Ideals and Expectations: Representations, Practices and Governance of Contemporary Motherhood

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2016

Abstract

This thesis is about contemporary mothering in the North East of England. It is informed by a feminist perspective and draws on the theoretical concepts of governmentality (Foucault, 1991), and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) to explore how mothers' everyday lives and practices are shaped by the discourse of 'intensive mothering'. This, I argue has come to stand as a proxy for 'good' mothering, and is a child-centred approach that is costly in terms of time, money and emotion (Hays, 1996). Furthermore, I argue that it is an approach that entrenches class and gender relations.

My first task was to consider the circulation of government messages that place mothers and mothering at the heart of an agenda to bring forth citizens 'fit' for a society that values self-responsibility, self-regulation, and entrepreneurialism. This, I suggest, sits comfortably within a *belief* that the United Kingdom is meritocratic, and that individual enterprise, such as hard-work, making the 'right' lifestyle choices, and taking responsibility for ourselves are guarantors of a good life. Mothers are explicitly addressed in government-led initiatives, healthcare, and child-rearing manuals to raise their children in particular ways. As I will show, the theories on which this advice is based, and the claims of evidence of the risks attached to not following it, are rarely questioned, and what follows familiar problems, are familiar solutions, even when there is scant evidence of their efficacy.

My research is conducted using qualitative methods; it is based on the accounts of twenty-five women who have at least one child under the age of five. These mothers are busy. Their time, emotion and money are all focused on their children. They express ambivalence about the value of the advice they receive, frustration about how time-consuming mothering is, and anger at how judgemental it can be. At the same time, such 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) is the benchmark against which they measure being a 'good mother'. My analysis draws attention to the complexity of negotiating ways of knowing, doing and being a mother and the discourses of mothering that work on and through women. I discuss how mothers negotiate their identity as a 'good mother' through and against competing forms of knowledge.

Dedicated to my Mam and in memory of my Dad, with love and respect.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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1   CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Today we are witnessing what Angela McRobbie has described as a 'neoliberal intensification of mothering': perfectly turned out middle-class, mainly white mothers, with their perfect jobs, perfect husbands and marriages, whose permanent glow of self-satisfaction is intended to make all the women who don't conform to that image – because they are poorer or black or their lives are just more humanly complicated – feel like total failures.

(Jacqueline Rose, 2014: 20).

Feminist researchers have shown that young women are especially positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects (Gill and Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2009, 2013), who 'capably maximise newly won opportunities such as access to the labour market and control over reproduction' (Scharff, 2014: n.p.). As Rose makes clear in this quote, this is an idealised image of perfect motherhood against which *some* women find themselves wanting. Self-surveillance is the thief of success, and my research certainly shows that women monitor and judge themselves against almost impossibly high standards. They suffer anxiety about not measuring up to an ideal that they can't quite pinpoint, but are certain they are missing, at least some of the time. Importantly, as my conversations with all of the women who contributed to this study clearly demonstrate, judgement by themselves and others about perceived failure has real, material effects. To be clear, *every* mother that I spoke with felt that to a greater or lesser degree, on some measure, at some point in time, they failed. But Rose is alluding to more than the fact that women sometimes feeling they didn't get something right; she's pointing to the fact that for some mothers they simply can't *be* right. As Scharff (2014: 2) argues, the 'othering' of some mothers as morally inferior 'is often constituted along all too familiar hierarchies of power'. My research bears out that argument, and in particular will consider the salience of social class in discourses of 'good' and 'bad' mothers and mothering. There are of course other axes of identity and inequality that shape our understanding and women's experience of motherhood, to which Rose alludes, whether 'race', age, sexuality, (dis)ability and so forth. It is certainly not my intention to underestimate the importance of those other ways to understand people's identities, however in this study, class emerged as an important part of the ideals and expectations shaping mothers' lives.

This thesis is based on the experiences of women who have a child under the age of five and is an exploration of the hopes, anxieties and practicalities of their everyday lives. Through conversations with the twenty-five women who agreed to take part in the research, I find out about ways of knowing, doing and being a mother. This study follows previous research about mothers' lives (e.g. Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Lawler, 2000; Parker, 2006, Jensen, 2010a), and as will become clear, takes inspiration from them. Of interest is the way that the formation of mothers, linked to cultural notions of femininity, class, and personhood are reflective of social, economic and political changes. I will argue that each contribute to the individualising of inequality, which is cast as a private rather than sociological or political issue.

To be clear, this research is an exploration of the making of neoliberal selves and not an attempt to prove or disprove the claims made by the various political actors or child-rearing professionals about the 'best' way to raise a child. It is, however, concerned with their part in how a neoliberal discourse of motherhood is constructed, how it is sustained and what, as well as who, it produces. Thus, I begin this thesis by examining the political context in which a particular, and problematic, notion of mothering circulates as a powerful truth about mothers and motherhood. I examine the socio-economic consequences implicated by such a construction and begin the process, which continues throughout the thesis, of asking how different women are positioned in relation to such a construction.

A central question is how discourses of motherhood might be understood as being implicated in formations of culturally and socially valued identities. I will argue that as maternal identities are formed, gender and class are simultaneously re-coded, and divisions are re-worked, albeit along familiar lines. Rather than a stable and unified self that is in some way 'authentic', this means thinking about the social, historic, and cultural meanings and markers that show its contingency. With that in mind, before outlining how the thesis will unfold, I will look at an extract from then Prime Minister David Cameron's January 2016 speech outlining plans for the government's *Life Chances Strategy*, in which he set out 'a comprehensive plan to fight disadvantage and extend opportunity'. Examining this speech will serve two purposes, firstly it will provide some context to explain *why this research*, and *why now*? Secondly, it will begin the process that continues throughout the thesis of unpicking the relationship between politics, selves and society.

1.1   The Context

According to David Cameron (2016), the UK government plans to introduce a 'social approach' to poverty; among the measures he announced in his speech, were money for couples counselling, an expansion of the Troubled Families Programme (TFP), and further investment in parenting classes[1]. I will use the following extract from his speech, as a stepping off point to explore the formation of the ideas that lay behind it, and to understand more about how mothers are positioned as both the cause of, and the solution to inequality. During the full speech, Cameron draws upon familiar tropes of poverty, family composition and parenting 'deficit' to suggest policy solutions to social problems. To be clear, none of the women who participated in my study is part of TFP, however, I will argue that the sentiments expressed in the speech, and the arguments used to support them, have implications for the lives of all mothers.

> First, when neuroscience shows us the pivotal importance of the first few years of life in determining the adults we become, we must think much more radically about improving family life and the early years.
>
> Second, when we know the importance not just of acquiring knowledge, but also developing character and resilience there can be no let-up in our mission to create an education system that is genuinely fit for the 21st century.
>
> Third, it's now so clear that social connections and experiences are vitally important in helping people get on. So when we know about the power of the informal mentors, the mixing of communities, the broadened horizons, the art and culture that adolescents are exposed to, it's time to build a more level playing field with opportunity for everyone, regardless of their background.

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[1] This was in fact a re-announcement of funding of a project CANparent, originally launched following the 2011 'riots' in some English cities to provide parenting classes to all families with a child under five. The government's evaluation of the pilot showed that it had been 'successful in stimulating provision', however take-up of the free classes was 'substantially over-estimated'. Only 9% who attended were fathers, and only 10% said they would be 'very likely' to participate in classes.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332182/RR357_-_CANparent_trial_evaluation_final_report__09_07_14_.pdf

And fourth, when we know that so many of those in poverty have specific, treatable problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, poor mental health we've got to offer the right support, including to those in crisis.

This is what I would call a life cycle approach – one that takes people from their earliest years, through schooling, adolescence and adult life.

(Cameron, January 2016)

It is important to note that this speech was delivered during an ongoing political programme of austerity, and I argue, utilises discourses of motherhood to achieve consensus around the government's agenda. In doing so it shapes and sustains the discourse to suit its policies and the ongoing neoliberal project of changing the relationship between citizens and the state. The rhetoric used frames poverty as a matter of personal (ir)responsibility, and indeed the press release in advance of the speech was headed 'Families are the key to ending poverty'. The state is an authoritative voice and so its impact on discourses is powerful; building on already taken-for-granted notions of individuals, families and especially mothers means that the speech bolsters rather than changes our understanding.

I will examine each of the issues raised in the speech with a view to setting the scene for my research and begin with a brief overview of austerity, which I suggest is the defining feature of the current government and has far reaching implications for social justice and our relationship with the state. I will go on to argue that austerity is a technology of government (Foucault, 1988, 1991a) that shapes our understanding of ourselves and others.

1.2 Austerity

The global financial crisis of 2008 has been classified as an 'old-fashioned collapse in demand following the bursting of a speculative financial sector bubble' (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2010: 1). While for some economists, for example, Paul Krugman, Joseph Stiglitz and David Blanchflower (Reeves *et al*, 2015) a Keynesian response of relaxed fiscal and monetary policy was appropriate, others advocated cutting public spending aimed at reducing the deficit (e.g. Reinhart and Reinhart, 2012). A change of government in the UK, first to a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2015), and then to a majority Conservative government (2015-present), saw the second of these positions adopted. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, announced an emergency budget in June 2010 in which he made explicit that reducing public debt was the priority and set out a

budget containing a range of proposals 'aimed at securing rapid fiscal consolidation' (McKay *et al*, 2013: 109). Underpinning these measures was an adherence to economic neoliberalism that positions the 'market' as outside of politics (Clarke, 2005; Jessop, 2013), and the state as responsible for creating the conditions in which it can thrive. There is little evidence that reliance on the 'market' to balance the economy is succeeding[2], nonetheless there is no signal that the government plans to review their position.

Although this is not the place to rehearse fully the economic or political arguments, research suggests that the impact of these policies has, and will continue to have, a disproportionately higher impact on the poorest in society (Oxfam, 2013; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014; Fawcett Society, 2014). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (Brewer *et al*, 2011) anticipate that both relative and absolute poverty will increase as a direct result of tax and Social Security changes. Examining changes made to 'benefits, tax credits, pensions and direct (but not indirect) taxes' during the Coalition government (2010-2015), De Agostini *et al* concluded that:

> Some groups were clear losers or gained little on average – including lone parent families, large families, and families with younger children, while others were gainers, including two-earner couples, and those in the 50s and early 60s.

(De Agostini *et al* 2015: 36)

This is a claim supported by analysis by Reed and Portes, (2014) who point out that on average women have lost twice as much as men as a proportion of their net income (cited in Bennett, 2015). Furthermore, De Agostini *et al*, suggest that following measures announced in the July 2015 budget, the division between 'winners' and 'losers' under austerity will intensify (2015: 38). The government argument is that 'reform' to the welfare state is necessary and that 'it will be our task to renew a sense of fairness in our society – where those who work hard and do the right thing are able to get on' (Cameron, 2015, reported in *The Guardian* 11th May 2015).

