shed light on certain areas of experience that are always there but normally less visible or less spoken about.

Grounded theory designs inherently privilege some voices over others due to the differences between stages of analysis (Levers, 2013). In addition, in this study some of the interviews were considerably shorter than others. In one of the interviews, the parent initially responded to the researcher's question saying that "nothing" affected how she thought or felt about herself as a parent. This comment, alongside the differences in how much parents engaged with the interview questions, prompted the researcher to reflect on the extent to which the research fit the situation and world of their participants (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz suggests looking at the social locations of the researcher and participants, as well as examining how ways of knowing are anchored in time and place (Charmaz, 2017). Engagement with different epistemologies demonstrates that Anglo-North American inquiry traditions are rooted in individualism (Nwoye, 2020). The social location and epistemology of the researcher may have been different to those of some of the participants; perhaps these differences might explain why some of the parents engaged less fully or fluidly in the interview. In addition, the researcher may have been felt to be in a position of more power due to being a trainee psychologist, as well as perceptions around their individual characteristics such as being white and British (Schein, 1999; 2011; Burnham, 2013). Intersecting relationships between power and identity for the researcher and the participants may have had implications for what was spoken about and what was left unsaid by participants about their experiences, meaning that certain information was not captured. Lastly, due to time limitations, the researcher was unable to verify the coding, analysis and theory generation processes with participants, meaning that the resulting grounded theory is the researcher's own interpretation of the data.

7.4 Implications and Future Directions

As has been outlined, the most significant neural development across the human lifespan takes place during the period between birth and three years and numerous reviews have highlighted the effectiveness of preventative and early intervention approaches for young families on children's outcomes (Music, 2017; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Tickell, 2011; Department for Work and Pensions & Department for Education, 2011; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). In recognition of the dramatic consequences of Covid-19 on young families and the services that support them, the government are in the process of developing plans to improve health outcomes for new parents and their babies during the first 1001 critical days (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021), meaning it is a timely moment to review the evidence underpinning current and proposed approaches.

There continue to be significant gaps in the evidence base for existing approaches that aim to support the development of self-efficacy beliefs in new parents (Schuengel & Oosterman, 2019; Wittkowski, Dowling & Smith, 2016) and implementation of the major programmes which have been rolled out in the UK has been associated with a range of concerns (Lewis, 2011). The context of service delivery has also changed considerably in recent years. Many services have had to respond creatively to financial constraints; for example, the majority of EPSs have adopted either a partially or fully traded system (Lee & Woods, 2017). In addition, the need to develop services which can be delivered digitally became paramount during the pandemic (Kaess et al., 2020). These contextual changes have been associated with numerous and significant challenges, as well as new opportunities. For example, within the traded system, EPSs are increasingly gaining commissioning from a variety of groups including local authorities, academies, social enterprises and parents (National College for Teaching

and Leadership, 2013). Practitioners have also gained confidence in developing new ways of working, which carry certain advantages such as increased access and choice for service-users (Bates et al., 2021).

This research offers a new perspective which could helpfully inform preventative and early intervention approaches that fit within different methods of service delivery. Rather than looking at pre-existing interventions, this study explored the origins and sources of parenting self-efficacy as perceived by parents themselves. In this way, it aligns with many of the consultation approaches in psychology, which assume that individuals are experts in their own lives who can identify and find solutions to their own problems through relational processes (Schein, 1999; 2011; Wagner, 2000; de Shazer et al., 2021; Kennedy & Lee, 2021). The theory generated by this research offers a framework that can be used by services and practitioners when considering the diverse factors that may influence the development of self-efficacy beliefs in new parents, as well as how they might operate and interact in a particular individual.

Alongside implications for services and practitioners, this research also has relevance for parents themselves. In a famous address to the American Psychological Association, George Miller proposed a vision for the profession which involved promoting access to psychological knowledge among the general public (Miller, 1969). As a theoretical construct, parenting self-efficacy has received a lot of attention from academics but is likely to have limited conceptual meaning for the majority of parents (de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005). It is possible that many people may find parenting self-efficacy a more meaningful construct if they are able to see how it could be applied to their own situation. The transactional model offers a framework for investigating the sources of self-efficacy that feel most salient to a

particular individual and exploring how they operate and interact; parents might therefore find this helpful for identifying their own unique areas of strength and resource.

This research also has relevance for researchers and professionals who are interested in early child development or the transition to parenthood. To the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to provide a theory of how parenting self-efficacy develops that is grounded in parents' own experiences and perspectives. In addition, the model has a unique structure that attends to multiple interacting relationships whilst capturing nuance and reflecting the different ways in which these can change and develop over time. Although the transactional model was not based on any particular framework, it echoes many of the concepts from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1986), which have been identified as important for informing effective public mental health policy and practice (Eriksson et al., 2018).

Future research should endeavour to include participants with wide-ranging perspectives and would benefit from studying the development of parenting self-efficacy in and across different groups and contexts. Other studies may wish to consider investigating the development and trajectories of self-efficacy beliefs in parents who have more than one child. The relevance of recent theoretical developments, including the transactional model, to prenatal self-efficacy could be explored; and it may be helpful to consider its applicability to adoptive parents and foster carers. Finally, future studies would benefit from being centred around parents' own experiences, and from verifying data collection and analysis processes with participants.

7.5 Recommendations for Practice and Dissemination

Given the numerous challenging contextual factors affecting young families at the current time, there is an urgent need to understand what new parents need to thrive. The transactional model offers a framework that will help services, practitioners and parents themselves to understand the processes and transactions involved in the development of parenting self-efficacy; and to plan intervention and support accordingly. It is therefore imperative that this research is shared with those who may benefit.

The transactional model can be used in a variety of ways by different professionals. EPs and other psychologists may wish to consider using it as a framework for virtual or in-person consultations with new parents. The transactional model can be used to facilitate exploration of how sources of self-efficacy operate and interact in a particular individual and to identify areas of strength and resource. In this research, many of the participants shared that they had found engaging in a virtual interview to be therapeutic and empowering; and that having a space to reflect on their feelings and experiences had helped to generate more positive beliefs about their parenting skills. In addition, psychologists might want to relate the theory to existing approaches which they are using, such as group parenting interventions, and review whether there are areas of the model which can help to extend current practice. Furthermore, given that psychological input into systems which support new parents has been associated with numerous positive effects (Soni, 2010; Webb, 2018), the transactional model may be informative and beneficial for the work of other professionals, such as Early Years practitioners, family support workers, health visitors and midwives. Finally, as suggested above, the framework can be shared with parents directly and may help them to better understand their experiences and identify their own unique areas of strength and resource.

Following completion of this research, the participants and relevant stakeholders from the LA in which the research took place (e.g. council staff; health and education professionals; local organisations which support parents) will be sent a copy of the final paper and offered an opportunity to discuss implications and recommendations for practice with the researcher. The transactional model will be condensed into a more concise consultation framework and shared with EPs and other professionals who work with young families via presentations at professional networks; service team meetings; and through accessible written formats (for example, an article in a professional magazine or an online blog). The researcher also plans to disseminate the findings with the academic community by publishing the research in a relevant journal; and directly with parents via a podcast or blogpost.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined how the findings relate to pre-existing theories and the wider literature. It has demonstrated that this research offers new ideas to existing conceptualisations of parenting self-efficacy and shown how these developments are supported by other psychological theories. Critical appraisal of this study has highlighted numerous strengths as well as areas for further development, and the implications of the findings for theory and practice have been discussed. In the last sections of this thesis, a reflexive account of the researcher's experiences will be given and some final conclusions around the contributions of this piece of research will be considered.

8. REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT

From the first interview, it struck me that my subject area and interview questions touched on some very personal aspects of participants' experiences and that I was meeting them at a time in their lives that probably felt very challenging. When Participant 1 attended her interview, her baby was just four months old. There was a sense that she was in the throes of a major shift to both her identity and her lifestyle. She brought up sensitive material around her own upbringing, her marriage and her faith with an openness that surprised and delighted me. I was left feeling moved by the connection which I felt we had developed over the course of the interview, and touched by her reflections at the end about how helpful she had found it.

The rest of the participants had had more time to adapt to their parenting role than Participant 1. Although there was less of a sense of rawness and shock, many of them appeared to be almost yearning to speak about and reflect on their experiences, as if it was a scarce and precious opportunity. In fact, in many of the interviews, there was a real ease about the process and I did not feel I had to prompt very much at all. Much of the time, the material that came freely flowing was of such depth and insight that I felt incredibly privileged to have been witness to such intimate reflection. Being part way through my Doctorate, I was aware that I had developed the skills to facilitate a safe and containing psychological space but I also felt there was something about this phase in the participants' lives that might have led them to engage and connect with me in this way; namely, that the first years of parenthood are a time of significant transition when parents typically have very little time to speak about, and reflect on, themselves.

However, two of the interviews were a lot less fluent and lasted much less time than the others. It is noteworthy that for both of these participants, English is an additional language, and yet I do not think this was the only reason that these interviews were experienced quite differently. After Participant 2's interview, I was left feeling that perhaps I had not earned her trust enough for her to share more openly with me, as she had spoken about how difficult she found meeting new people. In my interview with Participant 5, she had initially seemed completely perplexed by the interview questions and either unsure or reluctant about responding. After a couple of attempts at rephrasing the questions, she began to speak about some of her experiences and values. Participant 5 told me that "nothing" affected how she thought or felt about herself as a parent and described how, where she was from, "you put a baby on your back, you put a load on your head back home, you want to go and sell something". This surprised me. In my world view, there is a focus on the individual: their experiences, understandings, and reflections. This perspective was assumed in my interview questions and approach and, up until this point, this assumption had seemingly been shared by the other participants. During the interview with Participant 5, I realised how much the whole premise of my research and the way I was conducting it was guided by various culturally-informed assumptions.

Although the content of Participant 5's interview was brief, it presented such contrasting material to that of the other interviews and prompted me to reflect on the extent to which I was attending to power imbalances and difference during my interactions with participants. On reflection, I feel that I could have been more explicit about this within the interviews. For instance, as a white British woman in a position of privilege and power as a trainee psychologist, I wonder whether some of the participants might have felt more able to share and reflect on experiences relating to aspects of their identity such as race, ethnicity, culture,

and language if I had more openly acknowledged some of our possible differences at the start of the interview.

Every interview was a remarkable experience in its own way. I felt humbled that the participants had given their time and energy to engaging in what I imagine may have felt like an exposing process. It struck me that all of them had encountered or were encountering significant challenges in their lives but that despite this, they were somehow able to be resourceful and to continually strive for the best for their child. As I wrote in my dedication, this thesis is a tribute to the nine participants, whose truths and experiences have truly touched and inspired me.

9. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

While this research had its limitations, the strong design and application of a methodology which had not previously been used within the topic area amalgamate in a unique offering that has relevance for both theory and practice. In line with its aims, this study offers new insights for the conceptualisation of parenting self-efficacy. The findings demonstrate the benefits of adopting qualitative approaches for elucidating the complex processes underpinning the dynamic construct of parenting self-efficacy and show the value of generating theory that is based on parents' own perspectives. It is hoped that this research will be of interest to services and practitioners that support young families; researchers and professionals who are interested in early child development or the transition to parenthood; and parents themselves. In addition, this research aimed to address the crucial need for effective practice within this area. The significance for both parents and children of the first three years of parenthood have been strongly emphasised in this paper and the urgency to understand what new parents need to thrive in the midst of challenging contextual factors has been compellingly laid out. Ultimately, the main objective of conducting this research is that it helps practitioners and parents themselves to understand the processes and transactions involved in the development of parenting self-efficacy; and to plan intervention and support accordingly in a way that improves the experiences and outcomes of children and families.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Extracts from Research Diary

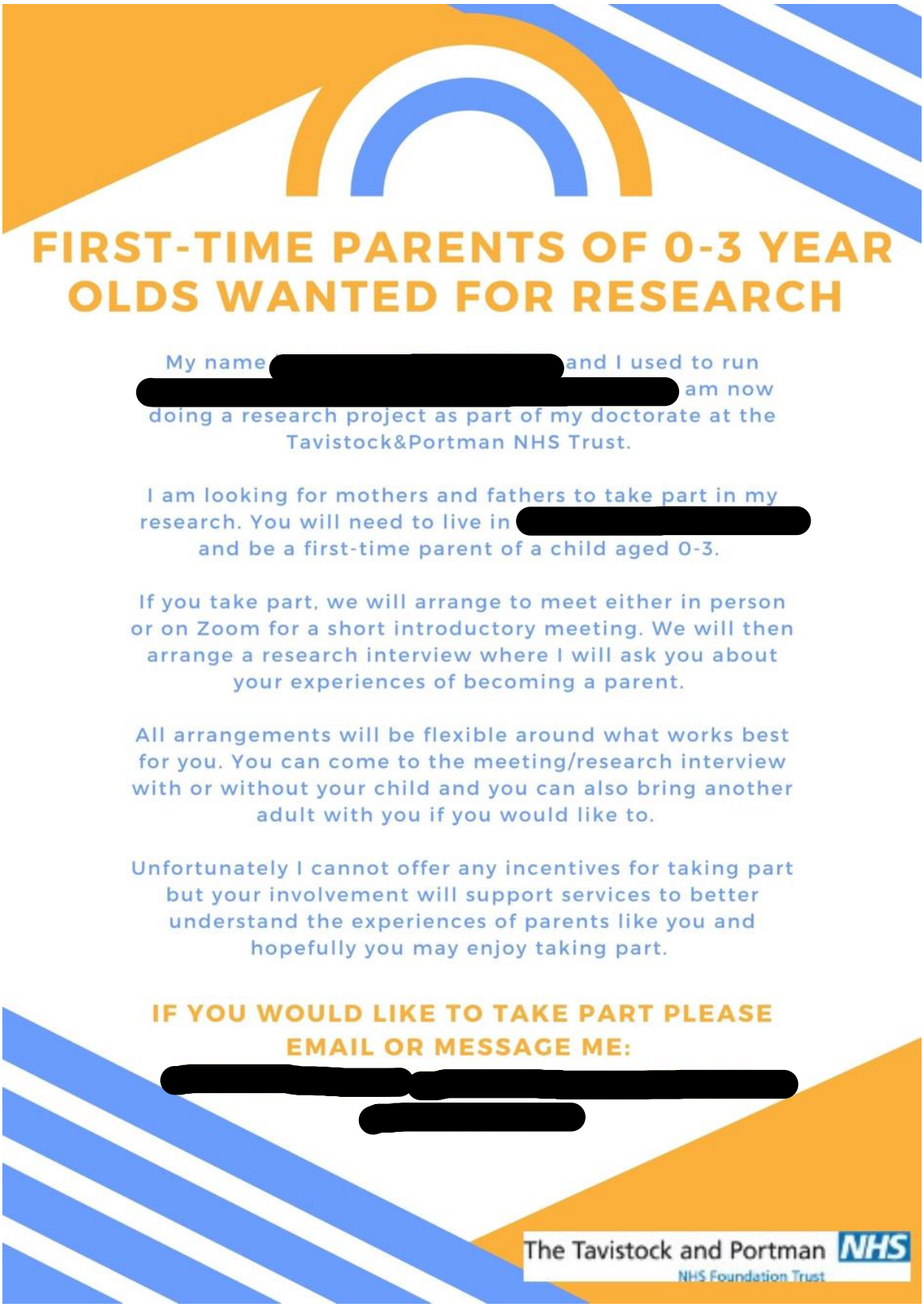
16th September 2021

Participant 3 accessed the interview on a laptop and arrived on time. He gave really full, rich answers and the interview lasted 55 minutes. I wondered about how power and privilege played out in the interactions between myself and Participant 3 compared to the two previous participants (who were women). For example, as a man who appeared to be older than me and well educated, he seemed to be more comfortable asserting his views and taking time to reflect than Participant 1 and Participant 2 had been. It was interesting hearing from a Dad for the first time so far and the different focus in some of his responses, e.g. emphasis on career, financial/career security – I wondered about what it meant for him to be a 'good' dad and how this might be different to what it meant to the previous participants to be a 'good' mum? Although perhaps my own assumptions were colouring how I received his responses? […]

13th October 2021

Participant 5 accessed the interview via her phone. She started the conversation by asking about the length of the interview. She seemed concerned as she had to put her twins to bed and said she only had 15 minutes. I assured her that we would finish when she needed to and reflected on the pressures that she seemed to be under and how it might feel for her to try and fit this interview in with the demands of her day... When I asked the first question (*what kind of things in your life affect how you think and feel about yourself as a parent?*) Participant 5 initially responded saying "nothing…nothing affects me". I wondered whether perhaps the question felt intrusive…or maybe it did not make sense to her? I tried to phrase the question in a different way and then she started to respond, explaining that she was from Africa and had a different approach… she described how where she was from, if you are a mother "you put your baby on your back, you put your load on your head, back home, you want to go and sell something". This struck me as a very different response to those of the other participants and I wondered how my questions about her thoughts and feelings as a parent fit/did not fit with her world view…and felt suddenly very aware of how conditioned the interview questions were by my own world view. […]

Appendix 2: Flyer for recruiting participants



Appendix 3: Form used for gathering demographic information

<u>If you do not feel comfortable answering any of the questions below, please leave them blank</u>

Can you give your age: _____

Can you give your child's age (years/months): _____

Can you indicate which languages you speak with your child: _____

_____

Can you describe your race: _____

(Some people might describe this as e.g. Black / Asian / White / Jewish)

Can you describe your ethnicity: _____

(Some people might describe this as e.g. Turkish-Cypriot / Black British / African American)

If you would like, can you describe your cultural background in your own words:

_____

Can you describe the gender you identify with:_____

(Some people might describe this as e.g. nonbinary / woman / trans man)

How would you describe your occupation?_____

(Some people might describe this as e.g. full-time parent / full-time employed / student / part-time employed)

<u>Thank you.</u>

Appendix 4: Information sheet and consent form

Information Sheet

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Title: How does parenting self-efficacy develop? An exploration of the contexts and mechanisms that influence mothers' and fathers' feelings and beliefs about themselves as parents in their first 3 years of parenting

Who is doing the research?
My name is XXXX. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in my second year of studying for the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Community Psychology. I am carrying out this research as part of my course.

What is the aim of the research?
The research aims to find out about the things that influence mothers' and fathers' feelings and beliefs about themselves as parents in their first 3 years of parenting.

Who has given permission for this research?
The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research. YYYY council has also given permission for the research to go ahead.

Who can take part in this research?
I am looking for mothers and fathers who have a single child or children delivered by multiple birth (e.g. twins) who are under the age of 3. You will need to be a resident in YYYY. You will need to have a conversational level of English or be able to bring someone with you who can act as an interpreter. If you bring someone with you, before starting the interview I will explain to them how any information you share needs to remain confidential. We will also think together about how we can help you to express yourself openly and honestly and make sure the interview reflects your true perspective.

What does participation involve?
If you agree to take part, you will be invited to meet me at one of the YYYY children's centres (whichever is most convenient for you), depending on the government guidelines around Covid-19. Alternatively we will arrange an online meeting via Zoom. The meeting will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you.

In the meeting, we will talk for around an hour about your experiences as a parent. This will be explored through me asking you a small number of open questions which you can respond to however you wish. I will make audio recordings of the meetings which will be transcribed for analysis and then deleted. I will also keep a reflective diary of my experiences as a researcher to support analysis.

At the end of the interview you will be asked to complete a one page form with a few questions relating to your demographics (i.e. age/gender/race/ethnicity etc). There will then be 15-30 minutes allocated to discuss any feelings which came up in the

interview with me if you would like to. This will not be part of the research and is intended as a supportive space which you can use if you wish to.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
There is very little research which explores parents' own perspectives of what affects their feelings and beliefs about themselves as parents. Therefore there is a benefit to other parents of sharing your experiences. There may also be personal benefits in having time to reflect on your own experiences.

What are the possible risks of taking part?
As parenting can be an emotional issue, it may be distressing to think and talk about experiences of being a parent. However, the open nature of the questions gives you freedom in choosing what to share and you can take a break or stop the interview at any time. There will also be options to access support after the interview.

What will happen to the findings from the research?
The findings will be typed up as part of my thesis which will be read by examiners and be available at the Tavistock and Portman library. I may also publish the research at a later date in a peer reviewed journal or through media, social media or websites, or I may present it at a conference or to the participants or community groups. You will have the option to read a summary of my findings or the full thesis once the analysis has been completed.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with this research?
Participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to pull out of the research without giving a reason for up to 1 month after the interview. After this time your data may have been used to generate theory and it will not be possible to take it out of the study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
Yes. All records related to your participation in this research study will be handled and stored securely on an encrypted drive using password protection. Your identity on these records will be indicated by a pseudonym (made up name) rather than by your real name. The data will be kept for a minimum of 6 years. Data collected during the study will be stored and used in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

Are there times when my data cannot be kept confidential?
Confidentiality is subject to legal limitations or if a disclosure is made that suggests that imminent harm to self and/or others may occur. In other words, any information you share will remain confidential except in the event that the researcher thinks you or someone else may be at risk of harm. The small sample size (8-12 parents) may also mean that you recognise some examples and experiences you have shared in interviews. However, to protect your identity, pseudonyms (made up names) will be used and any identifiable details changed.

