The conundrum of motherhood: house helps and the mediated motherhood discourses in Kenya

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Abstract

The globalised media tend to influence the content of local and regional media. This study sought to find the nature of mediated mothering discourse in Kenya and the extent to which it promoted the hegemony of intense mothering discourse; vis-a-vis indigenous mothering discourses such as co-mothering found among the collectivistic cultures of sub-Saharan Africa. Most working-class mothers employ caregivers – house helps to mind their children. A total of 71 stories from 2009 to 2022 related to mothering were collected from two leading newspapers in Kenya – *Daily Nation and The Standard* – which feature lifestyle issues. These stories were analysed using inductive coding and constant comparison to identify categories. Findings show that most of the discourses were the extent to which mothers were allowed to pursue personal ambitions in relation to the needs of their children (have-it-all), the level of delegation of core mother duties to the house helps, and the quality of caregiving that was associated with good mothers. There was no consensus on the level of delegation permitted as both extremes were highly criticised. Mothers were not yet ready to co-mother with the house helps – showing the hegemony of mediated intense mothering discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Motherhood is among the most cherished identities in the world (Borovska, 2018; Laney et al., 2015). Traditionally, in a number of sub-Saharan cultures, co-mothering was practised where mothering tasks were shared among the females in the extended family and even the neighbourhood (Muasya, 2014; Wadende et al., 2014). As families move away from the village to work in the formal sector, they leave behind this form of support and have to rely on other people, mostly domestic workers, for childcare (Muasya, 2014; 2016).

In addition, the motherhood practices in urban areas tend to shift from a shared role to more of an individualistic role; mothers tend to embrace other childcare and motherhood ideals, which include Western ideals that the media circulates. For instance, women search digital media to get ideas about pregnancy and childcare. The new individualised parenting places a high responsibility on the parents, especially the mother, who has to constantly search for information to provide the best care possible (Lupton, 2016), In Kenya there are parenting magazines such as *Parents* Magazine and the popular newspapers such as *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* with lifestyle columns which focus on things like motherhood, childcare, and general family welfare.

One of the dominant mothering discourses today is intense mothering (Arendell, 2000; Hay, 1996). Intense mothering is described as a:

Child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, financially expensive ideology in which mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and development of the sacred child and in which children's needs take precedence over the individual needs of the mother (Hay, 1996: 46).

Intense mothering discourse considers mothers as irreplaceable, and that women who seek work outside the home pursue it for selfish reasons. Some tenets of this discourse tend to influence Kenyan mothers too.

For instance, the Kenyan media tend to borrow storylines from other media as well. A close look at the media shows stories in the *Daily Nation* (Njung'e, 2009; Mandi, 2012) and in *The Standard* (Ngima, 2014) that resemble those carried in the Western media, for example, in the *Huffington Post* (Kassis, 2014; Crinion, 2013; Schirch, 2012), and in *The Atlantic* (Slaughter, 2012). Similar stories of why women quit jobs to look after their children were carried out in both Kenyan newspapers and in *The Atlantic*: (Light, 2013). Also, the story "Supermom and depression" was published in *the Daily Nation* (Daily Nation, 2011), and the *Huffington Post* (Bindley, 2011).

In most societies, women are assumed to be the primary caregivers (Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Collins, 1994). In the USA, the ideals of intense mothering have mostly been internalised by middle-class Whites, unlike other ethnic communities such as the Asian, Caribbean, Latino and African Americans, which often cherish co-mothering (Collins, 1994).

In sub-Saharan Africa, collectivistic cultural values encouraged women to share caregiving and housekeeping tasks with other female kin (Tsikata, 2009). Besides a few mothering studies in South Africa such as those of Magazwa (2003) and Doorene (2009), the study of mothering discourses is yet to be studied in sub-Saharan countries, and more so the role of print media in mediating ideals of good mothering. The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether print-mediated mothering discourses promote intensive mothering discourse among Kenyan mothers, whether they are accepted and how women negotiate these western mothering ideals within their lived experience of mothering. Mothering is, "the social practices of nurturing and caring for dependent children" (Arendell, 2000: 1192) and a domestic worker is, "any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship" (International Labour Organisation, 2011).

