

## Juggling Identities: *Komik Bunda's* Representation of “Good” Working Mothers During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

Being a working mother during the Covid-19 pandemic has not been easy. Various tweets and posts on social media display the multiple roles that mothers have been expected to play. The dynamics of motherhood during the pandemic were incisively portrayed in *Komik Bunda*, a comic published on one of the leading parenting sites in Indonesia, *haibunda.com*. This qualitative study explores how working mothers negotiate their identities to adapt, persist, and innovate amidst the ups and downs of the pandemic situation in Indonesia. Critical content analysis is performed on 30 comic strips with the theme of motherhood during a pandemic, and the findings are analysed from the perspective of feminist standpoint theory, identity, and representation. This study indicates that women experience an excessive workload resulting from their multiple identities as mothers, teachers, and workers during the pandemic. Negotiation efforts, such as identity segmentation and conceptualising partners as secondary parents, emerged as ways to manage the tensions between identities. The discussion in this study shows that the tension between identities will continue as long as women are confined by the myths of “good” mothers and “ideal” workers promoted by the ideologies of neoliberalism and capitalism. This study concludes that identity negotiation is not only about the identity mothers choose to hold but also about the authenticity and balance displayed by working mothers during and after the pandemic.

**Keywords:** *Working mother, identity, feminist standpoint theory, representation, critical content analysis.*

### INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic in March 2020, and the government of the Republic of Indonesia subsequently implemented a stay-at-home policy to prevent and suppress the spread of the virus. Overnight, schools, higher education institutions, workplaces, and other social facilities were closed, and face-to-face meetings were strictly limited. This condition required people to adapt as remote working and learning became the “new norm” (Aldossari & Chaudury, 2020). This change significantly impacted families who then lived, worked, and studied in the same living space.

Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted the various social and economic burdens placed on parents, especially mothers (Pedersen & Burnett, 2022). Mothers, who are already responsible for about three-quarters of the unpaid household labor of raising children, cooking, and housework, now have to do more parenting activities than ever before (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2021). The burden of the mother’s role is even more evident when considering working mothers during a pandemic. Those who usually go to the office and leave household chores to other parties (such as a babysitter, helper, or childcare) must now do everything themselves. Thus, it is becoming clear that the pandemic has exacerbated working mothers’ stress by adding the demands of constant childcare and schooling from home, in addition to their paid work (Auðardóttir & Rúðólfsdóttir, 2021).

The mental health of working mothers during the pandemic is an issue that has been recognized by various parties, from academics to practitioners. The Indonesian Women's National Commission (Komnas Perempuan, 2020) survey results show that women are more vulnerable to violence both economically and psychologically. Economically, women experience financial burdens when they and (or) their husbands experience termination of employment or receive half of their salary due to the implementation of limited hours and lower numbers of workers. Research results from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020) show that since the beginning of the pandemic, mothers have been more likely than fathers to resign from paid employment. Before resigning, mothers already reduced their working hours more than fathers. They also experience more distractions than fathers, mainly because of the demands of childcare (Whiley, Sayer & Juanchich, 2021). Meanwhile, psychologically, the burden of household work has increased, and women do twice as much as men. Worries about losing their job, plus an excessive workload, make working mothers experience more stress.

Long before the pandemic, women were faced with the choice of identity between being a housewife or a career woman. Although feminists believe that women can embody both identities simultaneously, the pandemic conditions created a conflict between the identities. The results are perhaps predictable: women quit their jobs to become full-time mothers. Therefore, it can be concluded that during the pandemic, women intensely struggled with their efforts to work for equality while remaining faithful mothers.

The daily dynamics and struggles concerning the identity of working mothers during this pandemic were captured by one of the leading parenting sites in Indonesia, namely *haibunda.com*, in *Komik Bunda*. Through these comic panels, we can observe how a mother divides her time, energy, and emotions in carrying out her role as a worker, teacher, doctor, caregiver, and housekeeper during a pandemic. This study explores how mothers negotiate their identities to adapt and survive amidst the changing conditions of the pandemic. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide insight for formulating possible solutions to alleviate the consequences of prolonged motherhood identity negotiations.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Periods of crisis, such as pandemics, have stronger impacts on women. In line with the findings of McLaren et al. (2020), women's vulnerability is exacerbated during disasters such as famine, war, natural disasters, and pandemic outbreaks. These experiences impact women's health as well as broader social and economic factors, including personal and occupational safety (Gausman & Langer, 2020; Osland, Røysamb & Nortvedt, 2020). The policy brief published by the Secretary-General of the United Nations notes that the pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems that ultimately amplify the impact of the pandemic. The key points in the policy summary are supported by emerging research on the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on women globally (Casale & Posel, 2020; Bashevska, 2020; Pedersen & Burnett, 2022; Clark, McGrane, Boyle, Joksimovic, Burke, Rock, & O'Sullivan, 2021; Guy, & Arthur, 2020; Çoban, 2022; Whiley, Sayer, & Juanchich, 2021; Burk, Mausolf, & Oakleaf, 2021).