Further information and contact details
If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the research, please contact me:

Email: XXXX
Telephone: XXXX

If you have any concerns about the research then you can contact [redacted] who works for the Tavistock and Portman research department. His contact details are:
Email: [redacted]
Telephone: [redacted]

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Consent form

Research Title: How does parenting self-efficacy develop? An exploration of the contexts and mechanisms that influence mothers' and fathers' feelings and beliefs about themselves as parents in their first 3 years of parenting

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:	**Initial here:**
1. I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.	
2. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw consent or any unprocessed data without giving a reason for up to 1 month after the interview. After this time I understand that may data will have been used to generate theory and it will not be possible to withdraw my data from the study.	
3. I agree for my interviews to be audio-recorded.	
4. I understand that my data will be anonymised so that I cannot be linked to the data. I understand that the sample size is small.	
5. I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality relating to legal duties and threat of harm to self or others.	
6. I understand that my interviews will be used for this research and cannot be accessed for any other purposes.	
7. I understand that the findings from this research will be published in a thesis and potentially in a peer reviewed journal or through media, social media or websites, or they may be presented at a conference or to the participants or community groups.	

8. I am willing to participate in this research.	

Your name: ……

Signed……. Date…../…../…..

Researcher name: XXXX

Signed…….. Date…../…../……

Thank you for your help.

Appendix 5: Interview schedule used in Cycles 1 and 2

What kinds of things in your life affect how you think and feel about yourself as a parent?

What helps you to feel more sure of yourself as a parent?

What makes you feel less sure of yourself as a parent?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix 6: Interview schedule used in Cycle 3

What kinds of things in your life affect how you think and feel about yourself as a parent?

What helps you to feel more sure of yourself as a parent?

What makes you feel less sure of yourself as a parent?

Others have talked about [below] - has that had an impact / been a factor for you?

key relationships

feedback from your child

feedback from other people

your own experiences of childhood

your values and beliefs

changes over time

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix 7: Examples of Memos for *Interactions Between a Parent and Their Partner*

Memo: Participant 1 refers on a number of occasions to how her sense of parenting self-efficacy is shaped and impacted by her relationships with significant people in her life, mainly close family members and her husband. There is a sense that the interactions between her and her husband are influenced by the interactions between them and their wider family members, e.g. “constant questioning” from family members leading to constant questioning between themselves.

Memo: Participant 3 describes in detail the kind of discussions he and his partner have and had even before they had a child. He gives the impression that they discuss their ideas together, give each other positive feedback and recognise their successes, and suggests that this helps to increase their sense of parenting self-efficacy. Participant 3 explicitly links his sense of parenting self-efficacy with the strength of the relationship with his wife, suggesting that how well they know and understand each other and what is going to work for them helps them to feel sure in their parenting skills.

Memo: Participant 4 talks about how her partner and her support each other and share practical tasks. She alludes to how this practical support helps her to feel more sure of herself as a parent and how when it was not there on her recent trip her parenting self-efficacy was impacted. She also talks about “aligning 99% of the time on rules and education” with her partner. She appears to have a sureness in her approach that may be linked to this? Participant 4 says that her and her partner agree on the values they want to 'give their kid'. Compared with Participant 1, Participant 4 appears to be quite unaffected by comparison of herself or her child with others, or by comments/questions from her partner. It is interesting to think about how the parental relationship may contribute to differences in parenting self-efficacy.

Memo: Participant 5 talks about how in a way it became easier parenting her son without her partner in their life due to the nature of their relationship, but says that it is really difficult doing it all on her own. She then talks about how she wants to be a role model for her son in terms of career and to be able to provide for him financially. There is a sense that Participant 5 feels a huge responsibility as the only caregiver to provide and model everything for her son. Comparing this with other interviews, it is interesting to note that the one father interviewed in Cycle 1 talked a lot about the implications of where he is at in his career on his family whereas the mothers who had partners did not talk about this. It seems as if this single mother has to take on multiple roles and responsibilities without the support of any other caregivers and a very limited support network.

Memo: My initial reflections after coding cycle 2 are that certain themes from cycle 1 were not present in cycle 2 (e.g. parental relationship, sharing duties etc) whilst some themes which emerged in cycle 1 seem to have greater significance for the participants in cycle 2 who were single parents (e.g. internal model of parenting / capacity to manage thoughts and emotions / previous experience with children). It seems possible that certain other factors may have more influence on parenting self-efficacy in the absence of a partner relationship.

Appendix 8: Coding Hierarchy

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
accessing services	
	accessing services or activities has not been a significant part of their experience
	attending playgroups helps her to feel better about herself as a parent
	being able to be in different environments (e.g. children's centre) helped
	feeling like she is helping her son by attending playgroup
	reflecting on the benefits of attending a playgroup for her son
approach towards comparison with others or own previous experience	
	'there's other things that are more harder than what we do here'
	'[in Africa] you put a baby on your back, you put a load on your head back home, you want to go and sell something'
	becoming worried that they are not feeding their son enough when comparing his size to other children
	comparing her experience with her partner to other couples
	comparing her son to other children in real life
	comparing her son to other children that she sees on social media
	comparing his parenting approach with other approaches
	comparing to other families is not a significant part of their experience
	considering her age in comparison with other parents
	describing approach that he disagrees with
	experiencing difficult things and getting through them
	questioning her son's development when she compares it with charts and apps
	questioning what she needs to do to aid her son's development when she compares him with other children who are more advanced
	reflecting on dynamics in other couples he has heard about
	reflecting on his son being smaller than other children
	reflecting on his son's size when he was born
	relating current life experiences to life experiences in Africa
	relating her self-confidence to her previous life experience in Africa
	trying to avoid comparing self to others

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	trying to avoid pressure of comparing their son to other children
approach towards feedback	trying together to avoid comparing
	alluding to the significant impact of receiving comments and questions
	anticipating judgement
	being blamed by family members
	experiencing anxiety around family members
	experiencing comments as really annoying
	feeling exasperated by constant commenting from older sister
	feeling that commenting is constant and relentless
	reflecting on how much she remembers people's comments
	reflecting on impact of receiving comments on her mood
	reflecting that other people's feedback does not have a significant impact on his parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that what other people say does not have much influence on her parenting self-efficacy
approach towards managing own expectations	
	recognising limits of what she can control
approach towards uncertainty	
	accepting there are things he is not confident about
	acknowledging that having things he doesn't know is probably always going to be part of being a parent
	feeling that he is never 100% sure of himself as a parent
	feeling unsure how his son will react to new things
	questioning if she is doing the right thing
	reflecting that he is not afraid to say what he doesn't know
	reflecting that there are always moments when he is unsure
	reflecting that there is always a level of unpredictability with being a parent
attachment with child	
	feeling that she loves her son so much
	reflecting on how quickly she and her daughter developed a strong bond

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	reflecting that she quickly understood her daughter 'much easier than I could ever imagine'
	understanding instantly what her daughter needed and how she felt
attachment with partner	
	'our relationship first, and then everything kind of emanates from that'
	linking the length of time they have been together and how well they know each other to developing parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that his confidence and sense of parenting self-efficacy probably grew out of the strength of their relationship
capacity to manage emotions	
	'every single second of the day is Baby, baby, baby, baby...'
	'I hated motherhood [...] and I felt like a really bad parent'
	feeling like she has no control over her life now
	feeling like she was going crazy with only her son to interact with
	feeling that 'basic things' have been taken away from her
	feeling that life is 'bittersweet' right now
	feeling things are difficult
	questioning her own purpose for existence and desire to live
	reflecting on how journaling helps her with processing and her mood
capacity to manage thoughts	reflecting on strategies which help her to emotionally re-calibrate
	observing that she does not overthink
	reflecting on the impact of overthinking on her parenting self-efficacy
capacity to recognise own successes	
	feeling proud of her sons
	feeling proud of herself that she is managing well
	feeling proud of herself when she graduated from her degree
	feeling proud that she managed not to bring down her son's mood whilst doing her degree
	feeling proud that she managed to do something for herself as well as doing things for her son
	feeling proud when her son laughs

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	feeling proud when her son reaches developmental milestones
changes to lifestyle	feeling proud when she sees her sons reaching developmental milestones
	observing the impact of the change in sleep routine
	reflecting on the impact of life changes on her mood
child's behaviour	
child's characteristics (social graces)	feeling that she is doing well as a parent when she sees her son behaving confidently
	noticing changes in her son's behaviour since they have been able to see people more
	reflecting on the impact of son's behaviour on her parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that she does not have any difficulties with her parenting self-efficacy due to her sons being 'good boys'
	losing family connections for her son due to the race and ethnicity of him and his father
	losing the support of her family due to the race and ethnicity of her son and his father
child's development	
child's health	feeling fulfilled when she sees her sons reach developmental milestones
	reflecting that she does not have any difficulties with her parenting self-efficacy due to her sons developing well for their age
	reflecting on impact of son's health on parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that her daughter being unwell makes her feel less sure of herself as a parent
	wanting to make her son better when he was unwell
child's mood	
	feeling proud of her daughter being happy
	forgetting about everything when she sees her daughter smiling
child's personality	
	feeling that their child fits with their personality traits
	reflecting on her sons both having an easygoing temperament
	reflecting on how early his son developed his own personality

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	reflecting that their son's fit with their personality traits makes it easier to parent him
child's relationship with partner	
	feeling jealous when her son goes more and displays more affection towards her partner
	observing differences between her and her partner's relationship with their son
commenting leading to questioning themself	
	feeling that others question and critique her decisions
	feeling unsure due to people's comments
	questioning herself following comments or questions
	questioning what else she should be doing
	questioning what she is doing and not doing
	questioning whether she is doing enough
	questioning whether she is doing things 'right'
	reflecting on impact of comments on her thoughts about herself as a parent
competing demands	
conflict between own ideas and family members' ideas	feeling lucky she had not had to work as well
	defending her knowledge of her son to family members
	experiencing conflict between ideas imposed by family members and her own ideas
	feeling that family members are imposing their own ideas on her
conflict between own ideas and professionals' ideas	feeling that her own sense of what her son needs is being challenged
	recognising what others may say about his approach
	being asked why she was not breastfeeding
	being finally listened to by midwives
	defending her knowledge of her own body and her child to the hospital staff