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[2] Office for National Statistics shows higher borrowing and lower growth in 2015 than previously forecast
http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html

1.3   Austerity as Technology of Governance

Cameron's division between those who work hard, and those (unmentioned) who do not, draws on a well-worn trope in welfare debates, which are haunted by a past populated by 'the social residuum' (Booth, 1891 in Welshman, 2012) or the 'underclass' (Herrnstein and Murray, 1995), to name just two classificatory labels that separate the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' poor. Consistent throughout these debates is the explanation that what divides groups is their attitude, behaviour and lifestyle; those making bad choices, are lazy, and/or irresponsible in contrast to hard-working, morally upright and self-responsible. Consistent also, is the claim that these traits are produced and reproduced within families and communities, hence the recurring responses that focus on families outlined by Welshman (2012) including in the 1950s 'Problem Families', in the 1970s 'Cycles of Deprivation' and the current 'Troubled Families Programme' (TFP). The impression that material poverty and poor parenting are natural bedfellows is a central aspect of the justification for TFP, which is much criticised (Levitas, 2012; Crossley, 2015), but is claimed to have achieved 100% success (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). Crossley (2015) argues that TFP is a vehicle for the production and reproduction of an *official* social problem by the state. Furthermore, that ever more punitive interference in the lives of marginalised groups is 'not a deviation from, but a constituent component of, the neo-liberal leviathan' (Wacquant, 2010 cited in Crossley, 2015: 3).

Rather than consider 'austerity' as an economic measure, which is in any case disputed (what it is, whether we have it in the UK), it is then perhaps better understood as part of this same process of neoliberalism identified by Wacquant (2010), and functions as a technology of governance (Allen *et al* 2015; Biressi and Nunn, 2013; Bramall, 2013, 2016; Jensen and Tyler, 2012). Cameron's (2015) distinction is not isolated, indeed one of the most consistent features of austerity discourse is the shaming of those deemed not to 'do the right thing'. Two clear-cut subjects are prominent in such depictions – the hard-working, self-responsible citizen, and the lazy, benefit-dependent other, hence we hear regularly of *strivers* and *skivers*, *workers* and *shirkers* (Clark, 2015; Coote and Lyall, 2013). These rhyming couplets entered the general lexicon quickly and drawing upon well-established tropes of deserving and undeserving, very firmly present unemployment as a personal failure. To be clear, this morally loaded language is used to imply a society that is damaged by wilful dependency on state provision. Further, as binaries, they suggest a shift in emphasis towards creating a

workfare state rather than a welfare state (McRobbie, 2009), framing employment decisions as 'choice' in the way of 'consumer-type powers of selection between options within active labour market programmes' (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011: 275). Anyone not in paid work or in a work-related scheme is understood as 'shirking' their citizen-consumer responsibilities. As Rafferty and Wiggan (2011) show, there is little, if any, possibility of poorer or single women choosing to be a stay-at-home mother, which as I discuss in Chapter Five is an especially classed representation of maternal identity. 'Choice' then, for many, is within a strictly limited repertoire of paid work or training schemes which surely exposes the falsity of 'choice' in this matter.

This is especially important for women who 'are expected to simultaneously labour/consume and mother/care, shifting responsibilities away from the welfare state to individuals' (De Benedictis, 2012: 4). More broadly, connections between paid work and poverty are extremely complex and there is evidence to support the claim that *in-work* poverty is increasing (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015), and as discussed above, is on course to continue. Put simply, the binary worker/shirker simply does not stand up to scrutiny; research finds that most people in receipt of Social Security are in paid work or simply at different points in their life (Brannen, 2006; Macdonald *et al*, 2010; Shildrick *et al*, 2012). In particular, women, who take primary responsibility for child-rearing tend to have paid work that is punctuated by breaks and part-time working, as well as lower-paid/lower skilled jobs[3].

1.4   Parents are the Architects of a Fairer Society

The sub-heading for this section is taken from a report from the think tank Demos (2009). It is a statement that has troubling implications of the expectation that mothers can (*should*?) absorb the burden of unfairness; but more than that, they are positioned as both the cause of, and solution to it. Faith in 'good parenting' to ameliorate the effects of social and economic disadvantage is not new (Lawler, 2000; Gillies, 2007; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015). As discussed above the current focus on family and community has not appeared suddenly nor unheralded (Welshman, 2012), but rather, it is part of a wider and longer project of social inclusion and social mobility. The government's *Life Chances Strategy* is

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[3] 42% of women work part time compared to 11% of men: ONS (2015) Annual Population Survey, November 2015 and 47% of women do low-medium skill work compared to 18% of men: ONS (2013) Women in the Labour Market 2013 http://www. ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_328352.pdf cited in Fawcett Society (2016) http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Parents-Work-and-Care-2016.pdf

merely the latest example of a well-worn trope. It is worth looking more closely at the issues outlined in the speech to understand why Cameron is confident that this approach will succeed, despite scant evidence that it has in the past.

While it is true to say that independent expertise has long played a part in the formulation of government policies, the turn to 'evidence-based policy-making' in the 1990s has increased its emphasis (Solesbury, 2001; Pautz, 2013; Pautz and Heins, 2016). This should not only raise questions about the source and methodology of the evidence but also about whether there really is an evidence-based solution to every problem that governments seek to address. Solesbury (2001) suggests that there existed within New Labour a commitment to 'what works?' as a driver of policy as opposed to an ideological base. However, he also points to 'the utilitarian turn in research funding policy' (2001: 2) and that 'the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has been subjected to the demands of government science policy that views academic research as a means to economic and social development much more than as a cultural end in itself' (2001: 4). Following Kuhn (1996 [1962]), the question must always be whether this does any more than reduce the research to little more than puzzle-solving, which requires pre-determined rules and a pre-determined outcome.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that the outline of Cameron's proposal draws on issues highlighted recently by a number of centre-right think tanks. The complexity of party political decision-making is such that 'establishing direct causal relationships between think tank[4] activity and a party's or a government's policy programme is nearly impossible' (Pautz, 2013: 364). Nonetheless, it is certainly possible to see congruence between them and infer from that whether there is at the very least some level of agreement. Furthermore, the personnel in some of the higher profile think tanks[5] have very close connections with political parties. This matters because as Bourdieu (1993) argues political opinion develops relatively autonomously from voters within the political field itself. I will discuss 'fields' in

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[4] Pautz (2013: 365) offers a useful definition of think tanks 'Think tanks are non-governmental institutions, organisationally independent from government, political parties or organised interests. They want to influence policy, but have no formal decision-making power; they lay claim to political neutrality while not making a secret of their ideological standpoints. Some carry out little research themselves and commission external experts or recycle existing research while others have considerable internal research capacities. Think tanks want to change policy through intellectual argument rather than through behind-the-scenes lobbying.'
[5] Centre for Social Justice was set up by Iain Duncan Smith MP, who was until March 2016 Secretary of State in the Department for Work and Pensions. In 2015 Christian Guy, Director of CSJ was appointed as an advisor to David Cameron. Ryan Shorthouse Director and founder of Bright Blue was a researcher for David Willets MP, previously Secretary of State for Education.

more detail in my Literature Review, however, suffice at this stage to note that fields are spaces where people compete and jostle for access to capitals and to secure their position (Bourdieu, 1984, 1996).

> It is the structure of the political field, in other words, the objective relationship to the occupants of the other positions, and the relationship to the competing stances that they offer, which, as much as the direct relationship to their mandators, determines the stances they take.

> (Bourdieu, 1985: 738)

If we consider think tanks to be part of the political field, rather than as researchers of social life, it becomes clearer that their recycling and cross-referencing of research is part of their struggle within a field. More importantly, it highlights that at least some of what we 'know' about parenting and its impact on children requires close scrutiny. The 'merry-go-round of evidence' that feeds into the speech also finds its way into everyday understandings of maternal identity and practice.

As I have made clear, the increased reliance on think tanks is one means by which evidence is re-cycled and re-used. One effect of which is that critical evaluation gets lost in the endless cross-referencing, as does the fact that this evidence is 'funded, commissioned and orchestrated by the same political actors who insist upon the significance of 'good parenting' above all other factors' (Jensen, quoted in Tyler, 2010). Bourdieu somewhat scathingly suggested that politicians 'are prisoners of a reassuring entourage of young technocrats who often know almost nothing about the everyday lives of their fellow citizens and have no occasion to be reminded of their ignorance' (Bourdieu, 1999: 627). I would argue that this precisely captures the role of contemporary think tanks – the *doxosophers* – whose position is rarely disclosed in media discussion (Pautz and Heins, 2016), but who ensure that ideological decisions enter the mainstream as 'common-sense'.

1.5   Neuroscience

In the opening extract of Cameron's speech, he invokes evidence from neuroscience to suggest that what happens in the first two years of life is pivotal 'in determining the adults we become'. The main thrust of the neuro-biological claims is that there is a limited time during which to 'build better brains' (Bruer, 1999: 12). The scientific basis of the claims has been presented as objective and value-free, and, although hotly disputed, has entered the

mainstream as factual. Bruer (1999) argues that not only is the science not new, but it has been oversimplified and misinterpreted to justify policymakers claims, not those of neuroscientists themselves. Moreover, it has been detrimental to the actual scientific breakthrough which is that 'the brain remains highly plastic throughout life' (Bruer, 1999: 205) In other words, precisely the opposite of a limited window as claimed by policy-makers.

Since the publication of the cross-party *Early Intervention: Good Parents. Great Kids. Better Citizens* (Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008), a great deal of attention has been paid to the argument for ever earlier intervention into the lives of children. In what has become something of a merry-go-round of evidence-based policy-making, it has been the bedrock of claims for a variety of measures and claims about the impact of parenting on children's outcomes. What is claimed to be evidence of the impact of mothering practices circulates among the same political and commercial institutions that fund the research and advise policy makers, often citing one another in support. Thus the Early Intervention Foundation (2015) repeats the claims made by The Centre for Social Justice (2011) and Demos (2009, 2011), so that despite critical academic engagement that disputes some of the claims (e.g. Jensen, 2010b; Gillies, 2014), they become doxic.

Since the publication of the Allen and Duncan Smith report (2008), the 'evidence' from neuroscience has developed into a formidable claim. As noted by Edwards *et al* (2015), the use of neuroscience adds weight to already existing demands on mothers to optimise their child's future outcomes through close attachment and stimulation. They draw attention to the repeated use of the scanned image of two brains, contrasted as 'normal' and 'extremely deprived' as a particularly effective tool. Asked what the image shows Frank Field MP stated that one is 'a brain that's loved and nurtured and one that isn't' (Edwards *et al*, 2015: 6). Given that children are seen as a 'social investment' (White and Wastell, 2015: 3) and that their future as 'economically and socially active citizens' is the goal, neuroscientific evidence of mothers' success or failure is alluring. However, despite Frank Field's (commonly held) assumption of what the image shows, the smaller brain is, in fact, that of a child who suffered severe neglect in an abusive institutional setting. That notwithstanding, children's brains are referenced no fewer than 59 times in the Allen report (2011), and as this example illustrates is linked to parenting:

Parents who are neglectful, or who are drunk, drugged or violent, will have impaired capacity to provide this social and emotional stability and will create the likelihood that adverse experiences might have negative impact on their child's development'

(Allen, 2011: 15, cited in White and Wastell, 2015: 5).