Several studies have specifically discussed the polemic of identity and the role of working mothers during the pandemic. Clark et al.'s (2021) analysis shows that working mothers have been negatively impacted by Covid-19 in terms of psychological well-being, negative emotional experiences, and the redefinition of family dynamics. Furthermore, the adoption of a disproportionate additional burden of care becomes an obstacle to the career

advancement of working mothers. In the academic realm, many studies have been conducted on academic motherhood during the Covid-19 pandemic (Burk, Mausolf & Oakleaf, 2021; Guatimosim, 2022; Guy & Arthur, 2020). These studies demonstrate the vulnerability of mothers in academia, which impacts career performance and achievement as well as expectations for equality in the work environment.

The heavy burden experienced by working mothers during the pandemic is caused by the construction of the “ideal” identity of motherhood in society (Pedersen & Burnett, 2022; Whiley, Sayer, & Juanchich, 2021), in which media representations play an important role (Elanda, 2021; Lamar, Forbes, & Capasso, 2019; Tsaliki, 2019). No matter how busy women are with their work or how difficult the conditions are, women are still expected to carry out their motherhood roles to the fullest extent. However, the recently popular form of neoliberal feminism has also convinced women that they can do both: be loyal mothers and “good” workers.

To achieve both, women are expected to navigate their identities as mothers and workers. Johnston and Swanson (2007) propose five navigation strategies for working mothers: selection, segmentation, cyclic alternation, neutralizing, and reframing. Selection requires a mother to choose one identity and leave another; for example, she can choose to focus on childcare and resign from her job. Segmentation requires mothers to create clear distinctions between each identity or compartmentalise their identities by, for instance, delineating which tasks are the responsibility of the mother and which are the worker’s. Meanwhile, cyclic alteration involves rotating between identities during different life periods (e.g., a mother works during her productive age, then chooses to retire and return home). Neutralising means that both identities change; the identities of mother and worker are no longer needed or prioritized. Finally, reframing is a process of finding an identity that reflects their commitments to work and to intensive motherhood by reframing one or both of these identities (e.g., working mothers interpret their own identities without referring to the general norms of society). The latter strategy has the most attractive potential because mothers can achieve it by broadening the definitions of caregiving and work.

Previous research on the identity of working mothers has focused on the expectation that women can manage the tension between the identity of a “good” mother (“ideal” motherhood) and a “good” worker. This includes reframing the meaning of quality parenting, relationships with partners, and the feeling of happiness in being a working mother. As research conducted by Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) concludes, working mothers’ identity negotiations can encourage a shift from polarity or a tendency to one identity to a more nuanced, fused identity.

For example, research conducted by Budds (2021) shows how working mothers can create broad motherhood roles by involving many parties in parenting. They can delegate childcare and housekeeping tasks to others and remain responsible mothers without having to be involved in intensive day-to-day care. Thus, reframing the definition of a good mother, a good worker, and a good working mother has the potential to give hope to working mothers.

Studies have explored the experience of working mothers during the pandemic, especially the variety of challenges and vulnerabilities they face. However, there are very few studies discussing the identity negotiation of working mothers during the pandemic. In fact, identity negotiations can be a foothold for working mothers in living their lives during and after the pandemic. Researchers believe that identity negotiation will help mothers redefine their identities and find their authenticity in carrying out their roles as working mothers.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the identity negotiation of working mothers during the pandemic through what is described by *Komik Bunda*, a medium that represents the interiority of working mothers.

### METHODOLOGY

This research uses the critical content analysis (CCA) method. CCA is a conceptual approach to understanding a text's meaning by considering the content from a particular theoretical perspective, such as sociohistorical, gender, cultural, or thematic studies (Leung & Chung, 2019). CCA focuses on how texts (including visual and linguistic aspects) can be used to identify hidden ideas, values, identities, and power.