However, mothers do not perform motherhood in a homogeneous environment. Instead, motherhood takes place at the intersection of race, ethnicity, social class, urban or rural settings, among others. These factors influence the way mothers negotiate their motherhood and the division of labour (Collins, 1994; Crowley, 2015). This context further influences the way mothers negotiate with the cultural motherhood discourses of a good mother and intense mothering.

This paper explores how the mediated intense mothering discourses affected the co-mothering discourses of working mothers in Kenya. To achieve this, it first seeks to determine the nature of mediated mothering discourses among Kenyan working mothers and how they define a good mother. Second, it considers how the mediated mothering discourses provided for co-mothering between domestic workers and Kenyan working mothers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

The media framing theory (Goffman, 1974) and mothering discourses such as intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and co-mothering (Collins, 1994) form the theoretical framework. In this paper, I first discuss the framing theory and later the mothering discourses. The media framing theory helps us understand how the mass media responds to societal issues and portrays societal perceptions concerning important issues like good mothering.

Essentially, media framing directs the audience to some desired interpretation of the story and redirects it away from non-desired interpretations (Shaw & Giles, 2009). A frame is a "schemata of

interpretation that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their lifespan and the world at large" (Goffman, 1974: 21). Thus, frames act as persistent organising principles which are commonly shared over time and aid in structuring the social world (Reese et al., 2001).

There are several ways of classifying media frames (Entman 1993; Dan & Raupp, 2018). According to Dan and Raupp (2018), frames can be classified as generic versus specific, or procedural versus substantive. Generic frames cut across societal issues and topics, for example, politics, health, and sports. They are sometimes referred to as macro or cultural narratives. They are like building structures which allow new stories to be built around them. On the other hand, issue-specific frames cover one or a few topics like pro-life. These issue-specific frames are further broken into Entman's frame functions (Entman, 1993).

The second classification of frames is substantive versus procedural. Substantive frames embody Entman's frame functions, namely, to define problems, identify the causes, offer solutions, assign responsibility to the various actors, and offer a moral evaluation (Entman, 1993). On the other hand, any frame that does not fall under the substantive frames is regarded as a procedural frame. These frames are narrower in scope and may fail to stimulate public debate (Entman, 1993; Dan & Raupp, 2018).

However, Dan and Raupp assert that there is an overlap between generic or procedural and issue-specific or substantive frames. This study uses the second classification and specifically Entman's classification to define a good mother versus a bad mother, identify causes of a lack of good mothers, offer solutions to rectify deviations from good mothering, assign responsibilities to society to who should ensure good mothering, and offer a moral evaluation of the different types of mothering found in the printed media stories. This is because the study deals with a very specific issue of motherhood.

Frames are influenced by societal discourses as well. Thus, media framing and dominant discourses influence each other, that is, they are co-constitutive (Steuter & Wills, 2009). Media framing has been used to analyse political discourses, such as the study of Mathe (2020), who found that South African politicians tend to use social media and parliamentary sessions to protest and disrupt parliament through the use of frames of race and social inequality. Media framing may influence the audience to choose a certain hegemonic opinion about a societal issue by the dominant discourse as well.

This study uses framing theory to study how the Kenyan print media (*The Daily Nation and The Standard*) frame a good mother in a context where some of the childcare tasks are transferred to the house help. *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* have a 40% and 20% readership respectively in East Africa (Elliot, 2015). The Kenyan print media extends some of the frames in the Western media to the local media by carrying the same stories. The following paragraphs explore how mothers construct their identity as mothers and motherhood in a context where co-mothering norms are assumed to hold.

Mothering discourses

This section explores two types of mothering discourses, namely, intense mothering and co-mothering, and how they frame a woman as a good mother. However, first I discuss what are discourse and discourse analysis. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002: 14) define discourse as, "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world". Discourses are the social construction of reality, and the language used enables us to construct the social world, social identities, and social relations. That is, language creates representations of reality, which is not prefixed but rather constructed. The social world is created and changed through discourse, and language is used to change or reproduce this reality.