The focus on babies' development stemming from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951, 1969, 1973) is well entrenched; in preponderance within the advice books, developmental specialists present seemingly objective information about normal (and natural) development, even if this is based on a fairly narrow set of assumptions. These ideas from developmental psychology are easily subsumed within the neuroscience claims, which, argue Edwards *et al* 'essentialises mother-child relations, biologises ideas about cycles of deprivation and reproduces classed value judgments about the means of achieving the 'right sort' of brain development' (Edwards *et al*, 2015: 2). There remains very little evidence that supports the way that neuroscience is being deployed. Moreover, contentions that how mothers interact with their children has a causal effect on brain development have been convincingly challenged (see Edwards *et al* 2015, 2016). Nonetheless, such claims have been remarkably persuasive, not only to policy-makers but to mothers themselves. I would suggest that the relatively recent increase in the number of think tanks, whose very business is knowledge production, has secured the extensive repetition of these claims and through them have taken hold more widely.

1.6   Character and Resilience

The second part of Cameron's strategy builds on equally shaky ground. His assertion that character and resilience are 'known' to be as important as education is firmly based on the assumption that particular attributes are not only desirable but essential for social mobility. This particular claim is re-cycled perhaps more than most and has been made by among others Demos (2009); Centre for Social Justice (2011); and Early Intervention Foundation (2015) who claim:

A growing body of evidence also demonstrates that parenting style is the strongest factor in shaping children's development.[6] The influence of parenting goes well beyond academic attainment and income, it is also critical for emotional wellbeing

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[6] It is important to note that research shows that household income and parents' education rather than 'parenting style' are far better predictors of children's outcomes (Hartas, 2012, 2015; Reay, 2013).

and the development of essential character and resilience skills which the All Party Parliamentary Group's earlier work has also shown to be crucial to improving social mobility.

There is a noticeable lack of critical engagement in any of these reports with firstly, how such attributes have come to be highly valued, and secondly, how they normalise what are seen widely as middle-class traits (Gillies, 2007; Hey and Bradford, 2006; Jensen, 2010a; Savage, 2000). As one of the foundational reports that are referenced widely, *Building Character* (Demos, 2009) is worth closer scrutiny. It forms part of a larger project by the centre-left think tank that uses data from the Millennium Cohort Study – a longitudinal study of children born in April 2001.

Demos identify the core skills that they assert can be nurtured in children to enhance their future prospects: Application, Self-regulation, and Empathy. That these particular traits have been designated as the correct 'soft-skills' to develop in pursuit of a good life is not surprising. They bear a remarkable similarity to those critiqued by Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) identified as prevalent in middle-class homes, which I will discuss in Chapter Two. At this stage, I simply note that 'good' motherhood is conflated here, as elsewhere, with middle-class motherhood and silently marked as 'normal' (Lawler, 2000; Gillies, 2005; Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012).

The Demos report goes on to identify four distinct parenting styles claimed to have a direct relationship with the inculcation of these desirable traits: tough love, laissez-faire, authoritarian and disengaged (Demos, 2009). Again, these fall broadly into line with both classed and gendered notions of 'good' parenting. Having analysed the report carefully, Jensen (2010b) notes that 59% of the parents did not fit the parenting style taxonomy squarely and that this (majority) residual category is effectively excluded from the analysis. Nonetheless the report makes bold claims about the effectiveness of some styles over others; in particular, the tough-love style is presented as achieving good outcomes for children regardless of the family's economic circumstances. This clearly shifts attention away from material resources towards the nurturing and pedagogic practices of mothers. The stress on a deliberate investment of time and emotional management highlights that 'good' mothering is perceived as an intensive project but not it seems from this, affected by money.

The financial burden of raising children is not inconsiderable[7], however, Cameron's assertion, building on reports such as this by Demos, suggests that somehow inequality and the effects of poverty will simply melt away if only mothers were more competent.

The Demos report was also intrinsic to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) interim report published in May 2014 that identified 'Seven key truths about social mobility' and the ensuing *Character and Resilience Manifesto* (APPG, Centre Forum and Character Counts, 2014). The interim report concluded that 'personal resilience and emotional wellbeing are the missing link in the chain' (in the life chances cycle) and that the challenge to all policy makers was to 'recognise that social/emotional 'skills' underpin academic and other success—and can be taught' (APPG, 2014: 1). The APPG use the evidence of economist James Heckman in support of their claims and the graph reproduced below is included in their report by way of evidence of 'a clear and significant economic return for investing in character capabilities early, particularly for disadvantaged children' (APPG, 2014: 30).

Figure 1: Relative efficiency of interventions
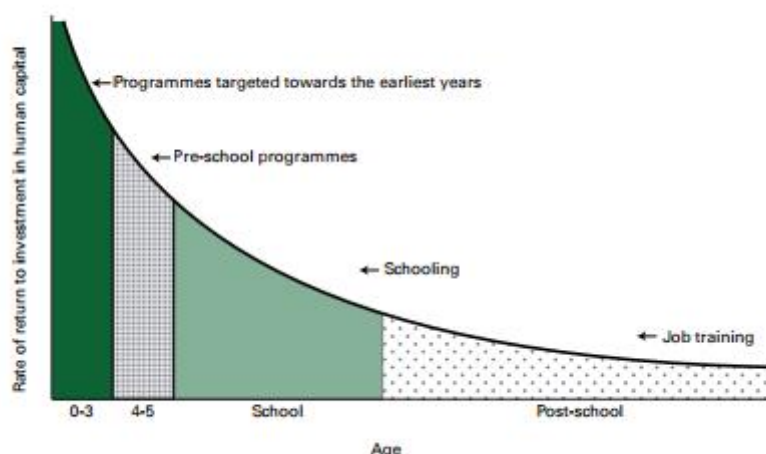
Source: J Heckman, 'The American family in black and white: a post-racial strategy for improving skills to promote equality', 2011.

This graph suggests that there is a diminishing rate of return on investments into children's lives, but it is decontextualized from the remainder of the study in the APPG report, save for the remark that 'for Heckman, "the true measure of child affluence and poverty is the quality of parenting" (APPG, 2014: 20). It should be noted that Heckman presents a purely economic model that, while influential in both New Labour and the current government's

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[7] The annual cost of raising a child aged 1-4 in the UK is estimated at £15,806 per annum according to a report by Centre for Economics and Business Research (2016) reported in The Guardian 16.02.16 http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/feb/16/cost-of-raising-children-in-uk-higher-than-ever

programmes for early intervention, is not a representation of empirical data (White and Wastell, 2015). Indeed, Howard-Jones *et al* (2012) dispute the simplistic relationship claimed between early learning and long-term advantage, concluding that better modelling requires 'more sophisticated assumptions about human development' (Howard-Jones *et al*, 2012: 18). The value of Heckman's study to the APPG is that it supports pre-existing notions of 'good' and 'bad' mothering as the root of 'good' and 'bad' character development. Whether this is a cynical move is, of course, open to question. I would argue that it is more realistic to say that this connection between mothering and outcomes has become 'naturalised' and is so deeply entrenched that it has become taken for granted. As Bourdieu says 'what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying' (Bourdieu, 1977: 167).

1.7   Social Connections

The third element of Cameron's *Life Chances Strategy* - that of social connections - can yet again be found in the recent work of a centre-right think tank. A report by Bright Blue[8] *Reducing poverty by promoting more diverse social networks for disadvantaged people from ethnic minority groups*, (Bright Blue, 2015) calls for the Government:

> to make the receipt of Child Benefit conditional upon parents of three and four-year-old children (and two-year-old children for the most deprived parents) enrolling their children in quality pre-school education.

While the report draws upon research carried out into the diversity of relationships and social capital, it does not provide any evidence that reducing the income of families will increase participation in pre-school education. Furthermore, the relationships it centres on are within families, rather than any wider social networks. This is clearly a targeted policy recommendation given that Child Benefit is not a universal payment[9]; that the requirement for 'the most deprived parents' is more stringent; and, that as the report states, 'Families from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to use Early Years Free Entitlement' (Bright Blue, 2015: 17).

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[8] The report is authored by Ryan Shorthouse, former advisor to the Conservative party and Director of Bright Blue, whose website describes it as 'an independent think tank and pressure group for liberal conservatism'. http://www.brightblue.org.uk/

[9] Child Benefit is payable to all families, however is reclaimed via the tax system for families in which one or more partner earns £50,000 per annum. https://www.gov.uk/child-benefit/eligibility

Again, it is worth noting that these punitive measures are not confined to the present government. New Labour's white paper, *Respect & Responsibility –Taking a Stand Against Anti-Social Behaviour* (2003), was equally hard-hitting 'including benefit cuts for errant families, the removal of persistent young offenders from their families for placement in foster homes, and the committal of parents to residential homes for 're-training' (Gillies 2005: 840). The logic here is clear, that parenting is the cause and solution to societal problems. Moreover, research by Peters (2012) shows clearly that mothers, not fathers, were the recipients of the overwhelming majority of Parenting Orders. I will discuss fully the gendering of 'parenting' in my literature review, and will argue that use of the term is not simply an innocent commitment to gender neutrality, but rather serves to render mothers and the work they do, invisible.

While Cameron's speech does not call for the changes to Child Benefit suggested by Shorthouse, it is clear that he also sees relationships (especially family relationships) as pivotal to securing better outcomes. Elsewhere in his speech, Cameron states that 'Today in Britain, around a million children are growing up without the love of a dad' and that 'I can announce today that we will double our investment in this Parliament, with an extra £35 million to offer even more relationship support'. The willingness to increase spending, at a time of austerity, is a clear signal that the heteronormative family is the preferred ideal, which Bourdieu argues is 'produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist' (Bourdieu, 1996: 25).

Until recently it could be argued that there has been a shift in policy interest from the form that families take to what parents do (Williams, 2004a, 2004b). In 2007, then Prime Minister Tony Blair said 'Of course, we should try to support marriage in whatever way we can, but to reduce support for lone parents isn't justified' (cited in Seely, 2014: 14). While this may be seen as a positive move away from the entrenched vision of a nuclear family to an understanding that families take on many and various forms, it is not true that associations were no longer made between family characteristics and the quality of child-rearing (Dermott and Pomati, 2016: 63).

Support for marriage is also found in the work of the especially influential think tank the Centre for Social Justice's report *Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown* (2014) who claim that 'for almost half a century there has been an escalation in

family breakdown across Britain – divorce and separation, dysfunction and dadlessness' (CSJ, 2014: 14). In part, the proposed investment in relationship support is a response to suspicions that the state disincentivises marriage by making benefits lower for couples who live together (Seely, 2014). The lone mother it seems is still derided as someone who is overly dependent on the welfare state, and whose reliance is morally suspect (Dermott and Pomati, 2016: 64).