Feminists use CCA to critically analyse cultural texts and materials to challenge patriarchal domination over societies that marginalize and oppress women and other minority groups (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). From a critical feminist perspective, CCA examines the correlation between gender representation and reality and challenges sociocultural views of gender roles. Therefore, this study examines the depiction of gender roles in comics as well as features such as emotions, interests, relationships, and character intelligence (Facciani, Warren & Vendemia, 2015).

The unit of analysis for this research is 30 comic strips of *Komik Bunda* that were published during the pandemic, from March 2020 to January 2022. *Komik Bunda* shows the daily life of Bunda as a wife, mother, and worker. This comic has been published on the parenting website haibunda.com since November 2017. *Komik Bunda* is a weekly comic that is enjoyed by site visitors, who are predominantly women. The following is a display of one of the strips of *Komik Bunda* entitled "Happy to Be Back to School Again."



Figure 1: An example of *Komik Bunda* (Haibunda.com, 2022)

During the pandemic, many working mothers shared their stories through social media, uploading statuses on WhatsApp stories, Instagram, and Facebook. However, this information is limited in terms of access and distribution. In addition, researchers encountered obstacles in identifying forums and mailing lists for working mothers in Indonesia who were actively sharing stories during the pandemic. Instead, the researchers

identified that *Komik Bunda* was able to describe and depict the daily dynamics of working mothers during the pandemic. Therefore, this research explores the issues that stand out from the comic, including how working mothers can negotiate their identities during the pandemic.

The CCA method is implemented in four stages. The first stage is initial reading, in which the researcher reads all of the samples carefully. During the reading process, the researcher notes things that require more attention to be addressed further. For example, the use of certain colors for the characters in the comic (e.g., blue for Ayah's clothes and pink for Bunda's), the setting and atmosphere of the story, the display of emotions (Bunda's emotions are more prominent than Ayah's), and the first impression of the story plot. Next, the researcher enters the second stage, which is selecting the theories and concepts that will be used to analyse the text. Based on the analysis of similar previous studies, the researcher uses feminist standpoint theory, the concept of representation, and identity as analytical tools. During the research, the theories and concepts that were used to analyse the findings were developed, including adding the ideology of ideal motherhood and good workers in the context of neoliberalism to explain the cultural expectation of working mothers.

The third stage is the analysis of text and visual elements. This stage involves a detailed reading of grammar, genre, style, and discourse. For example, based on the depiction of Bunda's various activities (washing, cooking, watering plants, and teaching Kakak) compared to Ayah's (watching TV, sitting on the couch, and playing games), the researcher found that a discourse of inequality in the household workload was consistently shown in the comics. After the researcher captured some of the discourses that emerged, the researcher entered the fourth stage, namely synthesis. The synthesis stage in CCA involves meaning-making or interpretation that combines textual and visual elements with a critical framework. For example, the researcher criticises the discourse of inequality in the workload of men and women in the household by exposing the existence of the ideology of ideal motherhood, which is common in a patriarchal society. Based on these four stages, the researcher highlights the interesting findings which will be discussed in the discussion section.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Identity Triad: Mother, Teacher, Worker*

During the Covid-19 pandemic, social, economic, political, and cultural changes have significantly influenced the role of mothers. All main activities are conducted at home, from school to work, forcing working mothers to take on at least a double burden. In *Komik Bunda*, there are at least three identities represented that women have carried through the pandemic, namely mothers, teachers, and workers. Each identity carries a significant workload and simultaneously fulfilling the expectations of all identities is not easy.

First, some women hold the identity of mother. In a patriarchal society, the role of the mother is clearly differentiated from the role of the father, though both have the responsibility to raise their children. Mothers are generally responsible for more work at home, which is often referred to as the domestic sphere. Mothers' duties include childcare, housework, and maintaining good relationships with their partners. Mothers certainly understand that these three main duties produce equally important tasks. For example, educating children, ensuring children's growth and development through good nutrition, and maintaining children's health are all part of the parenting duty. Housekeeping duties involve managing household finances, sweeping, mopping, ironing, cooking, and washing. Providing

for the husband's needs, ensuring the husband's health, and establishing good communication with the husband are part of heterosexual marital relationship duties.

The role generated by motherhood is depicted in *Komik Bunda* in detail, including the effort to ensure the physical and mental health of children during a pandemic. For example, in "Can't Kiss the Baby," Bunda teaches Kakak about social distancing for the health of children and others. In "Fun Camping at Home," "Riding a Roller Coaster at Home," and "Staycation at Home," the comic shows Bunda thinking about how to make children feel comfortable at home during the pandemic.