According to Jorgensen and Philips (2002), there are many variants of discourse analysis, but all hold these premises: the knowledge about a phenomenon is never taken for granted as there is no objective truth; discourses are culturally and historically situated and are bound to change, and there is a link between knowledge and social processes. The world is created and maintained through social processes and there is competition on what is true and false. Furthermore, different social understandings will lead to different social actions.

In this study, I focus on discourse as a piece of text or as a performance, but not as a discipline. Foucaldian discourse analysis differs from linguistic discourse analysis as it focuses on discourse as

a discipline with its own set of systems, rules and divisions, just like medicine. It has techniques and practices that create objects, concepts and strategies, and rules which determine what is true or false. Foucault was interested in the rules that create such statements but not their collective meaning, which differs from the linguistic discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerine, 2017). Below I discuss mothering discourses.

Intense mothering assumes that the mother derives most of her joy from raising the children. It is pitched between the stay-at-home mother (SAHM) and the working mother who is framed as a supermom. The supermom is fully engaged both at work and at home. The SAHM devotes most of her energy to her family and children while the working mother (supermom) finds fulfilment from both raising her children and engaging in a career for income and for self-actualisation (Sutherland, 2010). For the ordinary working mother to achieve these two objectives, which are assumed to be mutually exclusive, she has to outsource some of her childcare activities to a childcare provider (Muasya, 2016).

In addition, it must be noted that not all women uphold intense mothering ideals. A study by Horwitz (2003) found that resisting the dominant mothering discourse, which demands a selfless mother, gave some women a sense of agency and enabled them to juggle, balance, and reconcile the different demands they faced between work and motherhood. They altered them to suit their different work situations (Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

Co-mothering and the African mother

In a bid to accommodate other forms of mothering, Collins (1994) sought to problematise the universal concept of intensive motherhood. She suggested alternative forms and interpretations of mothering and motherhood. For example, in the US Black community, there was a tendency for surrogate motherhood and co-mothering. To these women, working outside the home was most often a case of family survival (Arendell, 2000).

Most sub-Saharan cultures are collectivistic. Collectivistic cultures uphold the needs of the group over that of the individual and encourage interdependencies in work, family, and work relationships. They emphasise kinship, family, and community ties. In sub-Saharan Africa, in places where there is more presence of extended families, working mothers rely on these networks for childcare (co-mothering), coupled with the use of house helps (Muasya, 2014). The same trend can be said of US migrant families, who often leave their children back in their native countries, and the children then later join them as their economic situation improves (Arendell, 2000).

Intensive mothering and childcare

Intensive mothering discourse ascribes a good mother frame or a bad mother frame in accordance with the investment a mother makes in the child's welfare. Intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) is the hegemonic view of mothering which fails to consider the conditions of the mother. These conditions include her work needs, economic vulnerability, and the heavy burden that mothers carry for childcare, or looking for alternative childcare solutions or players (Arendell, 2000). It blames the mother for how the child turns out. Besides blaming, it places the responsibility for the emotional, psychological, and educational development of the child on the mother. Despite the seeming contradiction, some mothers perpetuate these intense mothering norms when they pitch themselves against other mothers who seem to deviate from them (Arendell, 2000). However, scholars seem to disagree on the hegemony of intense mothering even among the races in the US. One such scholar is Crowley (2015) who found that intense mothering norms that promoted the "mommy wars" were a less important issue among the peers of the White middle-class women, and a main issue among the black middle-class women.

Ideally, mothers who work outside the home can engage caregivers, to whom they delegate childcare, within the context of intensive mothering (Muasya 2014; Macdonald, 1998). Despite engaging paid caregivers, mothers still cherish the singular mother-child bond, which contradicts the lived experience of most working mothers. In essence, mothers who uphold the intense mothering norm (Hays, 1996) view paid caregiving as a necessary evil.

To illustrate this hegemonic mothering discourse, Macdonald (1998) interviewed a sample of US middle-class professional women who worked for long hours in very demanding jobs. These women had young children and the nannies worked in live-in-based care. These mothers wanted a shadow mother, an extension of themselves. When the mother is not there the nanny is supposed to be loving to the child, but when the mother arrives home, the nanny erases or shuts herself off, a type of shadow labour work.