Although primarily I have considered the implications of Cameron's January 2016 speech, his position regarding families is perhaps more explicit in the speech he delivered to the Relationships Alliance Summit on 18th August 2014:

> [I]n many ways, it's the family where true power lies. So for those of us who want to strengthen and improve society, there is no better way than strengthening families and strengthening the relationships on which families are built. Whether it's tackling crime and anti-social behaviour or debt and drug addiction; whether it's dealing with welfare dependency or improving education outcomes – whatever the social issue we want to grasp – the answer should always begin with family.

> (Cameron, 2014)

Claiming that power lies with families is quite a useful rhetorical device; if they are the locus of power, families must surely also be where the blame lies. There is no room here for a discussion of the part played by the state, media or corporations in how we understand, or address inequalities. Linking dysfunction to upbringing in this way allows for the development of government strategies centred on responsibilisation, choice and self-regulation, or as Gillies puts it, the focus for the state is 'the production of competent neoliberal subjects' (Gillies, 2014: 218). What is implied is firstly, that the cause of myriad social problems is poor mothering, and secondly, that mothers are able to absorb all other factors and through their skill and competency overcome structural disadvantages.

1.8   The Research Aims

In examining Cameron's speech and the formation of the ideas that structure it, I have illustrated that families, and in particular mothers and children, are of central concern politically. More than that, however, doing so has allowed me to introduce some of the themes that emerge in my analysis of the conversations I had with the women who took part in the research. Ideas about how to raise children, the impact of 'doing it right' or not, and

the pressure to be a 'good' mother, do not appear by magic. The women in my research 'know', talk about, learn from, and are anxious about, the same things that Cameron has set out in this speech. I will return to the politics of mothering in my literature review in the next chapter to broaden the discussion beyond a single speech. However, this particular speech, or rather this extract from it, brings a context to the research that reveals the extent to which mothers are held to be responsible for the well-being of society under the guise of responsibility for their child. Family life has of course long been a public concern. The last two decades have seen a plethora of policy initiatives focused on 'parents' and 'parenting' as responsible for cultivating ideal citizens (Ghate and Ramella 2002; Gillies 2011). Cameron's Life Chances Strategy is simply the most recent. My examination of this particular extract of the speech introducing the strategy illustrates the responsibility that motherhood carries beyond the mother/child relationship. I will develop this further throughout the thesis in order to explore how knowledge about mothers is constructed in line with a political project.

This thesis is not, however, an examination of policy; it is about mothers. It explores the knowing, doing, and being of motherhood in a society that increasingly makes appeals to individual moral responsibility. More specifically, it is an empirical study of the everyday lives of women with children under the age of five, who, I will argue are held responsible for making themselves, through the project of the child, into ideal neoliberal subjects. To make this argument I will follow two lines of enquiry: The first is an examination of the social, political, and cultural messages about contemporary 'parenting'; and the second is an exploration of the everyday experience of motherhood. This is an exploratory piece of research and so I do not begin with a hypothesis to be observed, measured and (dis)proved. Instead, this research is a quest for meaning, and so my question is:

> What does it mean to be a mother at a time when the welfare state is in retreat, when inequality is on the rise, and (dis)advantage is framed as an individual achievement?

1.9   Thesis Outline

So far I have set out the context in which my research is set. I have laid the foundation stone by beginning a conversation about neoliberalism. The opening quotation from Jacqueline Rose set the possibility that not all women are able to claim an identity of equal value. I then expanded upon a political speech that not only suggests that inequality is a problem that can be solved by mothers, but that they are the cause of it. Finally, I have set out the aims of the research, which form the basis of the discussion that follows.

In Chapter Two I will review the literature that has informed my study. This includes a more detailed explanation of neoliberalism, which I explain as a political project that has developed since the Second World War, and cuts across traditional left and right leaning politics. I also discuss neoliberalism as a technology of governance that shapes subjectivities. I set out the theoretical framework and explain how a Foucaultian analysis, via the work of Nikolas Rose, can be augmented by attention to class using the conceptual 'toolkit' of Bourdieu. By drawing on empirical studies, I have been able to develop my argument to include the gendered notions of morality and care that contribute to the continuing division of labour. I also review in more detail the political interest in mothering, before turning to a discussion of intensive mothering. Both of which are fraught with classed assumptions that have material impacts on how and which mothers can claim value.

In Chapter Three I discuss my methodology, including the ontological and epistemological considerations that have shaped the research. In it, I explain my reasons for conducting qualitative research and why semi-structured interviews are the most suitable method for answering the research questions. I discuss the practicalities of designing and conducting the research, and reflect on some of the challenges encountered along the way. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the ethical considerations entailed in the research process.

Chapter Four is the first of my analysis chapters. In it, I discuss the women's use of different sources of expert knowledge. This includes what I have termed 'professional' in the sense that there is some monetary value involved (books, television programmes, and healthcare professionals) and 'experiential' which I use to indicate that the information is from friends, family and other mothers. I explore how the women prioritise different forms of advice and information; what knowledge it produces about mothers and mothering; and in what ways it contributes to producing child-rearing as a classed and gendered domain.

Chapter Five moves the discussion on from 'knowing' to 'doing'. This chapter reveals much about how women prioritise their child over themselves, responding to the moral imperative to meet the child's 'needs'. I explore the construction of 'needs' which, I will argue, are framed by the demands to produce the character traits held to be desirable in neoliberal citizens. I will discuss the extent to which mothers engage with 'enrichment activities' and argue that this is an important way for mothers to transmit social and cultural capitals to their children. In this chapter questions of identity come to the surface when the women talk about paid and unpaid work and some difficult negotiation of 'value'. I will argue that

long-standing issues about the invisibility of mothers' work have yet to be resolved, and are exacerbated by a neoliberal retreat from the welfare state that instantiates divisions between workers and shirkers.

Chapter Six again moves the analysis on, this time, to 'being'. This chapter has as its focus some of the encounters women have with classed and classing judgements. It begins by considering the relationship mothers have with their Health Visitor and explores the difference in experiences for women with different class (dis)positions. I will also discuss what it means to judge, and be judged, by strangers, which I will argue is a device to make distinctions and claim moral worth. Further, that judgement can generate emotions, such as shame and embarrassment, which I will argue are profoundly social experiences that reveal what matters to people. In this case the claim to being a 'good mother'.

Chapter Seven will conclude the study with a summary of the research findings. I will further draw out the main themes of the previous chapters to present the overall arguments of the thesis. I will reflect on the aims and limitations of the research, and what this may mean for the conclusions I make, before considering how it adds to the existing body of knowledge. I will suggest what future research could be undertaken that develops the arguments further.

2 CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

The very running of the social world is often assumed to hinge on citizens being well-adjusted selves living in harmony with other well-adjusted selves. And so governments, through the media of public policy, education, health provision and promotion, social work, law, take an explicit interest in what kind of selves its citizens are, and hence, in what kind of selves mothers are producing.

(Steph Lawler, *Mothering the Self,* pp. 1-2)

My examination of David Cameron's (2016) speech in Chapter One demonstrates that how mothers raise their children, and the type of citizens those children will become, remain key political interests. This is not new; family life has long been a public and therefore political concern (see, for example, Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Lawler 2000; Lister, 2006; Parker 2006; Gillies, 2007, 2014; Jensen, 2010a, 2012). This thesis builds on a body of work that shows that mothers are held to be responsible for 'making the world safe for democracy by ensuring the correct development of (their) children' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989: 39). Despite many continuities across time, not least in the gendering and classing of child-care, there is, I will show, an intensification of political interest in mothering. Arguably this has increased incrementally since a post-Second World War shift in child-rearing advice espousing the view that parental responsibility extends beyond the physical well-being and education of children to include their psychological and emotional well-being (Weiss 1978; Richardson 1993; Wall 2001). Though the exact properties that constitute the 'well-adjusted selves' held to be desirable may change, the focus has consistently centred on the problematic of how to ensure the development of good citizens, fit for contemporary society.

This literature review begins by examining what we mean when we talk of neoliberalism as a way to conceptualise the contemporary period. I will then consider how neoliberalism functions as a technology of governance that shapes subjectivities by drawing on Foucault's (1980, 1995, 1998) theorisation of power/knowledge and the self.

Rose (1985, 1987, 1989; 1999, 2001) offers a Foucaultian analysis of 'psy-knowledges' which he argues is 'intrinsically linked with transformations in the exercise of political power in contemporary liberal democracies' (Rose, 1998: 11). By drawing on his work I will argue that understanding selves as autonomous, enterprising and self-regulating has become taken-for-

granted as the 'right' way to be a 'good citizen' and hence the right way for mothers to raise their children. Such an analysis does not however fully account for one of the main themes I have identified in my research into the everyday experience of being a mother. Coursing through the interviews is a clear sense that mothers and their practices are differently valued depending largely, although not exclusively, on social class.

In order to explore the classed and classing work that so clearly emerged in the research I draw throughout on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000), and the empirical work of scholars who share Bourdieu's understanding of class as both relational and dynamic (e.g. Lawler, 2000, 2005, 2008). In this literature review, I will explain how I intend to utilise a conceptual understanding of class that is analysed as something people *do* rather than something people *are.* This way of understanding class rests on the 'toolkit' of Bourdieu's concepts, habitus, capitals and field, which I will outline in this chapter, and expand upon throughout as the thesis develops.

2.1   Neoliberalism and Governance

According to Jessop (2013), 'neoliberalism tends to become a chaotic concept', and is more often used by 'outsiders and critics' than 'by the advocates and supporters of the ideas, institutions, strategies and policies that this slippery concept is said to denote' (Jessop, 2013: 65). Clarke (2008: 135) argued that neoliberalism has two core problems as a concept 'it is omnipresent and it is promiscuous'. In the eight years since Clarke wrote that, I would argue that neither of these problems has gone away and that since then it has moved from academic and political debate into the wider public domain, which has intensified rather than reduced or mitigated those issues. Regardless of the difficulties with the concept, however, its lack of specificity or singular definition, Hall (2011) argues that naming it is the necessary first part of the process to resist its effects. For my purposes, it is important to understand not only what neoliberalism is, but also what it does.

Despite the 'slipperiness' identified by Jessop, the term has gained purchase as a way to name a logic of governing that shapes the current UK context. For Harvey (2007), neoliberalism is a *sui generis* ideology which, having begun in the field of economics, became more fully developed in a set of heterogeneous institutions including corporations, the media, education and professional associations (Harvey 2007: 38). It is a system in which 'the moral benefits of market' are identified as 'a necessary condition for freedom in other aspects of life' (Fourcade and Healy 2007: 301). Harvey (2007) argues that neoliberalism has

become 'hegemonic as a mode of discourse', and notes that it 'has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world' (Harvey, 2007: 3). Where Harvey (2007) suggests that it is a system that appeals to our instincts, Bourdieu (1998) argues that neoliberalism has achieved the status of *doxa.* Doxa limits what is thinkable and what is sayable, and is the 'absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness' (Bourdieu 1977: 168). Since neoliberalism presents itself as 'truth', its assumptions are forgotten *as* assumptions, and this, together with its 'methodical destruction of *collectives*' (Bourdieu 1998: 95, emphasis in original) renders a political system that is both 'de-historicised and de-socialised' (1998: 95).