The *Bunda* figure in the comics is a woman who can do multiple household tasks at a time. Often, the story opens with the figure of Bunda washing clothes ("Independence Day Competition at Home"), cooking ("School from Home Again"), or cleaning the house ("Fun Camping at Home"). This shows how extensive and intensive the role produced by the motherhood identity is. However, not all roles are visible, and most of them overlap without the mother or other family members being aware of it.

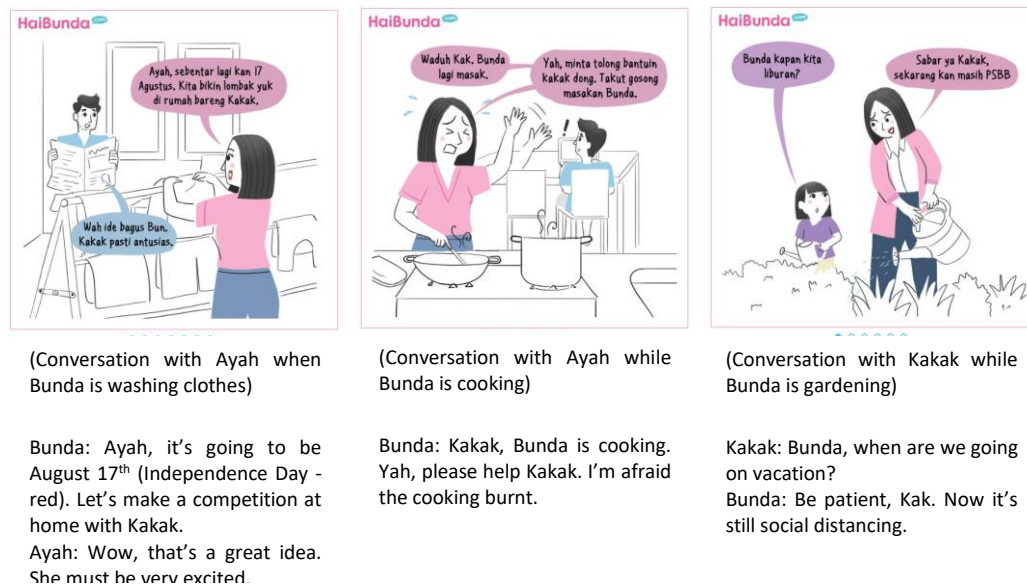


Figure 2: Being a multitasking mother (Haibunda.com, 2022)

Second, the lockdown conditions of the pandemic led some mothers to take on the role of teacher. The closure of educational institutions such as schools displaces the burden of educating children on mothers. Indeed, the task of educating children has long been handed over to the mother because she is considered closer to her children on a daily basis. The responsibility for educating children is split in two; formal and non-formal education is largely facilitated by schools and other educational institutions, while mothers support education by ensuring that children understand what they have learned in these institutions. However, schooling from home makes mothers take on the full responsibility for their children's education. Ultimately, mothers do more than accompany children while they are learning from home ("Children Learning Companion"). For example, the mother might do the child's schoolwork and answer online exam questions.

*Komik Bunda* presents various stories that represent the mothers' care while accompanying their children in learning at home. At first, the school-from-home policy was relieving for Bunda because it minimized the possibility of Kakak being exposed to the virus

outside the house. However, challenges began to be felt when schools held online exams and Kakak could not do them herself (see “Exam at Home” and “Online Exam with Mommy”). Beyond online exams, the many tasks given to Bunda also require her to divide her time and energy, especially when Kakak needs Bunda’s direction while doing these tasks (“School from Home Again,” “The Homeworks,” and “And the Drama Begins...”).