The mothers did not allow the nanny to develop her own relationship with the child; failure for the nanny to do so would mean a rupture of this understanding. This manufactured "shadow motherhood" enables the mother to live with the idealised ideas of intense mothering. The nanny's influence on the child is downplayed and that of the mother is elevated. The mother ensures that there are tasks that are reserved for her only, and rules are created to ensure this division of labour is adhered to. The nannies are kept relatively invisible in the lives of children and the social life of the family. Additionally, most nannies detached themselves emotionally from the children so as not to usurp the parent's place in the children's lives. They had to erase themselves from these children's lives and avoid strong bonding (Macdonald, 1998).

Another paper that focused on intensive mothering is that of Pedersen (2016), who explored the mothering ideals found on Mumsnet a UK online parenting forum for the middle class. The paper found three forms of mothering frames: good mother, good enough mother, and bad mother, partly influenced by the frames from the media such as the *Guardian* and the *Huffington Mail*. To accommodate many mothers, the forum had a place for "good enough mothers". In this forum the frame/ideal of a good mother was quite complex and changing. Some aspects of intensive mothering were incorporated to have a selfless mother who was completely focused on the welfare of her children.

However, this position was resisted by a number of posters. Idealising the idea of a good mother would give the impression that the mother is the primary parent and underestimate the role of the father in the lives of the children. There was resistance to the frame of a good mother and posts that indicated mothers should have interests outside of their children were reframed as part of good mothering. There was a reluctance in the use of the term "good mother"; instead, the forum advocated for "good enough mothers". This concept arose to overcome womens' self-doubt, and cultural insecurities about maternal abilities and embrace post-feminism, as it embraces and reframes some shortcomings as part of good mothering.

In the Mumsnet's forum, the "bad mother" was used humorously in a few posts such as a mother who ate her child's Easter eggs, a mother who could not keep her temper with her child, slapping, leaving the husband to take care of the child, not assisting the child with child development, not assisting the child with reading outside of school, poor teeth, child hooked on too much video games, child changing schools too often because the mother is changing jobs, no breastfeeding, and on two occasions this framing was connected to the media. Indeed, these issues were constructed against an ideal mother (good mother). The mother was made to appear selfish, a bad mother who demonstrated a conscious regret she was redeemed from being a bad mother. Thus, it had a narrow definition. Thus, a good mother should be patient, support her children, can work outside the home, and can sometimes lose her temper, but she also needs support from others and may have her own interests outside that of the children.

Mothering discourses in sub-Saharan Africa

Some studies on mothering have been carried out in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in South Africa. Doorene (2009) conducted a qualitative study of a multiracial group of professional women working in urban areas, with young children in heterosexual marriages in South Africa. The author sought to find out the extent to which the pervasive discourse of intensive mothering permeated among the mothers. The mothers accepted varying degrees of the intensive mothering ideology. Their mothering discourses revolved around three aspects: gendered parenting, inherent motherhood, and child-centred motherhood. Due to the inflexibility of their job situations, most employed a domestic worker or house help.

These mothers still viewed this parenting as inadequate, leading to some mothering guilt. The quality of parenting was expressed by the time that they devoted to their children. Additionally, they

saw motherhood as part of their duty biologically as women. Some women prioritised the needs of the children over their own needs, while others were of the opinion that the children should be responsible for their own lives, and be independent, believing that giving oneself so much to the children was equated to slavery. Among Black women, being a mother affirmed their identity as women. These Black mothers experienced ambivalence and guilt and struggled to align themselves with the discourse of a good mother and intense mothering. They negotiated and reconstructed some aspects of it to suit their context. In this same study, mothers who had to work to provide for their families struggled less with these feelings.

Doorene's sample was a small multiracial group. However, Robinson's (2014) longitudinal study found that the ideals of collective mothering were practised where childcare tasks were shared among family and community members, and this reduced the salience of intensive mothering among Black mothers, as opposed to their White South African counterparts. Moreover, Tsikata (2009) argues that the changing nature of the family, as in the rise of more nuclear units, could lead to more reliance on house helps for African mothers. Traditionally, despite African women working outside the home as traders and farmers, the presence of the extended family facilitated childcare.