It is this embeddedness in common sense that is demonstrable in political rhetoric and policy-making, and which is also identifiable within the conversations I had with the women who took part in this study, discussed in chapters Four, Five and Six, though as my analysis will show, not entirely, nor uncritically. Harvey (2007: 5) suggests that its dominance stems from the appeal it has to 'our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit'. Certainly, for key neoliberal thinker Friedman (2002 [1962]) possibilities, (or more accurately, fears) can be a useful persuasive tool in the service of otherwise untenable ideas:

> Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.

> (Friedman, 2002 [1962]: ix, cited in G. Slater, 2015:3)

Following the financial crash in 2008, there was a swift adoption of the word 'crisis' to describe the state of the banking sector and financial markets. In many countries, including the UK, the response was to introduce austerity measures, although as discussed in the introduction, to what extent the current government's cuts can be described as 'austerity' remains debatable. What is not debatable is that one of the key projects of the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments has been 'welfare reform'. For some this leads to the conclusion that neoliberalism is 'a brand of revanchist state politics that works to dissolve any collective basis for social welfare' (G. Slater, 2015: 1, see also, Means 2013; Wacquant

2010). By turning to the early development of neoliberal thought it is certainly possible to see this as one of those ideas that Friedman suggested could be activated under cover of a crisis.

Sometimes discussed as a recent phenomenon, neoliberalism has a long history, with the term itself being traced back to 1925 'in the Swiss economist Hans Honegger's *Trends of Economic Ideas*' (Ganti, 2014: 91). Often cited as foundational is the Freiburg School of economists and legal scholars who came together under the term 'ordoliberalism' in around 1950. Their main concern was with *laissez-faire* economic policies that they argued held the potential for large scale monopolies to damage free market competition. Arguing for some, limited, state regulation they were later very influential in the development of Social Market Economics in post-war Germany (Ganti, 2014; Lemke, 2002). Most usually scholars attribute neoliberalism's early development as a set of economic principles to the Mont Pèlerin Society and Friedrich von Hayek (Harvey 2007, Ong 2006). The society was concerned for the future of classical liberalism, in particular, Hayek had written about the dangers of both Stalinist communism and Hitler's fascism, and the danger of any form of collectivism reaching the United States or the United Kingdom[10] (Gregory and Stuart, 2013: 87). Not only does this show that neoliberalism is not a new concept, but importantly, that collectivity is a key concern, whether in the form of business cartels, as for the Ordoliberals, or more widely in society. I would argue that these original fears have, over time, transformed into a celebration of the individual rather than more particular concerns regarding communism or fascism.

Writing in 1998, Bourdieu argued that since neoliberalism derives from an economic base, it takes for granted 'that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions' (Bourdieu 1998: 31). Neoliberalism's development has happened across a variety of fields, such as academia, the media, politics and the workplace (Bourdieu, 1998; Harvey, 2007), and in the process, this vision of a driven individual striving to make the 'best' of their self, has been widely communicated. Harvey

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[10] Concerns surrounding the apparent ease with which people could become indoctrinated into mass domination were widespread among politicians and intellectuals at this time (Chaney, 1994). Fears about 'human nature' following two World Wars were, according to Kagan (1998: 94-96) what generated psychiatrists and psychologists to develop theories that were less pessimistic than Freud. For example, he argues that Bowlby's attachment theory 'thrives on the deep assumption that humans require love more than any other resource and the illusion that we can prevent men from hacking others to death by loving them when they are young children'.

(2007) makes a similar point when he says that the market has become 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs' (Harvey 2007: 3). Its principles, which prioritise de-regulation, privatisation, and competition, and that guarantee freedom in the marketplace subject to appropriate self-regulation and accountability, have been extended to the realms of healthcare, education, welfare and beyond. In effect, neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic practices in the same vein as classic liberalism, from which it derives, but now operates as a theory of the social and political which has been especially influential in shaping 'Western' governments (Brown, 2005).

Neoliberalism is then a governing rationality, in the course of which everything, including human beings, is 'economised'. This is not simply a reformulation of the Marxist theorisation of the commodification of humans. Brown (2015) argues that it extends beyond money-making activities, into areas of life such as dating, and learning, and as I will argue, child-rearing. The point is that *everything* is subject to calculation and metrics, with a view to measuring its present and, importantly, future value.

It is incorrect Brown says to assume that neoliberalism is an economic system that has *unintended* consequences (e.g. indifference to poverty, social deracination and cultural decimation). Instead, she argues that the promulgation of market principles to all aspects of human and institutional life is the function of neoliberalism (Brown, 2003: 5). It is a form of governmentality and thus 'a range of techniques directed at managing the self through the regulation of everyday conduct' (Foucault 1991). Foucault's neologism signifies not only a move from *ruling over*, to *governing*, but importantly, that this is achieved through appeals to the self. Brown goes on to explain that:

> neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as rational calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her/himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action

> (Brown, 2003: 8).

Brown acknowledges that Foucault was working before neoliberalism took hold as centrally in politics as it is now and that his interests were different than hers. He does, however,

provide the analytic insights into governmentality on which she is able to build her argument. Her extension of his analysis moves to an altogether more pessimistic possibility, not explored by Foucault, that democracy itself is on course to becoming unintelligible and redundant. In a 2015 interview[11] she says:

> Democracy requires that citizens be modestly oriented toward self-rule, not simply value enhancement and that we understand our freedom as resting in such self-rule, not simply in market conduct. When this dimension of being human is extinguished, it takes with it the necessary energies, practices, and culture of democracy, as well as its very intelligibility.

By inflecting previously non-economic domains with an economic rationality neoliberalism normatively constructs individuals as entrepreneurial in every aspect of their life. This configures people as rational actors, with self-care as an injunction to behave morally, and accept responsibility (Brown, 2003, 2005). Morality, Brown argues, is then understood as akin to a cost/benefit analysis, but one that discounts any constraint to achieving imagined outcomes. So, for example, the link between work and the welfare state means that a rational (and therefore moral) actor will choose responsibly to get paid work; there is no room in this equation for those without qualifications or experience, a lack of jobs available, or childcare demands.

This explanation of the neoliberal subject is in line with the autonomous self-regulating and entrepreneurial self that critics of New Labour's *Third Way* argue came to prominence as the 'ideal citizen'. Framed within a distinctly moralised version of democracy, which relies upon configurations of success or failure, human beings are understood as ethical projects loaded with moral dilemmas (Rose, 2001; Clarke, 2005). This is a project of the self where the ultimate goal is to achieve independence, with citizens themselves responsible for creating the conditions of their own autonomy. In return the government takes a step back from excessive interference or regulation; they will 'govern at a distance' (Burchell *et al* 1991: 18). This is, to an extent, merely illusory, resting as it does on the responsibility to enact this freedom appropriately or as Rose (1998: 17) puts it 'subjects are not merely 'free to choose',

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[11] Interview in online magazine Dissent, with Timothy Shenk (dated: 02.04.15)
https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/booked-3-what-exactly-is-neoliberalism-wendy-brown-undoing-the-demos

but obliged to be free'. Responsibilised citizenship is framed by the success or not of resolving these dilemmas:

> New Labour's ideal citizens are moralised, choice-making, self-directing subjects. (…) choice is framed by sets of injunctions about reasonable choices and responsible behaviour. Responsible citizens make reasonable choices – and therefore 'bad choices' result from the wilfulness of irresponsible people, rather than the structural distribution of resources, capacities and opportunities.

> (Clarke, 2005: 451)

We must choose to be 'hard-working' rather than rely on social security payments, health-conscious, to avoid using the health service, and communitarian, so as to reduce the cost of policing or cleaning our local environment. There is not an overarching moral code that we can consult and live by, but rather an 'unstable assemblage of what is deemed 'reasonable' and 'decent' across a variety of sites and practices' (Clarke, 2005: 451). Rose (2001: 3) is even more scathing about *Third Way* politics:

> Not much is new in this politics, apart, perhaps, from the addition of a certain therapeutic individualism (the language of self-realization) and an expansion of the ethic of collective responsibility to include nature as well as humankind. Its techniques of government are minor modifications of those already entrenched, with the infusion of faith in the power of markets (already jettisoned by the former epigones of neoliberalism in the international economy) and a naive enthusiasm for the mantras of managerial gurus

Elsewhere Rose (1998, 1999) argues that the infusion of psychological technologies and knowledge across a wide terrain of social and public life, produce a qualitatively new way to know, and hence govern, individual citizens at the level of their subjectivity. Before discussing Rose's analysis of therapeutic individualism I want briefly to outline Foucault's argument that knowledge cannot be dissociated from the workings of power. By revealing 'on the basis of what historical *a priori*' certain forms of knowledge become possible Foucault (1969: xxii), suggests that the 'episteme' which signifies the rules of knowledge formation for any given period can be discovered.

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2.2 Foucault: Discourse, Power/Knowledge

In my discussion of neoliberalism, I argued in line with Brown (2003, 2013) that it is best understood as a governing rationality. In this section I will expand on that conceptualisation and pay closer attention to the ways in which it links forms of power to processes of subjectification, that is, the making of selves. According to Lemke (2002) governmentality plays a decisive role in Foucault's analytics of power:

> It offers a view on power beyond a perspective that centres either on consensus or on violence; it links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject to the formation of the state; finally, it helps to differentiate between power and domination
>
> (Lemke 2002: 3).

Foucault argued that knowledge and power are not independent of one another, but are entwined; are not neutral, but central to modern[12] systems of social control. Two key concerns of Foucault are the variability of issues thought to be fixed, and the role of contingencies and power struggles in how these issues come to be known and understood. Fundamentally, meaning is produced in and through discourses, and thus it is not 'things' themselves that produce knowledge, but rather the 'discursive facts' that constitute them. What is important here is how this knowledge is used to regulate; the ways in which knowledge and power are intertwined within institutional apparatuses; and the technologies these apparatuses employ. For Foucault, apparatuses consist of 'strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by types of knowledge' (Foucault 1980: 194-196).

Foucault (1993) traces the emergence of liberal government's establishment of 'systems of knowledge and classes of experts who induce citizens to regulate themselves through the "conduct of conduct"' (Kapitzke, 2006: 433). These indirect mechanisms, or 'governing at a distance' (Burchell *et al*, 1991: 18) include the normalisation of discursive forms:

> It is a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them.   (Foucault, 1977: 184)

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[12] Foucault's use of 'modern' and 'modernity' are matters of much debate (see for example, Mitchell, 2000; Koopman 2010). It is important to note that his work is criticised for Eurocentricity, and that he is silent on modernism in empire/colonialism (Said 1991; Young 1995).

The pervasiveness of disciplinary power is realised in the surveillance of people, or rather the potential that they may be being surveilled. Surveillance hence becomes internalised as a persistent feature of everyday life, and the gaze turns inward (Layder, 1994: 122). To be clear, as discussed in Chapter Four, expertise can take many forms, and as noted by Coveney (2008: 237) 'Expertise – in its many guises – thus produces 'good' parents: ones who can recognise themselves as having acquired the modern skills of parenting'. Although Lupton (2012: 14) suggests that 'while the women's panoptic gaze is firmly fixed upon their children, others are observing these mothers and making judgements', it is clear that women are not only fixed upon their own children. The gaze is also directed to other mothers and themselves (Blackford, 2004).