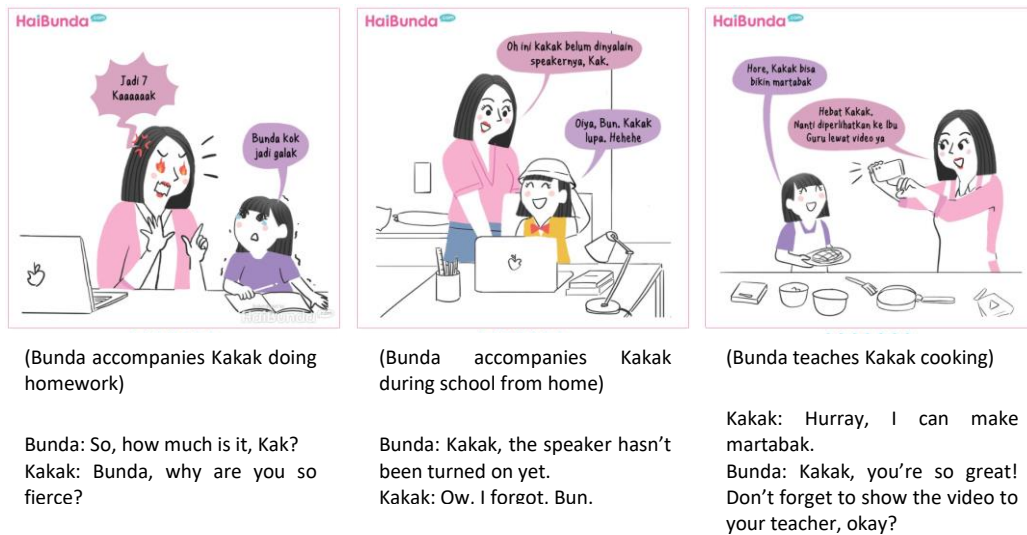


Figure 3: *Bunda* accompanying *Kakak* at school from home (Haibunda.com, 2022)

Through *Komik Bunda*, it can be seen that the identity of mothers as teachers adds a new workload for women. Before the pandemic, children received instruction from teachers at school, while mothers checked their homework and repeated material to ensure children’s understanding of the lessons. However, schooling from home presents a different learning experience for children: reduced learning hours, supporting tasks in each subject (even for sports or gymnastics subjects), and a lack of teacher supervision. This condition is what ultimately makes the mother take over the teaching role in addition to her already-held role(s).

Third, some women also hold the identity of a worker. The figure of Bunda is depicted as a mother who has a paid job outside the home. After social distancing was enforced, Bunda had to work from home using a virtual conference platform. In “Sorry, Mommy Can’t Be Patient” Bunda is in a meeting with her co-workers when she is disturbed by the presence of Kakak whining and asking for attention. This represents the real conditions of working mothers during the pandemic, in which they have to divide their attention between several tasks: they work while breastfeeding, do children’s handicrafts, teach children, and take on other household chores.



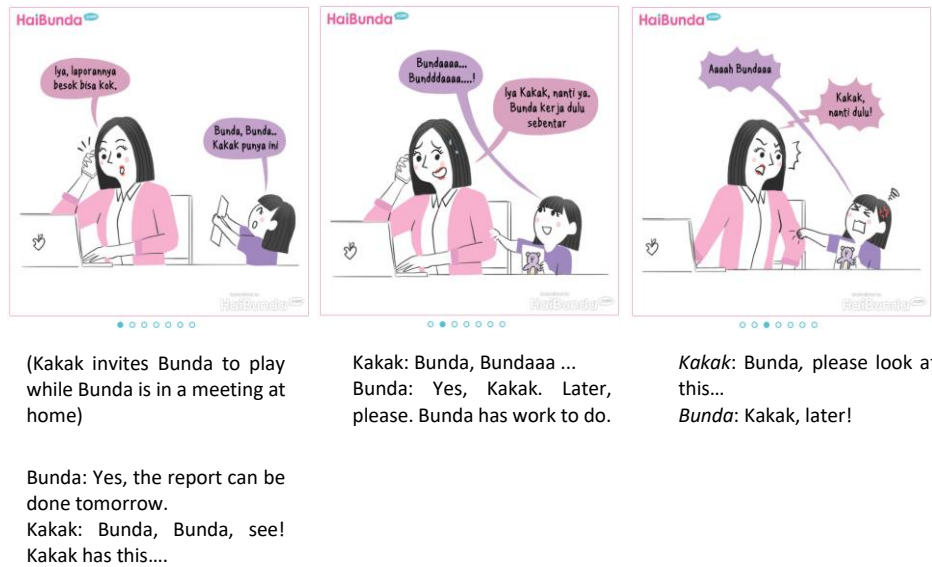


Figure 4: Sharing attention while working from home (Haibunda.com, 2022)

The pandemic blurred the line between paid work and unpaid domestic work, as there were no longer fixed hours for both types of work. On the one hand, as a worker, a mother needs to convince her office colleagues that she can work optimally from home. On the other hand, as a mother, she must pay attention to the housework and teach her children that she is still working while at home. Therefore, working mothers are prone to experiencing stress while working from home due to juggling their identities as workers and mothers.

During a pandemic, these identities often collide or overlap. Mothers do not have the freedom to embody one identity at a time. For mothers, these three identities (perhaps even more) cannot always be chosen but can only be lived: being a mother while working and being a worker while parenting. Physical and psychological fatigue has been a common complaint of working mothers during the pandemic. Sentiments like "Be patient, Mom!" have become common refrains that are often heard, read, and absorbed. However, the question remains: is patience alone enough to carry out all these identities?