However, these structures that cushioned the African mother's working life are weaker now, especially in towns (Muasya, 2014) and this may push more mothering tasks onto the nuclear family. But as women take on more childcare tasks, they may be adopting the intensive mothering ideals. The most likely avenue for viewing and studying this cultural interchange can be through the media. Therefore, this study focuses on mediated mothering discourses – discourses about motherhood published in two main print media outlets, namely *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*.

METHOD

In order to answer these research questions, I identified stories or articles related to the topic of motherhood and childcare in two leading media outlets, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, newspapers that carry featured stories in their *Life and Style* and *Eve Woman* sections respectively, between January 1, 2009, and May 31, 2022. I used search words such as mother, house helps, work-family balance, work-family policies, and breastfeeding among others on these online media platforms, and got 150 stories. I excluded stories that did not match or contribute to the mothering/motherhood discourse and remained with 99 stories (see Table 1). The unit of analysis was the story. In case an article had two stories, I counted them separately.

To analyse the data, I followed the thematic coding protocols of Tracy (2019), iterative (combining both deductive and inductive) coding, and constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I derived deductive codes from intense mothering, co-mothering discourses and Entman's (1993) four functions of framing, while inductive codes emerged from the data itself. Tracy advocates for two coding cycles. The first cycle describes the data, and the second cycle identifies causal relationships. I organised all print media stories in an excel file. In my first coding cycle, I chose a total of 20 stories to develop my initial codes. I selected these stories from each story category (see Table 1) which I used to code the rest of the stories and ended up with 48 codes. I merged them into 22 categories.

In the second coding cycle, I further merged the categories into two main categories namely: the "can't have it all" discourse and co-mothering discourse. I sought for disconfirming evidence to avoid forcing data into categories. A colleague who is familiar with the mothering discourse topic critiqued the categories and coded some stories to increase the credibility of the coding process. *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard Media* companies gave their consent for their stories to be used in this study. The National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation approved the study as well.

Table 1: Sample size

Nature of stories	Daily Nation	The Standard	Total
General work–family/life balance	24	6	30
Successful women	6	2	8
Motherhood	13	11	24
House helps	11	7	18
Employers & enacted work–family/life policies	6	4	10
Childcare	0	3	3
Parenting	5	1	6
Total	**65**	**34**	**99**

Source: Author

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kenya print media tend to carry the stories of upper and middle-class women and their experiences with childcare and motherhood. These women perform their motherhood in a space where there are new mothering ideas (discourses). An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the East African Communication Association Conference in 2019 and is part of a bigger study on media and work-life balance. However, I have added more new stories. In this analysis. I applied Entman's (1993) four functions of framing to identify how the discourse defines a good mother from other types of mothers, the causes that lead to failure to be a good mother, a moral evaluation in regard to the good mothering frame, and suggestions offered against the problem of failure to be a good mother.

The nature of mediated mothering discourses in Kenya

The first research questions sought to find out the nature of the mediated mothering discourse and how they framed "good mothers" among Kenyan working women. There were two main categories. The "have it all" discourse and co-mothering discourse. The media stories used the "have it all" catchphrase to describe women who desired to be "good mothers" and excel in their careers as well. This discourse had two subcategories that attempted to navigate the tensions in the discourse of "have it all" from the impossibilities, misconceptions, possibilities, and strategies. The discourse was polarised – one stance argued why women cannot "have it all" and the other stance -- how women can "have it all".

The first subcategory was the misconceptions and possibilities of "have it all". Misconceptions were on what a career is all about to women, which explored the causes of these misconceptions and the definition of "having it all". A good number of successful women were regarded as falling short of being a good mother and were accused of working for career glory, although they fended for their families. A number of successful corporate women were accused of doing so at family expense, as shown in the following story excerpts:

> Kenyan women have been fighting for equality for quite some time now, and they are getting it. ... But at what price? It has left many of them imprisoned and exhausted ... the idea of women happily combining career and a family has turned out to be a myth ... women trying to do it all ... there are only so many hours in a day and as a result, you either spend most of them at work or at home raising children and making a home (*Daily Nation*, June 6, 2009).