Foucault's argument rests on this conception of disciplinary power, which rather than being 'invested in subjects who exercise it over others with the sanction of right or law' (Cronin 1996: 56), operates relationally between subjects in multiple domains. Foucault's use of the word 'government' is more general than simply management by the state and extends to 'problems of self-management, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul and so forth' (Lemke 2002: 50). This extended meaning encapsulates 'the conduct of conduct' and links 'technologies of the self and technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject to the formation of the state; and finally, it helps to differentiate between power and domination' (Lemke 2002: 51). This is a power which is dispersed throughout networks and is exercised rather than possessed.

I will now return to Rose's application of Foucault's insights into the therapeutic individualism mentioned in his critique of Third Way politics to show how the wider political process of neoliberalism becomes meaningful in everyday lives.

2.3 'Psy' Complex as Governance

Drawing on Foucault's (1995, 1998) argument that the subject is formed in and by discourses, which constitute the world in particular ways, with particular regimes of knowledge, Rose (1989, 1998), argues that the production of a self-monitoring, self-disciplining and self-regulatory individual is intimately bound to the neoliberal market economies of Western governments. People come to know themselves and the world through these regimes of knowledge. Working primarily on the body and soul via a wide range of disciplinary practices – governmental, legal and medical for example – as people engage with these practices they come to know themselves as citizens, holders of rights,

healthy, as kin and so forth (Foucault, 1969, 1980, 1995). For Rose, the establishment of knowledge, tools and technologies derived from psychiatry, psychology, and psychometrics, which he refers to as the 'psy complex', shape subjects and behaviours along axes of normalisation.

> In particular, I suggest that the novel forms of government being invented in so many 'post-welfare' nations at the close of the twentieth century have come to depend, perhaps as never before, upon instrumentalising the capacities and properties of 'the subjects of government', and therefore cannot be understood without addressing these new ways of understanding and acting upon ourselves and others as selves 'free to choose'.

> (Rose, 1998: 13)

Rose (1998) outlines the technologies of government that produce moral subjectivity through which 'individuals [are] subjected not by an alien gaze but through a reflexive hermeneutics' (Rose, 1998: 77). In Rose's terms, this 'governing of the soul', is integral to advanced liberal society in which the modern citizen is 'subjectified, educated and solicited into a loose and flexible alliance between personal interpretations and ambitions and institutionally or socially valued ways of living' (Rose, 1998: 79). One of the 'truths' that emerges from this 'therapeutic culture of the self' is that lived experience becomes thinkable only in psychological terms. In effect, subjects are readable through the lens of psy as normal, normative, desirable, or pathological and the materiality of lived experience dissolves into the background.

'Psy' languages embed notions of choice, morality, reflexivity and rationality in a wider frame of individualisation. The promise is that the appropriately choosing, moral subject will be free from interference from the state. The irony for Rose is that this apparently autonomous, self-actualising and self-regulating subject is *obliged* to be free. For Walkerdine and Lucey (1989), this compulsion to understand oneself as a choosing subject is a feature of middle-class child-rearing and begins at an early age:

> Successful parenting rests on creating an illusion of autonomy so convincing that the child actually believes herself to be free. We believe that this fiction, this illusion of autonomy, is central to the travesty of the word 'freedom' embodied in a political

system that has to have everyone imagining themselves to be free the better to regulate them.

<p style="text-align: right">(Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989: 29)</p>

Put another way, freedom to succeed is 'an ethical duty to self and society' (Skeggs, 2004: 57), however as pointed out by Lawler (2009: 73), this is a society in which 'only a minority *can* 'succeed', not least because successful self-making is a classed process. This brings me to the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000), on whose theoretical and methodological tools I draw to connect power to lived experience. This, I argue addresses two issues, firstly, that Foucault's work does not offer a convincing explanation of how struggles stabilise; in contrast, Bourdieu's concepts allow a theorisation that the habitus can be inculcated against our own best interest, and hence systems of domination take root. Secondly, that while Foucault's work is invaluable in my understanding of how subjects are formed and implicated in social formation, it does not, for me, pay sufficient attention to constraints on making a self. That is, Foucault's subject is a self, for itself, fully capable of transformation regardless of the body they inhabit. By drawing on the work of Bourdieu, and the research inspired by his works, I aim to show that classed and gendered bodies are inscribed with meaning that, if not prohibits, certainly limits their power to transform. There are of course other constraints to transformation that could equally be investigated, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality or (dis)ability that are outwith the scope of my research but could form the basis of future development of the work. My focus here stems from my concern about widening inequality and a socio-political refusal of any structural causes of disadvantage, risk or exclusion, which are viewed as 'private troubles' to be managed and controlled on an individual basis.

2.4   The myth of classlessness

Classlessness is an important feature of discourses of individualisation; politically the shift can be identified in prominent statements from, firstly Margaret Thatcher who claimed that 'class is a communist concept' (Thatcher, 1992) and Tony Blair's declaration that 'the class war is over' (Blair, 1999). Similarly, within academia, questions emerged about the continuing salience of class as a valuable concept for understanding and analysing social division and inequality. For Pahl (1989: 710) 'class as a concept is ceasing to do any useful work in sociology', Pakulski and Waters (1995) pronounced the 'death of class', and Beck (1992, 2012), relegated it to 'zombie status', on the basis that class had become both 'too

soft' and 'too limited' to 'unlock and to understand the political explosiveness of transnational inequalities' (Beck 2012: 11). None of these theorists suggested that society had become more equal, but rather that it was unequal in more or less classless ways.

New Labour, when in power, were explicit in their attempts to remove class from the national conversation and set about making classlessness fit with equality of opportunity, citizenship and the potentials of the child, effectively positioning mothers as gatekeepers of both their child and moral society (Parker, 2006). This is echoed in the words of used by *Demos*, discussed in my Introduction, that parents are the 'architects of a fairer society' (Demos, 2011: 10). Of course positioning mothers as the guarantors of liberal democracy through the production of well-adjusted future citizens (Lawler 2000; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989), also positions them as responsible for its failure. That is, in order to maintain a coherent narrative of autonomy, individuality and personal choice, it is necessary to deny structural or external influences on their realisation. This not only obscures class but is a fundamental misrecognition of the causes of disadvantage, which are then understood to reside in the individual, their abilities, and/or motivations to make moral choices.

Before discussing the ways in which Bourdieu's insights have informed subsequent sociological theory, it is useful to set out his basic concepts which he described as his 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1989: 50). Intended as a way to transcend such false binaries as objective/subjective; micro/macro; and theory/method in order to analyse and understand the social world work together to produce and reproduce one another.

2.5   Bourdieu: Habitus, Capitals, and Field

Comprising mental and physical dispositions, whether thought or unthought; habitus is the incorporated history of a shared cultural context. Most usefully theorised in its dynamic interaction with the field, habitus is something that individuals are born into and which acts as a repository for social, cultural and historical practices and experience. As Bourdieu explains 'the habitus – embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu 1990: 91)

The family is usually the primary site of socialisation and thus extremely influential in the production of dispositions which are acquired and become embodied in the habitus. Not to be confused with imitation, this process is a pre-reflexive 'practical mimesis' which produces

a tendency towards conformity (Bourdieu 1992), expressed through ways 'of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu 1992: 70). The regularity of such action, so often repeated as to be almost predictable, is not the result of being governed by rules, but by embodied dispositions which are actualised in practice.

What this reveals is that habitus are relational both in the sense that they are related to one another in time and space, and that they carry with them the social world in which they exist. As Bourdieu (1977) advises habitus is 'the site of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality' (1977: 205). Contra criticism that habitus is deterministic, making transformation difficult if not impossible, (Alexander 1994; Lamont 1992), Bourdieu argues that habitus is powerfully generative, and that:

> As an open system of dispositions (...) constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable, but not eternal!
>
> (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133)

Habitus is best understood in its interaction with Bourdieu's other concepts, especially the field with which it shares a dynamic relationship:

> (On the one hand) the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (...)
>
> On the other hand, (...) habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world.
>
> (Bourdieu, in Wacquant 1989: 44)

Fields are bounded social spaces which are structured relationally; have distinctive rules; their own vocabulary; and their own measures and symbols of accomplishment (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990; Calhoun 2008; Hanks 2005). They are sites of struggle for position, prestige, financial reward, or authority that is, the 'capitals' (Bourdieu 1984, 1991, 1996) which circulate within them. Access to positions relies upon the ability to negotiate what constitutes capital in that setting and to demonstrate ownership of 'the set of actually usable resources and powers - economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital' (Bourdieu 1984: 114). Importantly, Bourdieu also introduces the concept of symbolic capital, which can be applied to any or all of the three main forms; this is the attribution of a quality

to the person as a consequence of the capitals they hold; to be clear this is a different order of capital than economic, social or cultural. Symbolic capital is 'what every capital becomes when it is misrecognised as capital' (Bourdieu 2000: 242).

Misrecognition, i.e. the endowment of 'naturalness' to a constructed object, and *doxa*, the unquestionable adherence to the *status quo* sustained by and sustaining of that misrecognition is the legitimated refusal of status to the dominated group in a particular field. Misrecognition of the power that lies behind social fields is embodied in the habitus of the group, which is not shaped by the mechanics of the field *per se*, but in the relations between participants and their relation to positions within the field.

In my research, the maternal self is taken as a field of social relations that is dominated by middle-class conceptions and practices of 'good' mothering. The invisibility of power relations within the field is what Bourdieu refers to as doxa. This is the 'absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness' (Bourdieu 1977: 168), and because it is impossible to be outside of one's own relations it is impossible to see or even think that things might be different.

For Bourdieu misrecognition is pervasive, it is the legitimated refusal of status to the dominated group in any field premised upon the terms of association defined and protected by the dominant group. As such it is especially useful for research that questions taken-for-granted assumptions about class, gender, and inequality.

2.6   The Moral Dimensions of Class

Bourdieu's concepts have proved especially capable analytic tools for scholars researching classed constructions of identities in various settings including motherhood, education, the workplace and leisure (Lawler 2004, 2005; Reay 2005; Savage 2000; Sayer 2005, 2011; Skeggs 1997, 2005). Theoretically and methodologically, Bourdieusian research makes a specific demand that research takes account of the relationship between agents and structures. This makes it possible to uncover both the individual and the wider system of capitals that impinge upon personal trajectories. As Skeggs notes:

> His work is an attempt to locate the economic within the symbolic organisation of social space. Moral value is always attributed to the economic domain ... as it is seen to produce good or bad effects and good or bad subjects of value.