#### *Working Mothers' Identity Negotiation*

In addition to the triad of identities that women hold during the pandemic, *Komik Bunda* also presents an overview of what mothers should and should not do while living out their identities and roles. This includes not only the various activities they must do at home but also how mothers are expected to manage emotions when conflicts occur. In "I'm Sorry, Kid," for example, Bunda vents her anger at Kakak who accidentally broke a plate and made the house dirty. Bunda's nagging makes Kakak cry and Ayah has to calm her down. After some time, Bunda apologises to Kakak, expressing guilt for not being patient. Similar plotlines are also found in "And the Drama Begins..." and "Sorry, Mommy Can't Be Patient."

The challenge of holding the mother-teacher-worker identity has also been identified in a study conducted by Leberman and LaVoi (2011) examining the identity negotiation of working mothers and coaches in youth sports. Women experience tension between their various identities and roles and feel guilty when they cannot meet all expectations. However, emotional expression, including guilt, must also be managed by mothers. The standpoint feminist perspective sees motherhood as more than just a role; the identity of mother is



based on beliefs and values about motherhood (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). The mother becomes a person who carries out her motherhood identity with love, and if a mother experiences negative emotions like anger, then she is considered to have violated her motherhood. In daily life, the negative aspects of motherhood are often hidden behind the mask of a competent, cheerful, and calm mother. Therefore, to practice good motherhood, mothers' emotional expressions must be suppressed or ignored (Agustin & Josephine, 2021).

Furthermore, the ideology of the good mother seems to contradict the identity of working mothers. In the larger context, ideal worker ideology and gender construct the worker identity desired by society. For example, there is a social expectation that men are in the public sphere or work outside the home as breadwinners while women work in the private or domestic sphere as primary caregivers. The ideology of intensive motherhood, according to Sharon Hays, assumes that parenting takes a lot of time and energy, but is also emotionally satisfying (Cappellini, Harman, Marilli, & Parsons, 2019). Motherhood norms in Indonesia also include that women should be mothers and take care of their families without pay. As a result, mothers engaged in paid work are perceived as having different priorities, being less committed, less suited to managerial roles, more easily stressed, and having other problems labeled "women's problems."

One of the comic strips of *Komik Bunda*, "Why is Bunda Working?," depicts how Bunda started to return to work at the office and had to leave her daughter at home. Kakak then compared her mother to her friends' mothers who are full-time housewives. Kakak questioned Bunda's love for her, and Bunda was considered to care less for Kakak because she left her at home. This condition makes Bunda feel sad and guilty because her choice to return to the office seems to be sacrificing her connection to her daughter.

These conditions illustrate how the logic of intensive parenting is inherently at odds with market logic, and, as a result, women struggle to meet the expectations of both domains. Putranto et al. (2022) argues that constructed identities such as motherhood become a place of struggle, where various values and interests meet and are negotiated. Therefore, identity negotiation is necessary to manage gendered expectations about ideal worker norms that are compatible with intensive motherhood norms.

Studies conducted by Johnston and Swanson (2007) show how most working mothers continue to maintain a dichotomy between work and motherhood. As a result, they engage in cognitive efforts to manage the tension between identities. Researchers use the term juggling as a metaphor to depict the multiple identities of mothers that are constructed by society: mothers, housekeepers, and workers. Similarly, the *Bunda* figure characterizes working mothers as existing in a state of perpetual imbalance, bouncing back and forth between the identities of mother, teacher, and worker both during and after the pandemic.

Previous studies have shown how working mothers manage the tension between the identities of the good mother and the good worker, such as by ignoring one identity for the other, switching between the two identities, or changing the meaning of being a mother and/or worker (Aarntzen, Derks, van Steenbergen, Ryan & van der Lippe, 2019; Budds, 2021; Burk, Mausolf & Oakleaf, 2021). In the comics, Bunda is shown negotiating her triad of identity. Although Bunda is described as versatile and multi-tasking, when she needs to help Kakak study, she puts aside her household duties and paid work. Likewise, when Bunda has a virtual meeting, she does not pay much attention to childcare or housework. Instead, Bunda divides her time between these tasks, although there is no strict time separation for each task. Bunda's actions are in line with one of the identity negotiation strategies identified by

Johnston and Swanson (2007), namely segmentation, in which Bunda clearly distinguishes between tasks as a mother, teacher, and worker.