> As young women starting out, many of us bought into the myth that we could have it all and all at once: a thriving career, happy family, business on the side, and still pursue our

> MBA in the evening ... a sense of despair and guilt that we had failed as mothers because our children ate meals the house-help prepared or that it was her they ran to with all their worries and fears (*Daily Nation*, April 4, 2014).

Moreover, some of the successful women quoted in the stories refuted this framing and stated that it is possible to have a successful family and career with family support. The solution they gave was the need for a good support system and even encouraged other women to rise up the corporate ladder.

It may be suggested that Ann Marie Slaughter's article titled, "Why women still can't have it all" in *The Atlantic* (Slaughter, 2012) triggered the "have it all" discourse in the Kenyan media and other media spaces. She shared her story of the difficulties she experienced while holding a high office and at the same time having a struggling teenage son. However, some media stories took a different stand and argued that one can be a good mother and that motherhood and careers are compatible so long as women pace themselves accordingly.

The second subcategory gave solutions or strategies to "have it all". Some stories framed tips on how to "combine" and "balance" career and family. These solutions included 1) women should choose work engagements around the child; 2) block family time, for example, weekends and evenings, not to make themselves indispensable at home; 3) attempt self-employment, discipline, and sacrifice, as this allows women to have more time for the children; 4) seek ways to merge work and family so that it is seamless; know when to step out of work for family purposes (ramp out and in), that is taking a break when the family needed them the most; 5) seek less paying and demanding positions through pursuing employers with predictable working hours, as some jobs although paying well have unpredictable schedules and a lot of travel; 6) pace themselves/prioritise, which involved pacing when to go for further studies so as not to overstrain themselves; and 7) accept the "imperfect" help from the house help among other solutions, as they will get additional help and avoid burnout. See the advice below:

> A lot of women let their family situation interfere with their career advancement. Time will run out – just balance the two and you will never regret it. It is just about organising your life. If women can use role models and mentors to know how to go about it, they can succeed. They should also cultivate self-drive ... Discipline ... is an attribute that every person dreaming big should cultivate. (*Daily Nation*, May 11, 2014).

> I am one of those people who want to do everything but I have come to appreciate that it's okay to delegate ... get the wisdom of knowing that it is okay to delegate and to empower those around you (*The Standard*, May 9, 2021).

> Many women fear the idea of not having a source of income ... I encourage stay-at-home mums to explore ways to earn income from home ... working online, thanks to technology. There are also offline businesses (*The Standard,* July 25, 2018).

The successful women in the Kenyan print media had to pass the test as to whether they successfully balanced the demands of work and family. These women proved this by arguing that the family was still their core, and the main source of satisfaction despite their pursuits and achievements in careers. Thus, intense mothering discourse tended to influence the "have it all" discourse, where women either positioned their children at the centre of their lives or not.

The second category was the co-mothering discourse. This discourse explored the extent to which women involved the domestic workers (house helps, nannies) in childcare activities and had three sub-categories namely, the necessity of the house help, the centrality of the child, and co-mothering with the house help.

The first subcategory was the necessity of house help. The Kenya media stories frame the house help as "essential" in the lives of working women with young children. This is due to inflexible work schedules,

working odd hours, traffic jams forcing parents to leave very early and come home very late, and lack of family-friendly facilities at work like crèches or breastfeeding facilities. The following story excerpt illustrates this phenomenon.

> We are not saying that a woman has to choose between the diaper and the briefcase. We, however, definitely agree as producers that the house-help has slowly turned into the 'Boss' of most homes (*Daily Nation*, May 29, 2015).

The second subcategory was the centrality of the child in a mother's life, which framed whether one was a good mother. This good mother had "mother only duties" which were not to be delegated, and the mother was framed as the main nurturer/primary caretaker in the life of the child. Some stories framed the mother to put the child's interests first before hers, especially career interests – as shown by the following excerpts:

> So once one is a mother, it is no longer about them but every minute decision that they make has to be tied to the baby's best interest (*The Standard*, October 31, 2014).

> Mothers are considered the nurturers and primary caregivers of their children and pursuing personal ambitions usually comes last on the list of priorities. Guilt comes in because it feels as if you are going against the grain (*The Standard*, February 7, 2010).