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	feeling judged and misunderstood by midwives
	questioning what the midwives thought she was supposed to do
	receiving constant questioning from midwives around why she was not breastfeeding
	reflecting on the conflict between her own ideas and midwives' ideas
	reflecting that being unable to breastfeed has not decreased her bond with her daughter
	remembering how frustrated she was
	standing up to the midwives
connection with wider support network	
	reflecting on impact of loss of family connections on her parenting self-efficacy
continuity of confidence	reflecting on the numerous factors that contributed to her struggling as a parent
	reflecting that her parenting self-efficacy stays the same over time
deciding what to take on board and or what to leave	
	'and there I understood that people outside don't really know what's going on. So it's better to go with your own gut rather than listen to other people, that is, that has no clue about what's going on in your life'
	'most of the time I don't really listen to outsiders that have no clue what's going on in my life. It was, it was a tough lesson to learn… but I got it'
	developing the confidence to decide what to take on board and what to leave
	feeling that she knows her daughter better than 'anyone outside of the house'
	listening to your own instincts rather than other people
	reflecting that her bond with her daughter is very strong even though she was unable to breastfeed her
degree of fit between own ideas and partner's ideas	understanding that she knows her child and their situation best
	agreeing with partner most of the time

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	aligning '99% of the time on rules and education'
	defending her knowledge of her son to her husband
	feeling questioned even by her husband
degree of harmony in parental relationship	
	reflecting that her son could sense that she was having difficulties with her mental health
	reflecting that leaving her son's dad reduced her stress
	reflecting that the changes having a baby brought had a negative impact on her relationship with her son's dad
developing confidence over time	
	'as they grow is like, I'm growing with them'
	describing how her sons communicate with her
	describing their routines
developing strategies that help	developing confidence in their own knowledge of their child
	changing and adapting the ways she looks after her daughter
	feeding their daughter first
	reflecting on strategies that help daughter to go to bed
	reflecting on things that help their family, e.g. keeping arguments to a minimum and getting as much rest as you can
	reflecting that her skills develop in response to her sons' development but her parenting self-efficacy stays the same
	taking it day by day
	thinking about the need to be creative
developing their identity as a parent over time	
	developing sense of her own approach and identity as a parent
	reflecting on how she supports her sons' development
	reflecting on the kind of parent she wants to be
	reflecting on what doing a 'good job as a parent' means to her
	wanting to be a good parent
developing their own ideas and values	

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	'letting children be children'
	describing his parenting approach
	reflecting that he considers his parenting approach quite free and open
	reflecting that the majority of her ideas and approach come from back home
	trying not to punish or limit his son
	wanting her and her son to understand each other
	wanting her son to interact with her
	wanting her son to show her how he feels
	wanting to open up his son's possibilities
	wanting to recognise his son's need to develop and explore
	wanting to understand each other
	wanting to understand her son
discussing things together	
	getting assurance from discussing things with each other
	recounting an example of something he and his partner discussed
	reflecting on the impact of being able to have discussions with each other on both of their parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that they have 'stuck to their guns' on their shared ideas and parenting approaches
doing it alone	
	being able to focus on her son and develop a routine once she had left her son's dad
	doing it on her own
	feeling responsible and alone in being a good role model to her son in terms of career
	feeling responsible and alone in influencing her son
	feeling she experiences a lack of guidance developing her parenting skills
	finding it hard to stay patient when she is the only caregiver
	taking care of the baby on her own without her son's father has made it reallly hard
doing it together	
	doing it (parenting) together with partner
encountering others with similar approach	

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
and or ideas	
	feeling less alone
	feeling reassured by encountering others with a similar approach
	normalising her experiences with her baby
	reducing pressure on herself
energy levels and tiredness	
	noticing that she reacts differently depending on whether she is tired or full of energy
	noticing the impact of tiredness on her mood
	reflecting on the impact of sleep deprivation on her confidence
	reflecting on the impact of sleep deprivation on how she feels as a parent
	reflecting on the impact of tiredness on parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting on the need for parents to have a lot of energy
	reflecting that she is less calm and makes more mistakes when tired
	reflecting that she is more confident in her parenting skills when she is full of energy e.g. in the mornings after a good night's sleep
experiencing things for the first time	reflecting that tiredness leads to doubting everything she is doing
	feeling as first-time parents that you want to wrap your child in cotton wool
	finding it difficult to interpret new reactions
feeling a sense of belonging	
	reflecting on the impact of attending a group being affected by degree of fit between herself and other service users
	reflecting on the impact of her personality on her preferences for accessing services
	reflecting that she is not that keen on meeting new people or making friends with other parents
feeling isolated	
	being reminded that she is a parent
	feeling lonely and isolated
	feeling that friends (who are not parents) do not understand
	finding it difficult to go out

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	reflecting on how her life has changed
feeling validated and reassured	
	feeling that she is doing well as a parent
formative experiences of parenthood	reflecting on how helpful and reassuring Instagram has been
	'from the day he was born I was sort of in it'
	feeling a stronger sense of confidence in her own ideas and approach following hospital incident
	feeling reassured about her own approach following hospital incident
	learning important lesson from her experience in hospital
	reflecting on how his experiences during his son's first few hours affected his approach to parenting (e.g. 'learning as I go along')
	reflecting on how their dynamic developed influenced by the C-section recovery time
	reflecting on the impact of a particular incident (hospital)
	reflecting on the impact of a significant early experience (being unable to breastfeed) on her confidence in her parenting skills
	reflecting on the impact of being the one to change the first nappy
	remembering a significant incident (being unable to breastfeed) when her daughter was first born
getting easier over time	remembering how awful her experience in hospital was
	getting easier as her son gets older
	getting easier as her son grows
	getting easier as her son is developing routines and able to do more things
	getting easier as she learns to live with it
getting feedback from interactions with child	getting easier the more she 'gets out there'
	feeling that his approach is to take cues from his son
	getting assurance from his son
	noticing that emotional tension affects their family
	observing the impact of her anxiety on her daughter

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	reflecting on how easy it is to read how his son is feeling
	reflecting on how feedback from his son affects his parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting on how taking cues from his son helps him to develop his understanding of him and how to parent him
	reflecting that feedback from her son and feeling they have a good relationship is the most important factor for her parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that seeing her son's smile makes it all worth it
	reflecting that she wants her son to be healthy and develop well but this will follow if they have a good relationship
	relying on cues from his son
getting feedback from others	
	feeling surprised about who has helped her develop her sense of parenting self-efficacy
	receiving positive feedback and impact of this depending on who says it and how it is said
	reflecting on relative impact of comments from different people
	reflecting on significance of one particular piece of positive feedback
	reflecting that other people love her sons
	sharing positive feedback that she has received about her sons
getting feedback from partner	
	getting assurance from his wife
	reflecting on the impact of genuine communication with her husband
	reflecting on the impact of partners' response to her mental health difficulties
	thinking about the impact of receiving feedback from his wife
getting to know child's needs and communication	
	describing getting to know what works and doesn't work with his son
	learning from his son's cues
	reflecting on developing their understanding of their son's signals
	reflecting on how he has learnt to understand his son's needs and communication
giving partner assurance	

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	'being able to have that conversation and sort of giving her the assurance that you know, it's not just her, she's not going crazy about something'
	giving his wife assurance that she or they are doing the right thing
hoping things will improve	
	hoping that it will get easier once her son goes to nursery
hormonal changes	wishing the time away
	noticing the impact of her period on her mood
impact of Covid-19	
	feeling powerless due to Covid
	observing reduced opportunities due to Covid
	observing that her son became very attached to her and her partner
	observing that playgroups were not available during the pandemic
	reflecting on her son's early experiences and how they were impacted by the pandemic
	reflecting on the impact of covid restrictions on what they can do
	reflecting that her son was born just before the global pandemic started
interactions with common or assumed parenting practices and ideas	
	acknowledging different approaches to parenting
	challenging common or assumed parenting practices or ideas
interactions with professionals	reflecting on common or assumed parenting practices and ideas
	'there's so many rules around what they can and can't do, that they can't really support you the way that you need them to'
	feeling that the help available does not meet the need
	feeling that the help available is not enough
	feeling that there is not much help to support mental health
	reflecting on the qualitative differences between help or support from a friend and help or support from professionals
	reflecting that there's a limit to how much she can feel supported by professionals
knowing what child	

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
needs	
	feeling he is second guessing
	reflecting on the impact of not understanding what's wrong on how feels as a parent
level of anxiety	
	feeling a sense of constant anxiety about her son
	feeling unsure about how starting at nursery is going to go
	feeling worried that her son will not adapt at nursery
	feeling worried that something will happen to her son
	reflecting on now being constantly anxious about something happening to her son or to her
	reflecting on the impact of her anxiety about the future on her mood
	reflecting on the impact of her anxiety about the future on her parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting that her anxiety comes from herself, not external events
lifestyle	
	feeling bored of being at home
limited understanding from others	
	anticipating criticism whenever something doesn't go 'right'
	receiving even more frequent comments and questions from family members due to baby's illness
limited understanding of professionals	
	feeling that professionals don't understand
	reflecting on limited understanding of professionals about her and her child
mutual desire to have children	
	reflecting on his and his partner's mutual desire to have children
own beliefs and hopes	
	'it's not a one size fits all for a baby'
	'we're comparing apples and oranges'
	recognising every child is different
	recognising that his son gets to the next stage of development in his own time

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	reflecting on advice from paediatrician that every child is unique
	reflecting on fears about not being a good parent
	reflecting on her change of mind around wanting to have children
	reflecting on how much she wanted to have children and impact of this on her as a parent
	reflecting on the impact of praying on her processing and mood
	reflecting that just because something has worked for someone else and their child it does not mean it will work for you
own characteristics (social graces)	
	'they probably think well you're just from a different planet'
	acknowledging he is 'much older now' than when he thought he would become a parent
	alluding to different levels of responsibility between him and his partner ('helping')
	assuming increased responsibility due to being the mother
	feeling like an older parent may miss out on 'simple things' like playing
	feeling like an older parent may miss out on sharing 'some semblance of life experience'
	feeling that there are things you lose out on when you become a parent at an older age
	observing differences between role of a mother and role of a father
	recognising the benefits of being last in their friendship group to have children
	recognising the downside to being the last in their group of friends to have children
	reflecting on how his maturity affects how he views himself as a parent
	reflecting on life stage of him and his wife when they became parents
	reflecting on the impact of age on how he feels as a parent
	reflecting on the impact of his age and maturity on his life factors (e.g. time) that affect how he feels as a parent
	thinking about his son's access to peers within their friendship group
	thinking about the age gap between him and his son
own experiences of childhood	
	feeling that she did not have positive experiences with her own parents
	feeling that she does not have an internal parenting model to draw on