While the research conducted by Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) shows how women manage to reframe the definition of good working mothers by differentiating themselves from good mothers through childcare arrangements, taking pride in their actions, and having others help them raise their children and manage their complex lives, *Komik Bunda* shows how the tension in managing identity also involves the father as a party who supports Bunda's work. For example, Bunda asks Ayah to accompany and supervise Kakak, who is taking exams at home, when Bunda has to do office work, and Ayah plays with Kakak while Bunda cleans the house. Although several studies on the division of household labor show the minimal role of the father (Çoban, 2022), the presence of the father becomes the closest reliable party to manage domestic life when institutions and parties outside the home cannot help the mother.

The identity negotiations carried out by working mothers are always taking place. Before, during, and after the pandemic, working mothers continue to struggle to manage the tension between their multiple identities. Working mothers are constantly faced with problems related to the duality of identity, and it has lately become increasingly common to believe that women are able to do both. This study asks: are women really able or constructed to be able to live out these multiple identities?

#### *Beyond the Matter of Choosing One's Identity*

In countries with collectivist cultures, such as Indonesia, the identity of the mother is largely determined by society. There are sets of invisible rules that are constructed to determine what a mother should and should not do, how she should feel in carrying out her role, how these emotions should be channeled, and how she should establish a relationship with her husband, extended family, and other people who support her. Although not formalised, these standards are still applied and passed down from generation to generation.

Being a working mother in a collectivist society can feel helpful on one hand, but on the other hand, it can feel demanding. With the help of the community (including husbands, parents, and neighbors), women can work outside the home and hand over caregiving tasks to other parties. In many Indonesian families, child care assistance by family and neighbors is voluntary. This differs from individualistic cultures, where childcare is generally the responsibility of each parent and the involvement of other parties usually requires additional costs (e.g., daycare or hiring a nanny). With communal support, women can negotiate their identities in a more focused way: they can be a worker at work and a mother at home (although their attention may still be divided).

However, the community also acts as an observer who ensures that women carry out their motherhood duties well even if they are working. Expressions such as "you can work as long as the children are taken care of" or "family comes first" are ways in which patriarchal societies remind women of their identity and role. Outside the home, questions such as "how is your little one?" or "who looks after your child?" are common conversation starters among Indonesian women. While working, women are constantly reminded to carry out their roles well and, if possible, be better mothers than workers. This kind of cultural expectation confirms the identity of women as mothers but also creates an excessive physical and psychological burden on working mothers. During a pandemic, assistance from other parties can disappear while the cultural expectations of the mother increase.

The conflict between good mothers and good workers became even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when women were forced to return to being housewives. This condition has the potential to undo the work of feminism and force women back into the domestic sphere. Moreover, the stay-at-home policy breaks down the dividing line between home and work that allows women to be mothers in the domestic sphere and professionals in the public sphere. As emphasized by Ashcraft (2020), the changes triggered by the pandemic in the public and private spheres have created new forms of masculinity and tend to define women based on their household existence. The pandemic period has tied the public patriarchy with the private patriarchy more closely and complexly. Although women are satisfied with spending more time with their families and having a reduced workload while working from home, this condition is unsustainable, and women are still plagued with concerns about being stay-at-home moms and moving away from career development.

Lamar et al. (2019) argue that the idea of a good mother cannot be separated from the polemic of working mothers. This idea is closely related to neoliberalism and capitalism. The neoliberal narrative places two identities of women (mothers and workers) in conflict, making it seem as if women need to choose, which lowers the prestige of one job and exalts the other. The work of mothers at home is often considered inferior to the success of a company. For example, when a woman chooses to become a full-time mother, she is considered to have “sacrificed” her career in order to raise children. In turn, women are considered selfish when they choose to be career women and give childcare tasks to other parties.

The tension between these two identities can make women feel guilty. Guilt arises when mothers try to reconcile narratives about good mothers with notions of good workers. The good mother culture is rooted in contemporary society (Lamar, Forbes & Capasso, 2019). The ideal of good mothers promotes the idea that good mothers invest most of their time and resources into the well-being of their children.

The ideology of the good worker is also entangled with neoliberal corporate feminist groups. The feminist discourse of “you can have it all” is embedded in neoliberal idealism that drives the capitalist agenda (Whiley, Sayer & Juanchich, 2021), wherein a working mother is only considered successful if she is successful both at home and at work. To manage the tension between identities, many mothers sacrifice their free time and consider reducing paid work to mitigate their guilt and accommodate housework responsibilities (Aarntzen, Derks, van Steenberg, Ryan & van der Lippe, 2019). However, this choice actually creates another sense of guilt in mothers.