> What we hear and see on the day is an idealised version of motherhood, making many women feel guilty for not being perfect mums. The downsides of motherhood are often hushed up. It doesn't fit perfectly into professional lives ... modern motherhood has become rigidly perfectionist (*Daily Nation*, February 6, 2022).

The mother's only duties were framed to include tasks like bathing the baby, supervising children's homework, tucking the baby into bed, and the child's spiritual development among others. So, it was considered inappropriate (abnormal) when the house help signed the child's school diary. Likewise, taking care of the infant at night and changing the baby at night while the mother was asleep were considered unusual. By making the house help be the primary caregiver, it implied that the child absorbed the values of the nanny. Chores such as bathing the baby and assistance with homework were for the mother. See the following excerpt:

> However, there are certain jobs that are yours whether you have a helper or not. Chores such as doing homework with the children and bathing the baby should be the parent's responsibilities. Parents should bathe their children so that in case they have any injuries, they can notice (*The Standard*, February 9, 2013).

Over-delegating led to the child being too attached to the nanny. This made some mothers feel replaced and some even quit their jobs. This over-attachment of the child to the nanny was framed as a sign of a bad mother or deviant mothering. Women were cautioned that the role of the house helps was that of a helper in running the house but the chores of children were that of the mother.

> Yes, some house-helps have all the qualities you desire ... but in fact, this delegation may be causing your family unit great harm ... the nurturing role that women in the house play, which is very easily taken over by the help who are seen as more dependable and "present" than the lady of the house (*Daily Nation*, July 9, 2011).

Another feature of a good mother was to delegate fewer child-related chores. The number of hours

was a measure of quality. However, some mothers resisted this framing, arguing that what mattered was the quality of parenting and not quantity. In fact, women stated how they set aside some quality time for their children during weekends and evenings as the sacred time for the family. In the argument of quantity vs quality, most working mothers in the stories argued that they valued quality time with their children such as during the weekend and evenings which were sacred moments for the family. Some women felt they were required to spend a little longer time with their children before resuming work. "I was physically present for my children during their first years of life and witnessed all their milestones," (*Daily Nation*, January 4, 2015).

Over-delegating was seen as a sign of ineptness as a mother – a bad mother, as the following story depicts:

> Women need to know that these girls also get tired. So rather than come home and cross your legs watching TV after work, try and get involved with the housework. Change the baby or surprise your family by cooking them a meal (*The Standard*, February 9, 2013).

On the other hand, under-delegation was an issue like in the case of the stay-at-home mother (SAHM). There were several reasons why mothers were under-delegating. First, the inadequacy of the house help as a caretaker of the children. Another reason, the woman chose to stay at home to bond with their children:

> Was it not for my husband who was able to cater for us, I would also have had to hang on to my job and watched as my children's lives were ruined by house helps (*The Standard*, March 3, 2010).

Despite the above option, in most of the stories, the learned SAHMs who opted out were framed in the Kenya print media to have "wasted their brains" and failed to utilise their university education as this story excerpts show:

> Some will look down on you and ridicule you for "wasting" yourself after investing so much time and money in a good education only for you to "throw it all away" to be a housewife (*Daily Nation*, January 4, 2015).

Some stories depicted these women as busybodies, idlers, selfish and lazy. In the mediated stories women were supposed to work and contribute to family income. Thus, SAHMs were not spared either. Ironically, mothers who could not drop everything to be with their children like the SAHM still claimed to be good mothers as confessed by the mothers in the stories below:

> I found out that it is impossible to be a "super perfect mother"... Motherhood has never held me back from achieving anything. I always believed in balancing my time so that even while I was pursuing my career, I still had quality time for my children and family ... The notion that motherhood robs women of their freedoms and successes is totally not true (*The Standard*, May 10, 2015).

Opting out of work is a contested decision as career mothers still raise well-groomed children as shown in the excerpt below:

> Providing you're not actually neglecting them, the total number of hours parents spend with their children between the ages of three and 11 has no effect whatsoever on their academic achievement, behaviour, emotional well-being, or eventual success in life (*Daily Nation*, May 16, 2015).