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	feeling unsure as a parent due to wanting to avoid her son having experiences like her own
	finding it difficult to remember her own experiences of being parented
	reflecting on the significance of growing up with support from parents and impact of this on life opportunities
	reflecting that both her parents were there for her
	reflecting that her mother has been a strong influence on her parenting approach
	reflecting that she received great encouragement from her parents
	remembering difficult experiences of being parented
	remembering words of encouragement from her parents
	trying to remember parenting strategies that her own parents used
own health and mood	experiencing a c-section increased the amount of support she needed after birth
	reflecting on the impact of having had a C-section combined with lack of practical help and money
	remembering that she could not even sit up by herself at first
	remembering withdrawing from social contact completely when she first had her son
	sharing that her own mental health fluctuates and her concerns about how this impacts her son's development
own self-confidence	asserting belief that self-confidence is the basis for being able to face life's challenges
	linking parenting self-efficacy with her sense of confidence in herself
	observing that she has a great sense of self-confidence and self-esteem
	observing that she has a strong sense of confidence in herself
own sense of identity	reflecting that a lack of confidence impacts one's ability to carry out their parenting duties
	feeling like she was getting her identity back by spending time with a friend
	having someone there who had been in her life before she had a baby
	putting her energies into her degree
	reflecting on the impact of her relationship with her parents on her own identity

Focused Codes	Initial Codes
own temperament	
periods of greater ease and difficulty	feeling uncertain about where her instincts come from
	feeling that it was easier with her daughter at the beginning
	observing that her daughter was very relaxed as a baby
	reflecting on changes to their life factors since her daughter started walking
	reflecting on the simplicity of their routine when her daughter was a baby
	reflecting that things became more difficult when her daughter started to walk
position in career and society	
	describing previous career
	describing the lifestyle involved in his previous career
	feeling comfortable with where he is at professionally
	feeling glad he did not become a parent earlier in his career
	feeling that his priorities have changed
	feeling that where she is with her career is going to affect her son
	reflecting on 'where he is at professionally' and the impact of this on how he feels as a parent
	reflecting on how feeling comfortable professionally impacts how open he is to spending time with his son, which makes him feel like a good parent
	reflecting on how he would not have been able to be open and available to his son and his wife during previous career
	reflecting on how where he is at professionally now is supporting him to spend time and bond with his son and therefore feel like a good parent
	reflecting on the lack of work life balance in his previous career
position within own family	alluding to impact of older sister's position within family on their interactions
	reflecting on sister's prior experience
	reflecting on the impact of losing her own parents when she was a child
position within parental relationship	
	reflecting on her husband's parenting approach and identity

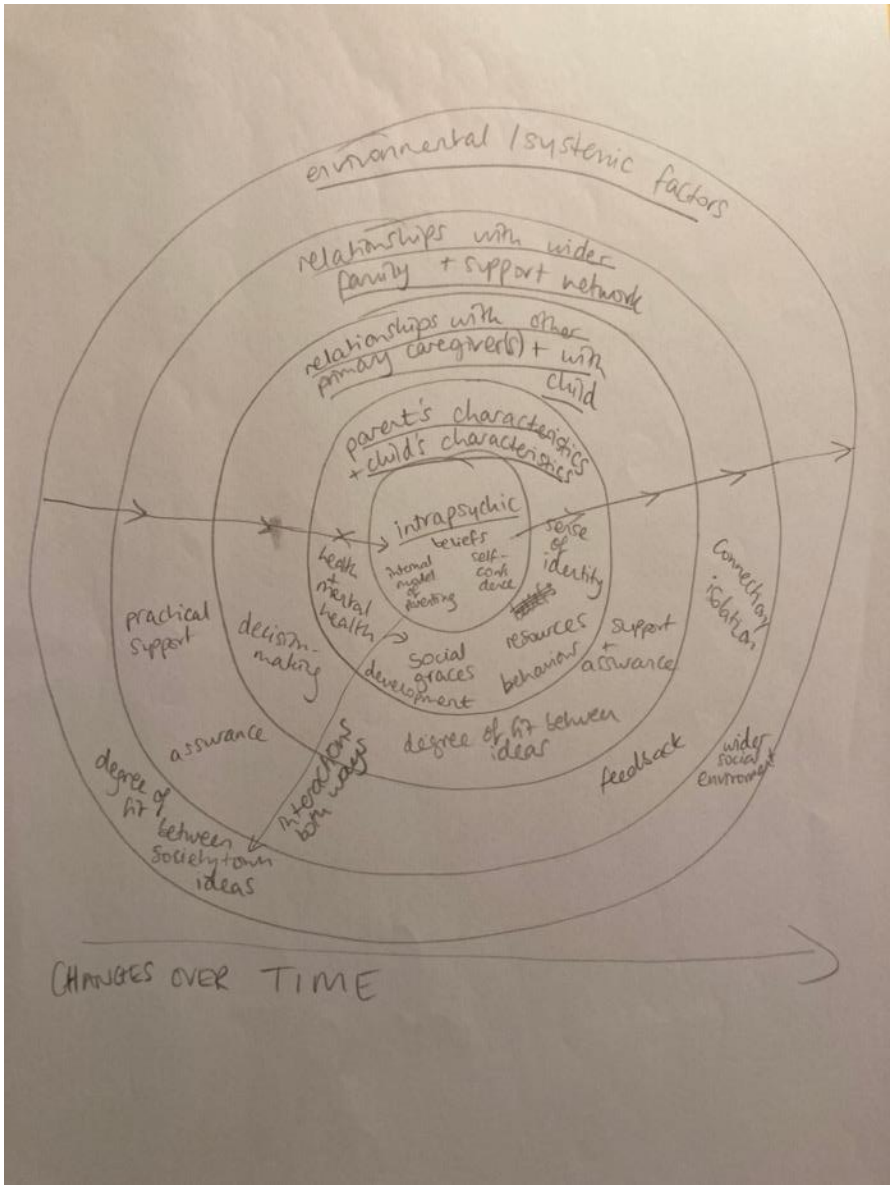
Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	reflecting on how taking cues from his wife helps him to develop his understanding of their son and how to parent him
	reflecting on impact of husband's parenting approach on her
	reflecting that his approach is partly informed by his wife's guidance
	relying on his wife when he is not sure or not confident
	sharing his approach with his wife
practical support from wider support network	
	feeling that her and her partner have to rely on each other a lot
	needing help at a certain point
	reflecting that being a single parent means you have to rely on family and friends more
	struggling without much support
	thinking about being far away from family
previous experience with children	
	describing taking care of her nieces and nephews
	feeling confident due to her previous experience with children
	realising what the reality of having a baby is like and contrast with expectations
	reflecting on her ideas about parenthood before she became a mother and contrast with reality
	reflecting on his lack of previous experience changing nappies
	reflecting that women are not always told the truth about what it is to be a mum
	relating her parenting approach to her previous experience with children
range of people who comment	
	reflecting on range of people who comment
	reflecting on receiving comments from other people
	reflecting on receiving positive feedback from strangers
	reflecting on which family members comment
	reflecting that everyone is willing to give their opinion on what they think you should do with your child
recognising successes and achievements	

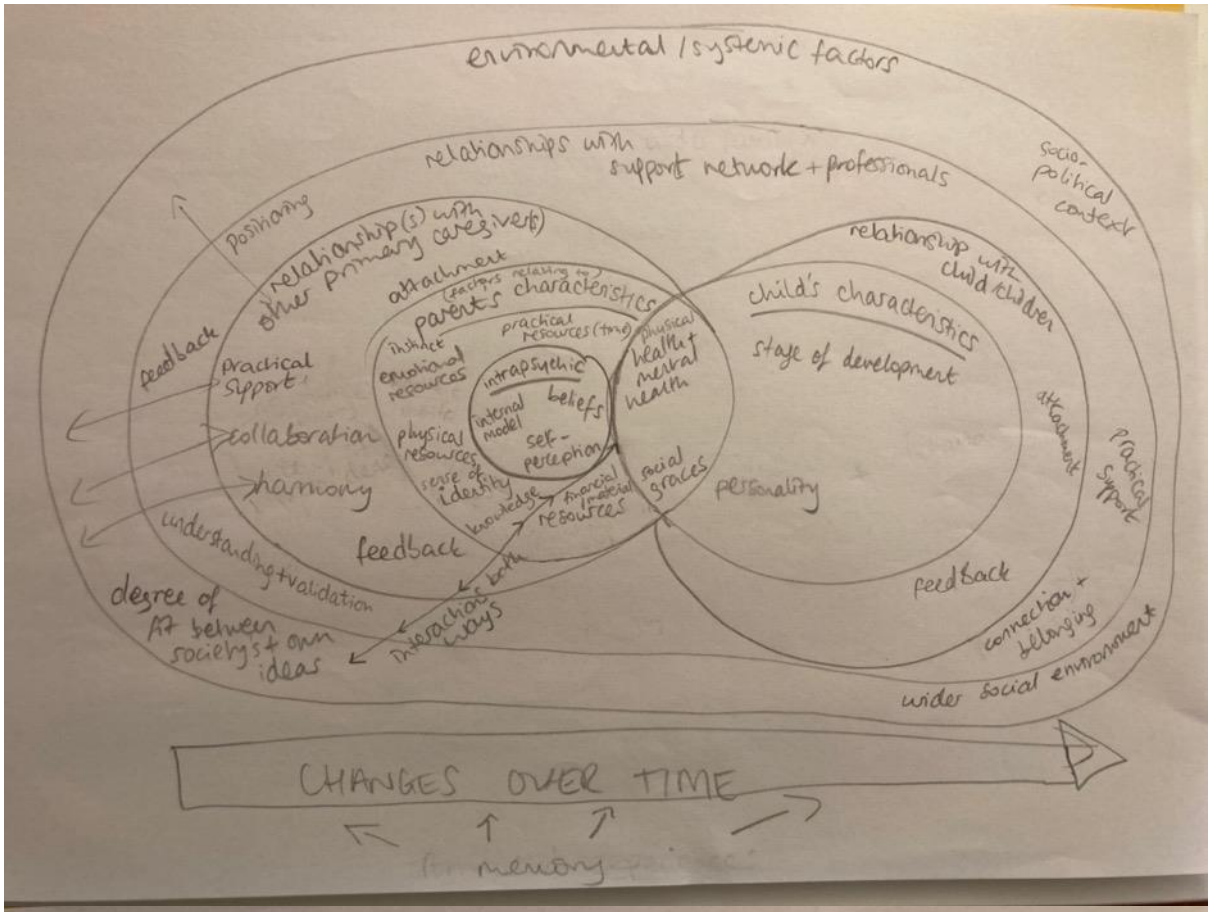
Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	feeling like they have done a good job for keeping their son alive for 11 months
	recognising they are doing well as parents
	stopping to recognise her achievements
recreating own experiences	
	reflecting on own experience of being parented and impact of this on her parenting identity and approach
	reflecting on the impact of his own upbringing on his desire to become a parent
	reflecting that he always wanted to have a family of his own and linking this to his own upbringing
	sharing values and beliefs from her own parents with her daughter
	wanting to recreate the experiences she had as a child (parents being there for her) for her sons
	wanting to recreate the type of relationship she has with her parents for her sons
rejecting or avoiding own experiences	
	acknowledging there are aspects of his own experiences of being parented that he will never do with his own son
	disagreeing with parenting approach he experienced
	recognising that their ideas and approach are impacted by their own experiences of being parented
	reflecting on her desire to have a career linking to her own experiences in childhood
	reflecting on how his approach is reacting against his own experience of being parented
	reflecting on how his parenting approach is influences by his own experiences of being parented
	reflecting on the age at which his dad had him and his sister
	reflecting on wanting to be a dad when he was much younger
	reflecting that she did not want to be a parent like her own mother
	trying not to make her son suffer because of her own experiences
	trying not to repeat patterns from her own experience of being parented
	wanting to provide her son with things she didn't have as a child, e.g. present loving relationship