After struggling for successful careers and equality in the public sphere, mothers have traded guilt about working for guilt about being “bad” feminists (Donegan, 2020; Lewis, 2020). During the pandemic, mothers have felt isolated and desired to return to work immediately, but they are overcome with fear that they are “bad” mothers. In addition, they also want to enjoy being a full-time mother without feeling like a bad feminist. This experience of guilt is not a new occurrence for women. On many occasions, the formation and strengthening of patriarchal identities are carried out by facilitating feelings of guilt in women, including guilt for returning to work (Roering, 2021) or guilt for staying at home (Aarntzen, Derks, van Steenberg, Ryan & van der Lippe, 2019). Neoliberal corporate feminism relies on self-control, which increasingly rejects femininity (including intensive parenting tasks). Instead of fighting for women’s empowerment in the public sphere, neoliberal corporate feminism devalues the life experiences of working mothers and exacerbates inequality.

Amid the polemic of choosing and not having to choose, feminist critical standpoints offer a perspective that puts the experience of Indonesian working mothers into an alternative narrative, namely that women's domestic labor is meaningful, valuable, and contributes to society. Although the constant tension remains, the pandemic allows mothers to work and enjoy life with their children at the same time. Mothers can finally enjoy being with their children while baking cookies ("Baking Business"), caring for plants ("Gardening at Home"), and camping at home ("Fun Camping at Home"), but can also get distracted from time to time, such as during a Zoom meeting ("Sorry, Mommy Can't Be Patient :(") or while doing other work ("I'm So Sorry, Kid").

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has turned mothers' worlds upside down, it has also taught mothers a lot, especially when it comes to uniting women's roles as mothers and professionals (Whiley, Sayer & Juanchich, 2021). The identities of mother and worker are a paradox in women. As stated by Carl Jung (2020), that paradox is the key to the whole work, and it is through understanding the paradox that humans become fully whole. Working from home while being a mother has challenged working mothers to accept the flaws and chaos of life as human beings. The pandemic has exposed our flawed humanity and the need to be a good model for our families, co-workers, and those around us. Thus, the dynamics of life during a pandemic become an experience as well as a unique opportunity to show authenticity and share vulnerability in front of others.

#### CONCLUSION

A critical analysis of *Komik Bunda* demonstrates how women fulfill multiple social roles as mothers, teachers, and workers. From a critical standpoint, this study identifies the ideology of neoliberalism and capitalism that underlies the representation of the good working mother identity represented in *Komik Bunda*. The figure of *Bunda* in the comic represents how mothers embody their identities as housewives, intensive mothers, and ideal workers. In addition, the juggling of identities illustrates the good working mother expected by the Indonesian people: a mother conducting paid work in public spaces but remembering her main duties at home.

This study also explores how working mothers negotiated their identities during the pandemic. The results show that mothers undertake segmentation based on their identities, separate time to do paid work and household tasks, and allocate the greatest attention to work related to children's education and work. Another negotiation strategy is conceptualizing the spouse as a secondary parent who can also help with certain types of housework and childcare. Although the father's role is not very prominent in the comics, it seems that verbal support from the father can relieve the mother's emotional exhaustion.

The emotional dynamics of working mothers are also highlighted in the comics. Although *Komik Bunda* shows the interiority of working mothers during a pandemic in the real world, efforts to criticize the production of mythical depictions of the ideal working mother are still needed. If this myth was common in Indonesian society before the pandemic, then the pandemic has placed more pressure on women to live up to the expectations of this myth. Instead of contradicting identities and suggesting that one identity is superior to another, working mothers can prioritize authenticity in living out these identities. Therefore, identity and negotiation efforts are not simply an act of choosing between existing identities, but rather should focus on prioritizing authenticity while managing the tensions between identities. This research is the first step in criticizing the depiction of a good working mother that has been commonly displayed by the media during the pandemic. Further research may

expand these findings related to images and media by exploring the lived experience of Indonesian women who undergo and negotiate these multiple roles.

Finally, it is undeniable that the pandemic has brought many difficulties and burdens to the lives of working mothers, but mothers can also use this time to reflect more deeply about who they are and what is important to them. Being a working mother during a pandemic is harder than it was before the pandemic. Even so, mothers can value the time they can spend with their children at home. The struggle of working mothers will continue, despite the decreasing influence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mothers will continue to strive for authenticity, balance, and a way to embody all their identities.

#### BIODATA

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