(Skeggs, 2004: 16)

Social class is then never a simple matter of economic stratification and any understanding of how power and difference are both lived and felt requires an examination of the cultural and symbolic configuration of distinction in circulation. Bourdieu's conception of class is then a more complex notion that brings into play not only the cultural and material but also, the symbolic nature of class relationships and practices. Bourdieu's argument is that the 'theoreticist error that you find in Marx, seems to consist in treating classes on paper as real classes…that the people involved exist as a unified group, as a class (Bourdieu: 2004: 129). A class is 'as much by its being perceived as by its being' (Bourdieu, 1984: 372), and so is 'not based on recognising oneself as belonging to a given position, but as differentiating oneself from others in a field' (Savage, 2005: 14). References to culture and lifestyle act as mediators that mean class is no longer spoken of as class, but in terms of morality, choices, and identities; problems are recast as markers of pathology, which importantly, are positioned as surmountable with the right expertise and labour (Gillies, 2005, 2007).

The retreat from class does not indicate that Britain has become classless, but rather that class is now spoken indirectly, through a range of symbolically loaded terms. Despite class as a generalised phenomenon being dismissed as outlined above, it has been shown to be re-assembled as inscribed upon certain selves, most notably the poor or working-class, with middle-class 'markers' normalised and unremarked. In effect, class ceases to be a publicly defined phenomenon and becomes instead a private concern (Savage, 2000), and as such, becomes a 'loaded moral signifier' (Savage *et al,* 2001) worthy of closer attention. Bourdieusian analysis opens the way to uncover myriad ways in which class is euphemised, disguised and dis-identified with, allowing class to be 'speakable' without actually being spoken.

Class is thus a moral domain; the extent to which it inscribes a moralised organisation on subjects has been the subject of a renewed academic focus (Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997; 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, 2001). Each of these works, in different ways, suggests that class is troublesome for identity, subjectivity and access to resources and practices. Skeggs, (1997: 90), for example, argues that working class women are *always* positioned as inadequate against the middle class resulting in them having to justify themselves. She argues that in her research respectability, which she describes as 'an amalgam of signs, economics and practices, assessed from different positions within and

outside of respectability' (Skeggs, 1997: 15) was a 'central mechanism through which the concept class emerged' (Skeggs, 1997: 2).

Clearly, class is not the only morally infused axis of identity, and yet it emerges frequently in studies that link motherhood and the dispositions that shape maternal identities and practices. My research contributes to a growing field within sociology that uncover the moral dimensions of classed motherhood including the experience of lone motherhood and paid work (Duncan and Edwards, 1999); working-class mothers (Gillies, 2007); local childcare cultures (Holloway, 1998); single mothers (May, 2003, 2008); step-family life (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2003); the moral complexities of divorce (Smart and Neale, 1999) and family responsibilities to adult kin (Finch and Mason, 1993). In her research into teenage motherhood Macvarish (2010a, 2010b) found that although many of her participants perceived that they were badly judged, in reality, she found that this was not the case. More interestingly perhaps is that she found the mothers of the teenage mothers were subject to much more disapprobation regarding their daughter's pregnancy.

My concern then is with the social meaning of morality, and how women are able to claim the moral identity of a 'good mother'. Being 'moral' is more than simply choosing properly or appropriately, nor is it blind adherence to some abstract notion of what is 'right' as if it exists somewhere 'out there', it is a social phenomenon. By focusing on mothers' 'lived experience[13]' within the context of social, political and cultural norms, it is possible to move away from purely abstract concepts and to analyse experience without reifying it, or endowing it with some essential quality (McNay, 2004). What this means is that in this research I am able to theorise what moral judgements do, and how they attribute value to the person, but also to uncover some of the moral assumptions that are prevalent in contemporary society (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2000). There is no doubt that occupying a position deemed to be of less worth can have external effects, but it is more than this, as Sayer (2005: 153) points out, moral judgements are also 'internalised'. As I will illustrate in my analysis of breastfeeding, teenage mothering, and social judgements (Chapters Four, Five and Six respectively) there is also no escape from assumptions about women's bodies and

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[13] As Les Back (2015) points out regarding the study of 'everyday life'. 'There is something vaguely oxymoronic about the idea of everyday life. Is there any form of life that does not happen every day?' (Back, 2015: 820). I would pose a similar question: Is there anything that we call experience that isn't 'lived'? Nevertheless, it signals an interest in how larger structural issues filter into the opinions, feelings and practices of individuals, and perhaps to identify those public issues that are misunderstood as private troubles (C. Wright Mills, 1959).

what they stand for in terms of moral worth. Much of this stems from what is understood as the 'naturalness' of womanhood and motherhood, which, despite feminist challenges to essentialist notions of maternity and femininity, somewhat stubbornly remains as an enduring feature in accounts of mothering.

2.7   Naturalness

I begin from the position that there is no universal, natural 'mother' nor is there some overarching power that coerces her into being. Instead, my argument rests on the notion that subjects are produced discursively across society via the knowledge that is produced about them (Jensen, 2010a: 20). Foucault (1982, cited in Martin *et al* 1988: 18) points to 'economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine and penology' as some of the 'so-called sciences' through which humans come to know themselves. What we 'know' about mothers and mothering is, in some way, shaped by each of these disciplines, and is deeply embedded in our culture. I will argue that this 'naturalising' of care leads to the (largely) uncritical acceptance of gendered and classed assumptions that circulate in discourses of motherhood.

This argument is hardly new. Second wave feminists opened up a debate that seriously challenged taken-for-granted assumptions about motherhood and mothering in the 1960s (de Beauvoir, 1953; Oakley, 1980; Rich, 1976; Ruddick, 1989). The debate continued in what Hansen (1997) configures as 'a drama in three acts: repudiation, 'recuperation, and, in the latest and most difficult stage to conceptualise, an emerging critique of recuperation' (Hansen, 1997: 5). Among the arguments, there is a clear process of unpicking traditional approaches to sex, marriage, and familial reproduction that advances the notion that motherhood is a social construction. To be clear, feminist scholars do not, and have not, always agreed and I'm condensing very complex and nuanced arguments here into a mere acknowledgement of the extensive work that has preceded the position that I can take.[14] For the purposes of this thesis, I note that a significant change brought about by second wave feminists has been that motherhood began to be examined not only as an experience but also as an institution (Bernard, 1975; Rich, 1976). In part this opened the door for

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[14] Drawing from Hansen's work, Jeremiah (2006: 22) provides a list of important contributors to the debate: The first act is defined as involving "repudiation" of motherhood and mothering, with such early second wave feminists as Simone de Beauvoir (1997), Shulamith Firestone (1979), Kate Millett (1977), and Betty Friedan ([1963]1992) being cited as exemplars. The second act is characterized by "recuperation," by attempts to reclaim and revise maternity. Such attempts began in the mid-1970s, and were carried out by feminists as diverse as Adrienne Rich (1986), Nancy Chodorow (1978), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1991) and Sara Ruddick (1989) in America; Mary O'Brien (1981) and Juliet Mitchell (1974) in Great Britain; and Luce Irigaray (1985), Hélène Cixous (1994) and Julia Kristeva (1986) in France.

motherhood to be evaluated in a way that acknowledges its contradictions and complexity, or as Rich puts it: 'the guilt, the powerless responsibility for human lives, the judgements and condemnations, the fear of her own power the guilt, the guilt, the guilt' (Rich, 1976: 277).

What Rich was able to show was that the 'naturalness' of motherhood is a construction that served men's position in the public sphere by confining women to the domestic; the product of a compulsory, idealised and a-historical character within a patriarchal society, as well as a self-subjugation to the needs of others. For instance, within the attachment parenting discourse, there is a strong rhetoric of 'the natural' (Badinter, 2012; Crossley, 2009; Kanieski, 2010), which suggests a special, biologically derived, responsibility for the daily care of children, and to prioritise their needs. As I discuss later in this chapter (2.9), women's relationship with paid work and motherhood has been re-cast within a postfeminist ideal, and so the picture has changed since Rich was writing. Nonetheless, her insights still hold true, that associating maternal care with nature, serves to limit the opportunities for women and secure advantages for men in the public realm (Rich, 1976: ch4). In line with Rich (1976) and following Smart (1996) my analysis will reflect the position that motherhood is not a 'natural condition', but a construction that presents itself as natural.

In defining motherhood as women's primary social role, work outside of the home assumes lesser significance and is reflected in the lower status, lower earnings and part-time hours that remain features of women's engagement in the paid labour market. In other words, the discourse of motherhood is closely associated with the sexual division of labour (Oakley, 1974; Wearing, 1984; Scarr and Dunn, 1984). In a capitalist society, where payment is the measurement of value, 'the unpaid and unlimited hours of parenting contrast with the professional's role where there is remuneration for specific hours of employment' (Dale 1996: 5). Arguably this puts more pressure on women to maintain a moral maternal identity, which can be used to justify time away from paid employment. But more than that, the increased presence of women in the workplace occurred at the same time as discourses promoting motherhood as child-centred, expert-led and emotionally consuming; mothers it seems must compensate for time away from paid employment by being a 'professional' mother.

I will return to the concept of 'naturalness' in my discussion of intensive mothering in section 2.10, to examine how it translates into maternal practices, for now, I now want to turn my

attention to the expectations of what such child-centred mothering is claimed to achieve. To begin I will consider the political claims, before discussing the implications for mothers themselves.

2.8   Politics of 'Good' Mothering

As set out in my introduction, parenting is on the public agenda. Hand in hand with the rise in policy initiatives, there has been a proliferation of manuals, television programmes and websites aimed at parents and 'family' issues (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012). Social mobility is something of a privileged object in neoliberal government, serving as a proxy for social justice. Articulated as a matter of equality of opportunity, i.e. equal *chances*, rather than equal treatment or equal shares, it is possible to claim that what the poorest must have is more *aspiration* rather than more redistribution. Faith in the practices of good parenting as the key to unlocking aspiration and overcoming social and economic disadvantage has gained such credibility in the last two decades as to be almost unquestionable (Jensen 2010a). This despite the fact that there is much robust evidence that inter-generational social mobility has stalled and that social immobility has direct links to social inequality (Atkinson, 2015; Dorling 2014, 2015; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

'Good parenting' has been identified, first by New Labour, then the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, and now the Conservative government as the central means by which stagnant social mobility can be invigorated and hence, social inclusion guaranteed (Parker, 2006; Featherstone *et al*, 2014; Gillies, 2014). Programmes such as Sure Start and the Family Nurse Partnerships Scheme, which assigns a nurse to pregnant women whose unborn child is considered to be at risk of social exclusion, are designed to promote values around caring and child-rearing to 'disadvantaged' mothers (Hey and Bradford, 2006; De Benedictis, 2012). In restricting the services in this way it is clear that the target is working-class mothers who can be taught the 'right' way to bring up their children and enable them to govern themselves and their children (Lewis, 20011; Maconochie, 2013; Moss and Petrie, 2002).

The first five years of a child's life, in particular, are seen as critical for later successes and failures. Frank Field, a Labour MP appointed by the coalition government to head a review of poverty and life chances, stated that:

It is family background, parental education, good parenting and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more to children than money.