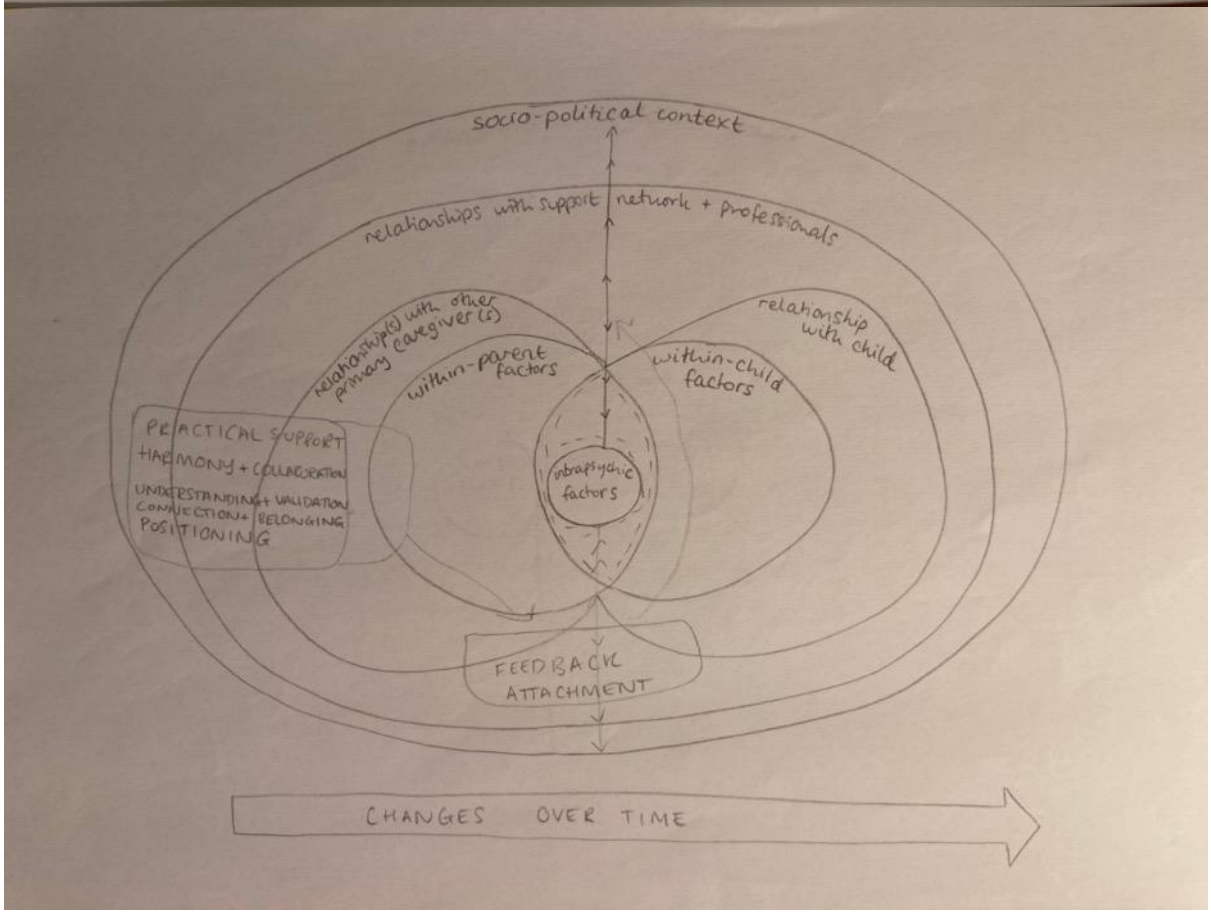
Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	wanting to provide her son with things she didn't have as a child, e.g. safety and no violence
	wanting to provide her son with things she didn't have, e.g. connection
relevant knowledge	
	increasing her knowledge through Instagram
	reflecting on impact of looking at developmental apps and charts
resources	
	feeling unable to give her son everything that he needs due to her financial situation
	observing reduced opportunities without a car
sense of instinct	
	'it just didn't feel right in my soul'
shared vision prior to birth	
	reflecting on pre-baby discussions and being on the same page right from the start
sharing duties and responsibilities with partner	
	being alone without partner
	feeling her life is governed by her son
	feeling unsure how single parents do it
	realising how much her partner helps her
	reflecting on difficulty of taking care of her daughter on her own
	splitting tasks between her and her partner
social life, friendships and relationships	
	having someone to talk to and feel normal with
	observing the 'massive effect' of her social life and relationships on her parenting self-efficacy
	reflecting on how speaking to her friend helps her processing and mood
	reflecting on the impact of regular visits from her friend
	reflecting on the significance of a few relationships in context of isolation
	reflecting on the strength of her relationship with her parents
wider social environment and living conditions	

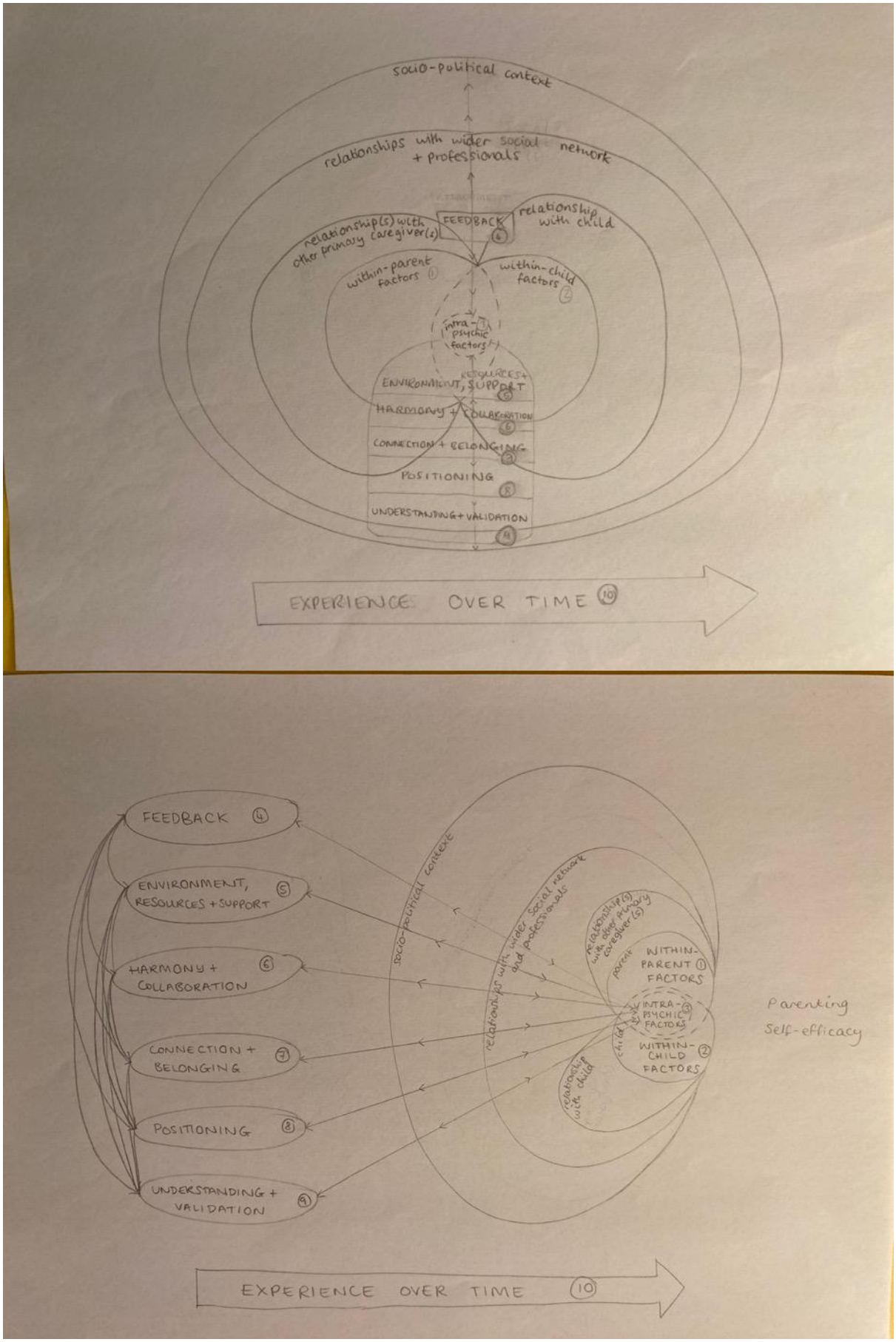
Focused Codes	Initial Codes
	recognising her fears about the environment her son will be growing up in
working things out together	reflecting on external triggers for her anxiety e.g. hearing about an event
	acknowledging limits in her knowledge and approach
	balancing her own instincts and ideas with her husband's
	focusing on couple's values and ideas for their child
	thinking about how they want to live
	working things out with her partner