Co-mothering between the mother and the house help

The second research question sought to find how the mediated mothering discourse provided for co-mothering between the house help and the mother. The third subcategory of "co-mothering with the house help" answered this question. Despite the involvement of the house helps in the lives of children, mothers were not yet ready to co-mother with the nanny as it was a sign of their ineptness – bad mother.

In one of the stories a mother of a four-year-old, had her lowest moment as a mother when a parent at her daughter's school said that she had been mistaking the child's nanny for her mother, making her question her own priorities and making her resign from her job.

However, despite the claim that the mothers were in charge as the main caregivers, some stories depict otherwise – that the house helps were indeed doing the mothers' work:

> Most mothers will tell you that the ideal situation would be where they were able to raise their own children. It is happening but most mothers will not admit that they are co-parenting with their nannies. Some see it as an admission that they are failing as mothers (*Daily Nation*, September 28, 2015).

> Nowadays we all somehow assume that parents need to be heavily involved with their children for them to succeed. Especially their mothers, driven by the idea that there's something special about the way mothers interact with their children. (*Daily Nation*, October 24, 2021).

The stories showed mothers were in denial of the house helps as co-mothers and they lived in guilt, jealousy, and experienced power struggles with their house help. This is despite some nannies being better experienced in childcare. The acceptance of some house helps to be good in handling children and setting boundaries would avoid power struggles and facilitate co-mothering as depicted in this story:

> I made a list early on. I am the one who reads my children bedtime stories and tucks them in bed. I figured they would grow up associating certain things and activities with me. (*Daily Nation*, September 28, 2015).

Discussion

The framing of a good mother is a contested issue in Kenya's media. The influx of stories from the international discourse of "having it all" which was further influenced by the intense mothering discourse that made Kenyan mothers redefine themselves as good mothers. This article agrees with Macdonald's (1998) paper where mothers refused to let the nanny take centre stage in the life of a child or to be seen as co-mother.

The definition of a good mother was reconstructed to allow for working mothers and the realities of a working life. Reliance on house helps is attributed to a decrease in extended family support (Muasya 2014). Mothers argued they are good mothers as long as they combine and balance work and family. The quality of care was reframed not to be based on quantity but on quality. In the mediated stories, the SAHM mother who spent all her time around her children was not seen as a model of a good mother. This agrees with Horwitz (2003), who found that women resisted the discourse of intense mothering to gain agency that allowed them to balance the demands of work and family.

Mothers argued that they may not be super perfect mothers but still had given some of their time in the key moments of their child. This agrees with Pedersen (2016) who found that the media stories had adopted three mothering frames – good mother, good enough mother, and bad mother. The "good enough" mother framing allows mothers to find themselves in different positions. Pedersen's article resisted the narrow framing of a good mother, as mothers were encouraged to have interests outside that of their children.

In Kenya, co-mothering is common in the rural areas, but in the urban setup childcare is individualistic,

as in the South African urban mothers (Doorene, 2009). These women tend to have assimilated different levels of intense mothering, and the main influence could be the media. Some media stories also attempted to create a space for a good mother to include some co-mothering aspects (Collins, 1994; Arrendell, 2000) with the house helps and not just treat them as "shadow mothers" or just helpers. This is because of the time these house helps spent with the children.

Limitations
This study focused on motherhood discourses of two Kenyan print media outlets and not from other media outlets.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION
There seems to be a shift in urban areas from the collectivistic ideals of mothering cherished in African society to more individualistic values. Thus, it is inappropriate to conclude that the extended family offers work-family balance support for modern working mothers and their families in urban areas.

Second, future studies should explore mothering discourses from the perspective of the house helps and low-income mothers in urban areas, as the voice of these two groups of women is muted. Future studies should also consider mothering discourses found in other media too, like television.

To conclude, the mothering discourse in Kenya seems to be changing from collective to individual responsibility and the mediated mothering discourse tends to enforce the intense mothering ideals. The women who rely on house help tend to be depicted as inept or bad mothers. However, middle-class working women tend to highly contest this position in their desire to have a career as well. These women are not yet ready to admit that the house helps do a considerable portion of mothering duties and should be resentfully accepted as co-mothers.

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