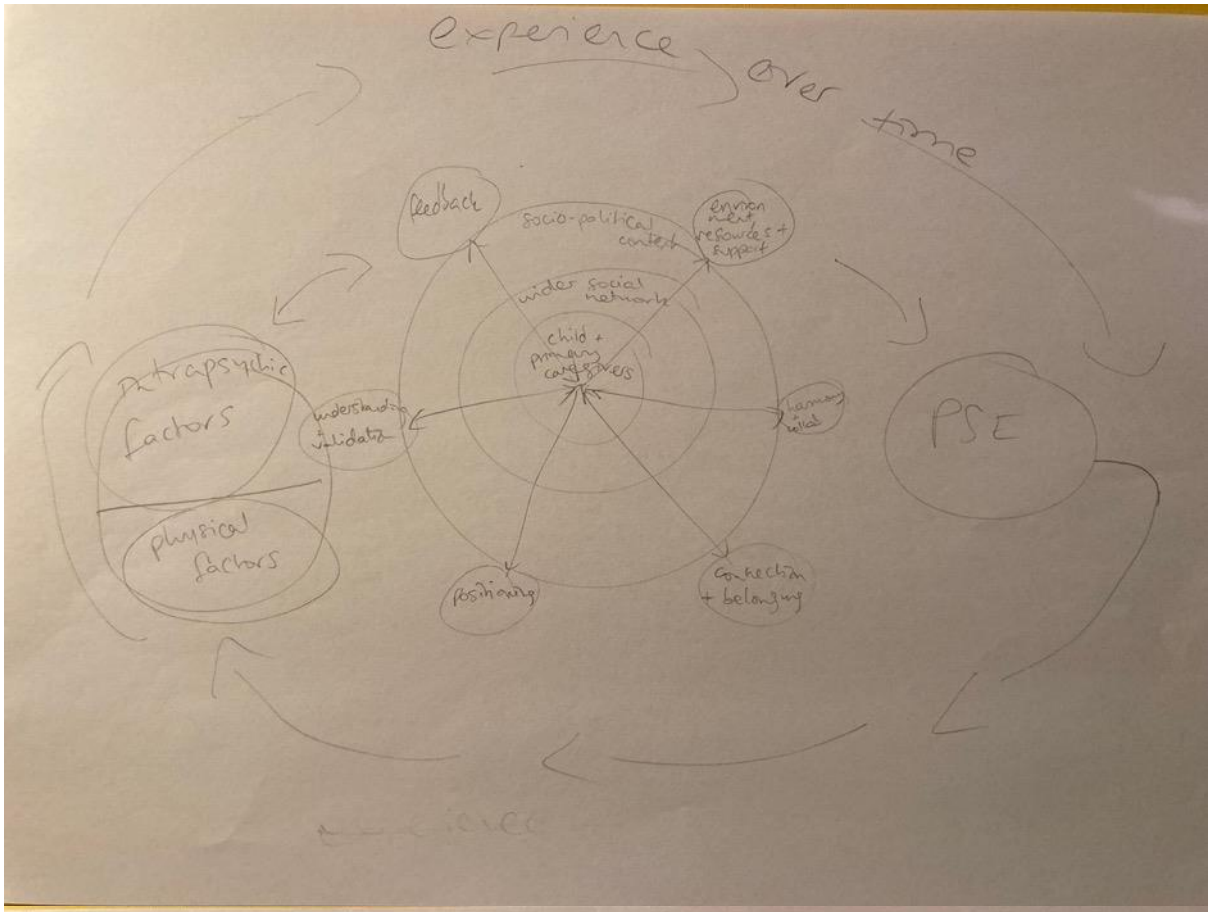
Appendix 9: Graphic representations of the different conceptual stages of the theory (in chronological order of development)

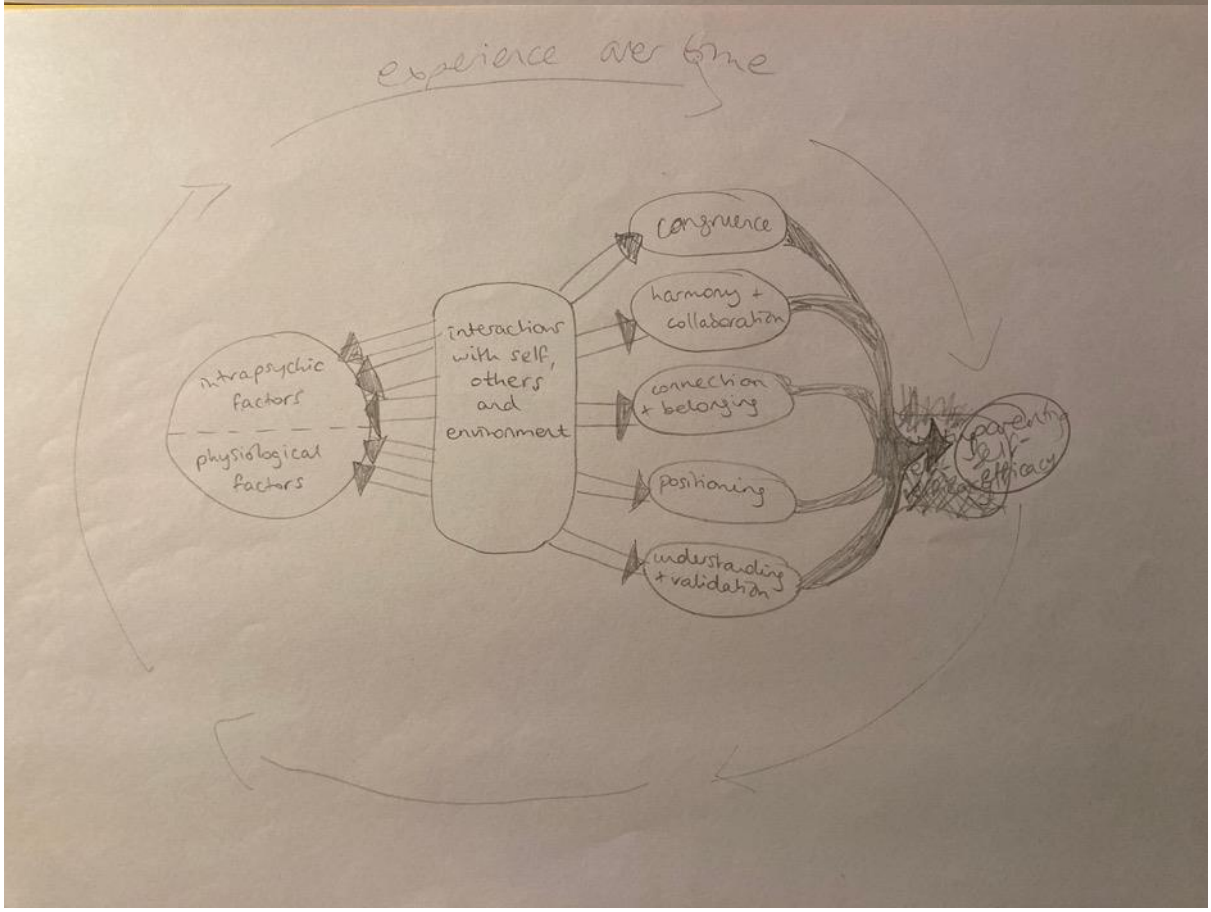


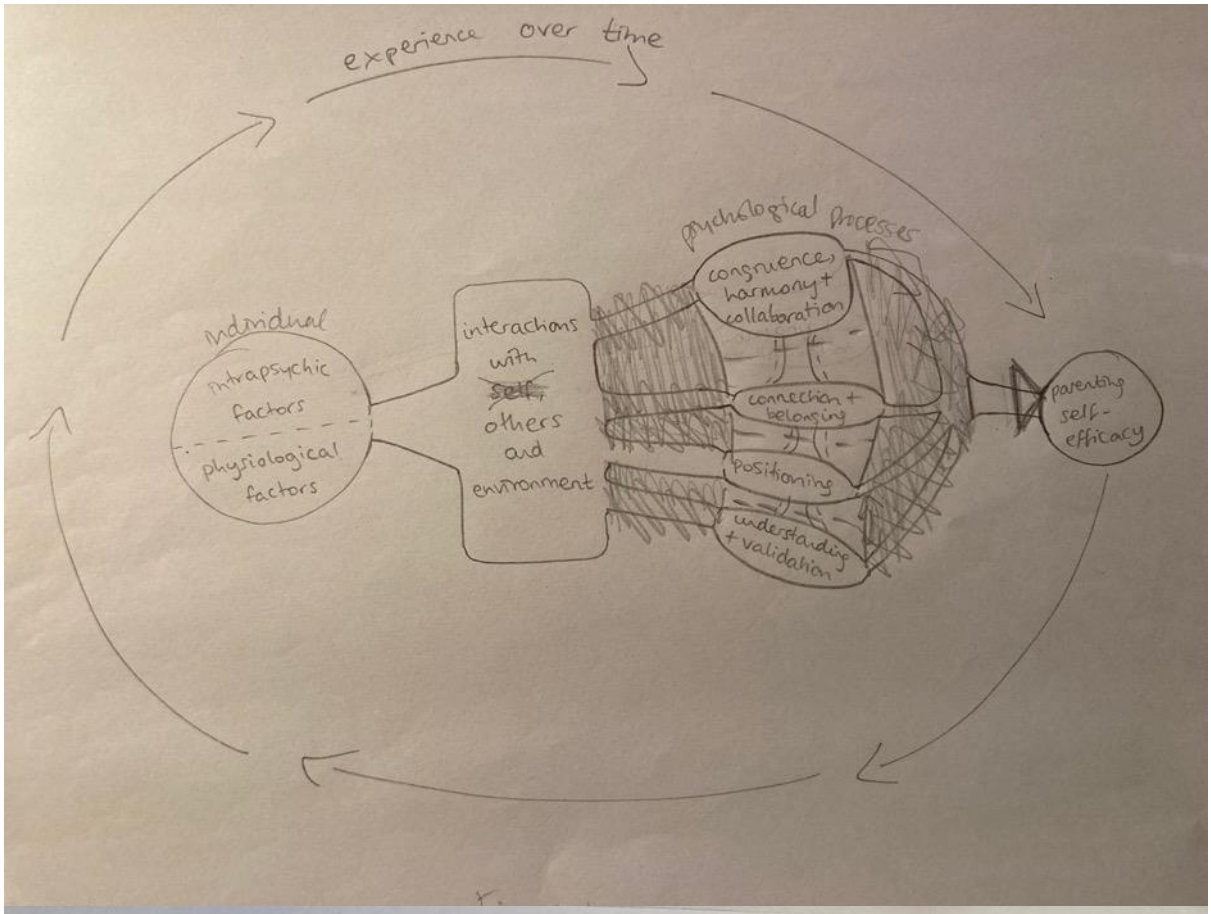

environmental / systemic factors
relationships with support network + professionals
socio-political context
relationship(s) with other primary caregiver(s)
attachment
parent's characteristics
child's characteristics
relationship with child/children
stage of development
personality
intrapsychic
internal model
beliefs
self-perception
physical health & mental health
emotional resources
practical resources (time)
physical resources
sense of identity
knowledge
financial / material resources
social graces
positioning
feedback
practical support
collaboration
harmony
understanding + validation
degree of fit between society's & own ideas
interactions both ways
attachment
connection + belonging
wider social environment
CHANGES OVER TIME
memory

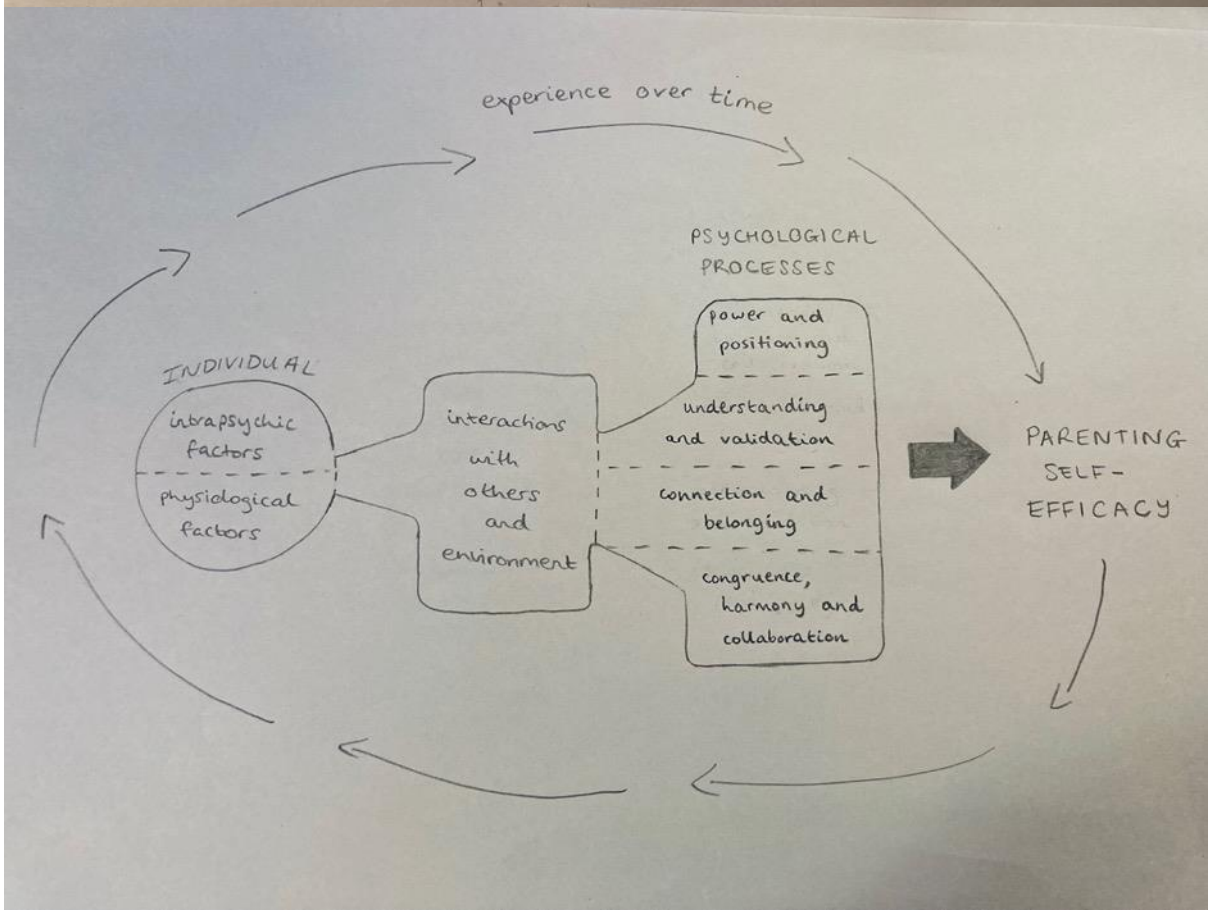

socio-political context
relationships with support network + professionals
relationship(s) with other primary caregiver(s)
within-parent factors
within-child factors
relationship with child
intrapsychic factors
PRACTICAL SUPPORT
HARMONY + COLLABORATION
UNDERSTANDING + VALIDATION
CONNECTION + BELONGING
POSITIONING
FEEDBACK
ATTACHMENT
CHANGES OVER TIME


socio-political context
relationships with wider social network + professionals
relationship(s) with other primary caregiver(s)
FEEDBACK 4
relationship with child
within-parent factors 1
within-child factors 2
intra-psychic factors 3
RESOURCES + ENVIRONMENT, SUPPORT 5
HARMONY + COLLABORATION 6
CONNECTION + BELONGING 7
POSITIONING 8
UNDERSTANDING + VALIDATION 9
EXPERIENCE OVER TIME 10
FEEDBACK 4
ENVIRONMENT, RESOURCES + SUPPORT 5
HARMONY + COLLABORATION 6
CONNECTION + BELONGING 7
POSITIONING 8
UNDERSTANDING + VALIDATION 9
socio-political context
relationships with wider social network and professionals
relationship(s) with other primary caregiver(s)
parent
WITHIN-PARENT 1 FACTORS
INTRA-PSYCHIC 3 FACTORS
child
WITHIN-CHILD 2 FACTORS
relationship with child
Parenting Self-efficacy
EXPERIENCE OVER TIME 10


experience over time
feedback
socio-political context
environment resources + support
wider social network
child + primary caregivers
intrapsychic factors
physical factors
understanding + validation
harmony + collaboration
positioning
connection + belonging
PSE


experience over time
intrapsychic factors
physiological factors
interactions with self, others and environment
congruence
harmony + collaboration
connection + belonging
positioning
understanding + validation


experience over time
psychological processes
congruence, harmony + collaboration
connection + belonging
positioning
understanding + validation
individual
intrapsychic factors
physiological factors
interactions with ~~self,~~ others and environment
parenting self-efficacy


experience over time
PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES
power and positioning
understanding and validation
connection and belonging
congruence, harmony and collaboration
INDIVIDUAL
intrapsychic factors
physiological factors
interactions with others and environment
PARENTING SELF-EFFICACY

Appendix 10: Written permission from the Council

[redacted]

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust
120 Belsize Lane
London NW3 5BA

[redacted]
Phone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]
Website: [redacted]

Date: 19 February 2021

Dear Sir / Madam

Research Project

I am writing to you regarding [redacted] undertaking research at [redacted] has permission from [redacted] Council to conduct her research with [redacted] residents.

[redacted] has permission to access the children's centre premises, dependent on Covid-19 government guidelines.

The London Borough of [redacted] has policies on Violence and Aggression and Healthy and Safety that will indemnify [redacted] against the consequences of any untoward event. There is also a complaints procedure if that is needed.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

[redacted]
Service Manager

Appendix 11: Research approval from the Tavistock

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
Fax: 020 7447 3837

[redacted]

By Email

25 May 2021

Dear [redacted]

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: How does parenting self-efficacy develop? An exploration of the contexts and mechanisms that influence mothers' and fathers' feelings and beliefs about themselves as parents in their first 3 years of parenting

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: [redacted]
E: [redacted]

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor

Appendix 12: Framework for critiquing qualitative research articles
From: Holland, K. and Rees, C. (2010). Nursing: Evidence-Based Practice Skills. United States: Oxford University Press.

Aspect	Questions
Focus	What topic is the concern of this article? Is this an important topic? The focus here will be broader than that of quantitative research and may emphasise experience of a condition or situation.
Background	How does the researcher argue that the topic is worthwhile? How widespread or big a problem is it? Is the seriousness of the topic reinforced by the previous studies? Is there a thorough review of the literature outlining current knowledge on this topic? The background may make the qualitative approach a logical choice.
Aim	What is the statement of the aim of the data collection? This usually begins with the word 'to' and may concentrate on an exploration of a situation, e.g. 'The aim of this study is to explore the lived experience of chronic illness.
Methodology or Broad approach	Within a broad qualitative approach is it phenomenological, ethnographic, grounded theory, or broad qualitative design? Does this match the statement of the aim?
Tool of data collection	What was the method used to collect the data? Had this tool been used in previous studies of this type? A qualitative tool will not be piloted to check accuracy but may be used firstly on a small scale to give the researcher experience of its use in this situation. There may be mention of credibility where the researcher attempts to give clear details on the circumstances and environment in which data gathering took place. The descriptions of such things as individual interviews may be extensive to allow you to feel almost as though you were there. Do you feel this tool worked well or might an alternative have been more effective?
Method of data analysis and presentation	This is one of the most important steps in qualitative approach where the researcher's understanding emerges inductively from the data and their interpretation of what is going on with those involved. To make sense of large amounts of text the researcher may mention specific systems for analysing the data either in the form of computer programs such as NUDIST and NVivo, or systems designed by other qualitative analysts such as Colaizzi or Van Manon. There may be reference to immersion in the data where the researcher reads over and over the details of what people have said or done. Codes to categorised themes may be mentioned and illustrations of the way this was done may be presented to form an 'audit trial' to allow you to follow the way the researcher managed the data from transcript to coded themes. The data will be in the form of observed descriptions or verbal comments and statements from those involved. These may be quite powerful in their description of feelings and emotions where the researcher is attempting to provide evidence of 'credibility' so we can believe in the accuracy of the findings and the interpretation of them.
Sample	Here the numbers of participants will be low, perhaps under 10 and often not more than 20. Data collection may have stopped once 'saturation' was reached, that is, where no new categories emerged from the findings. Were there inclusion and exclusion criteria stated? Were these reasonable given the research question and the nature of the sample? Do the selection criteria limit to whom the results may apply? What method was used to select who got into the study (the sampling strategy)? Is this appropriate for this research question and approach? Does the sample suffer from any kind of bias?
Ethical considerations	Did an ethics committee (LREC, or in US an Institutional Review Board 'IRB') approve the study? Was informed consent gained and mention made of confidentiality? Could the study be said to be ethically rigorous?
Main Findings	What themes or categories arose from the findings in answer to their aim? Was there an attempt to ensure that the accuracy of these themes was checked in some way, for example by peer checking with others not involved in the study, or more than one member of the team involved in interpretation of the findings?
Conclusion and Recommendations	Did they give a clear answer to their aim? Is this well argued and supported? Were clear recommendations made (who should do what, how, now)? If grounded theory, is there an attempt to explain what might lie behind the findings?
Overall strengths and limitations	What would you say were the aspects of the study they did well? What aspects were less successful? Did they acknowledge any limitations to the study?
Application to practice	How do the findings relate to practice? Should any changes be considered?

Appendix 13: Full list of papers included in the systematic literature review

Papers identified in Search 1

Anicama, C. (2018). *I think I can: The relations among parenting self-efficacy, parenting context, parenting practices, and preschoolers' socio-emotional development among low income immigrant families* (Order No. 13422440). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2206655496). Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/i-think-can-relations-among-parenting-self/docview/2206655496/se-2?accountid=14511

Barboza, G. E., & Schiamberg, L. (2021). Dual trajectories of parenting self-efficacy and depressive symptoms in new, postpartum mothers and socioemotional adjustment in early childhood: A growth mixture model. *Infant mental health journal, 42*(5), 636–654.

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