<div style="text-align: right">(Field, 2010: 5)</div>

Grover and Mason's (2013) analysis of *Early intervention: The next steps* (Allen, 2011), the cross-party report to which Frank Field was appointed, points to the importance of the document in framing policy decisions. The gendered and classed framing of the report and its recommendations is just one example of close scrutiny of policy documents can reveal about taken-for-granted assumption that frame government policy. Mothers, for example, were mentioned seven times more frequently than fathers. Despite women's increased presence in the workplace more recently, it remains the case that in most instances, they perform the majority of the caregiving, take maternity leave and usually spend more time with the child than do fathers (Faircloth, 2010; Faircloth and Lee, 2010; Fawcett Society, 2014; Shirani *et al,* 2012). However, 'parenting' which is increasingly used as a verb, denoting what people do, rather than a simple noun denoting a relationship with a child, obscures the fact that it is mothers first and foremost who are assumed to parent.

The idea that the many dimensions of mothering can be classified and measured seems remote and in its stead, 'good' mothering tends to be defined backwards from outcomes; by that, I mean that if children are judged to be successful, the assumption is that they were well brought up. As a result, what the mothers of these successful children do is taken to be 'good' practice. When David Cameron (2010) declared during a speech at the left-leaning think tank *Demos* that 'we all know what good parenting looks like', he implied that there is one generally accepted model to which everyone aspires. This begs the question of what it means to speak of a set of criteria for 'good' parenting, and who determines such criteria (Gewirtz 2001; Gillies 2008; Jensen 2010b). In addition to policy documents and Prime Ministers' speeches, which although perhaps not widely read, do enter the public sphere via media press releases, the majority of mothers access information about mothering across multiple platforms, including of course in their own networks. Cameron's presentation of a single model of 'good parenting' masks the complexities, contradictions and tensions of contemporary parenting.

Oakley (1986) argued that in the past the dominant groups defining mothers comprised men and medical experts, and it is conceivable, although unlikely, that professional advice was entirely one-dimensional. The dominance of men in the field has changed since that time, with many more women than men now publishing child-care books (Hardyment, 2007), nonetheless, two key male theorists, Bowlby, and Winnicott, remain very influential. Although rarely cited in popular texts aimed at mothers themselves, both are foundational in the surveillance of maternal subjectivity. Bowlby (1953) whose maternal deprivation paradigm argues that mothers must be constantly available, and Winnicott (1953, 1964), whose 'sensitive mother' has a 'natural' capacity to know and care for her child, have a legacy that can be traced through the development of childcare theories that retain those tenets, especially attachment theory. Moreover, those central 'truths' about mothers' role in child development have been extended rather than replaced and are fundamental to state endorsed provision aimed at mothers and children, as well as practitioners such as Sure Start, CANparent, Solihull Approach, and TripleP. The same principles are applied in television programmes where their scope reaches beyond parents themselves to wider audiences. Their repetition and further endorsement mean that the message of emotional management, pedagogy, reasoning and ultimately choice, have become common-sense, and contribute to the on-going prioritisation of expert knowledge over experience within professional circles. In Chapter Four, I explore the relationship that women have with 'expertise' and the privileging of different forms, whether professional or experiential. As I will discuss, a range of factors come into play, including age, class, and confidence, meaning that how women relate to different forms of expertise can tell us something about how subjectivities are shaped by, and shaping of knowledge. What it cannot tell us, is 'what good parenting looks like'.

2.9   Women, Know your Place

The use of the term 'parenting' then, seems to point not only to an attempt at gender neutrality but also in this neoliberal context to the idea that child-rearing is a rational, teachable skill set. The privileging of discourses of choice, rationality and reflexivity in parenting manuals, government-endorsed parenting classes and in the media relies upon a one-dimensional parent, able to choose freely the sort of practices they perform. In this way, certain practices become silently marked as rational desirable and normal, and in general, these are middle-classed (Allen and Taylor, 2012; Gillies, 2005; Lawler, 2005; McRobbie,

2013; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015). In view of the fact that child-rearing remains primarily the responsibility of mothers, and when things go wrong, they are more likely to be called upon as executors of welfare and justice orders (Lawler, 2000), it is women who according to this logic, must be taught how to 'parent'. So while 'parent' is substituted into the discourse in an attempt to acknowledge the diversity of family arrangements[15], it masks the uneven distribution of the work and penalties associated with bringing up children. Simply using the word 'parent' doesn't change the fact that mothers do the majority of the child-rearing, and thus 'parent' merely operates to invisibilise or deny women's work. Moreover, the move from parent as a noun to parent as a verb implies a fairly impoverished understanding of the mother-child relationship in which all interaction is instrumentalised in terms of outcomes. Love and play for example are described as important for how they contribute to the child's development rather than any intrinsic human value (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012). Not only does this mean (as discussed in chapter one, 1.5) that it becomes plausible for Frank Field to claim that the diminutive brain is caused by a lack of love, but also that a standardised skill set becomes knowable, teachable and valuable. The apparently neutral 'parenting' then is a rhetorical sleight of hand that shifts responsibility onto individuals to acquire the right skill-set. Such a move leaves structural inequality out of the explanatory framework altogether and normalises a narrow definition of what 'counts' and can be converted into symbolic capital.

Gender remains an axis of power that organises and shapes society, identity and knowledge and as such 'parent' is an effect of power/knowledge and is a category of person that can be known and governed (Foucault, 1988). The supposed gender neutrality of 'parenting' therefore fits entirely comfortably with a broader neoliberal figuring of people as rational *homo oeconomicus* and as carriers of human capital. Neoliberalism is never about only the political sphere set on de-regulation and privatisation, it is instead about a governing rationality that introduces the same market logic to the everyday workings of daily life, and subsequently to the very inner workings of subjects (Ong, 2007; Rose, 1999; Rose, O'Malley and Valverde, 2006). This is a process that interpellates individuals as enterprising, choice-

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[15] Parenting is in part a simple attempt to be gender neutral; arguably it is a response to feminist scholarship and activism that sought to unravel the essentialism bound up in the term mother. It can also be seen as a less heteronormative term that recognises the diversity of family forms and gender fluidity. As Foucault (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 231) put it 'My point is not everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad'.

making, self-regulating and self-responsible, and because its achievement is through individuals working on their self is not understood as gendered. I want to be clear that this thesis does not offer up an alternative to neoliberalism, but rather a critique of how it operates in our society, and the effects it has on the ways we understand the making of selves who 'fit'.

A clear contradiction between neoliberalism in theory and actual lived experience rests on this re-working of *homo oeconomicus* as a genderless subject (Brown, 2015). Postfeminism is perhaps where neoliberalism and gender intersect, making young women the 'ideal neoliberal subject' (Allen and Osgood, 2009; Gill and Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). This idealisation does not disrupt the notion of the genderless subject, but rather is constructed in a way that presumes the feminist project has been realised. It should be noted that postfeminism is not an uncontroversial term, and is used in quite different ways by different theorists. I take my lead from McRobbie (2009) who argues that it is an analytical tool that both does and undoes feminism. Gill and Scharff (2011: 4) explain '(Young) women are offered particular kinds of freedom, empowerment, and choice 'in exchange for' or 'as a kind of substitute for' feminist politics and transformation'. One such instance of this trade-off lies in the changing significance of the 'sexual contract' (Pateman 1988) for the state. Women traditionally traded their independence to be housewives supported by breadwinners, thus contributing their unpaid labour for the benefit of wider society. However, McRobbie (2008, 2009) argues that the 'new sexual contract' reworks traditional markers of adulthood and young women are now challenging conventional norms of femininity. This entails young women making 'good use of the opportunity to work, gain qualifications, to control fertility and to earn enough money to participate in the consumer culture' (McRobbie, 2008: 54). In exchange for opportunities to work and consume freely, they accept the responsibility to mother and care without the support of the welfare state. As my opening quote from Jacqueline Rose (2014) makes clear, this is a very exclusive construction of an ideal maternal identity with hierarchies drawn in familiar ways.

So far, I have argued that 'parenting' invisibilises women, while simultaneously increasing the burden put upon them. As I contend in my introduction women have been disproportionately burdened with reductions in welfare spending and the shift to a workfare state (Fawcett Society, 2014; McDowell, 2016; Pearson and Elson, 2015). While it is not

especially novel to suggest that unpaid labour contributes to the wider economy, (Hochschild and Machung, 2003; Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; Pateman, 1988), I would argue that neoliberalism has recruited feminist arguments to its cause. Research shows that the labour market has become increasingly bifurcated, with the growth of low-wage, low-status jobs (Bennett, 2015) running in tandem with a high-value knowledge-based economy (McDowell and Dyson, 2011). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2016), point out that these studies of the labour market rarely acknowledge that, in an economy recognised as changing and precarious, unpaid labour remains crucial, though under-acknowledged, and stable. Furthermore, it remains the case that women, and especially mothers, are more likely to work part-time, in lower skilled, and lower paid work. This is certainly borne out in my research, both by a lack of shared parenting and in their experience of the 'Motherhood Penalty' (Asher, 2011; Thomson *et al* 2011), which names the phenomenon by which following the birth of a child men begin to earn more, and women less. This is exacerbated by changes to social security as austerity continues, so the move from welfare to workfare (Lister, 2004; McDowell, 2016; MacLeavy, 2011; Peck *et al*, 2009) reaches ever further and more harshly.

The question of whether feminisms are compatible with neoliberalism, and to an extent reinforcing it, cannot be easily dismissed. Fraser (2013) argues that feminism has unwittingly been the 'handmaiden of neoliberalism'. In effect, several strands of second-wave feminism, including critiques of the 'family wage', welfare paternalism, and recognition that the personal is political, have become uncoupled and re-routed. The aim to recognise the talents and abilities of individuals, for women to gain positions of power, and the freedom to make choices have been folded into neoliberal ideals. Regardless of criticisms of past iterations of feminism, one of its key purposes was to work as a collective project, which is at odds with a completely individualised subject. According to Rottenberg (2014), the main difference between past feminisms and the neoliberal feminism she identifies as exemplified by Cheryl Sandberg[16] is that neoliberal feminists simultaneously see that women are not treated equally with men, but they do not accept that social, structural or economic forces produce

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[16] Sandberg is the CEO of Facebook who published *Lean In* (2013) which declares itself to be a feminist manifesto. Critics accept that the author has brought feminism into public debate, but that it centres on a very narrow understanding of feminism, and an even narrower cohort of women, and hence erases issues of concern to the majority of women both in the USA and around the globe (See, Eisenstein, 2013; Rottenberg, 2013, 2014).

this inequality. They accept the responsibility to find solutions on an individual basis because they accept responsibility for their own self-care and well-being.

For Gill (2007) postfeminism is not, as is sometimes suggested, an argument that we've reached a time when feminism has already done its work and is no longer needed. She argues, in line with Foucaultian technologies that it is a way of thinking and acting upon ourselves through self-surveillance, evaluation, and self-regulation. Young women are positioned 'as subjects of capacity who can lead responsibilised and self-managed lives through self-application and self-transformation' (Scharff, 2014 n.p.). The privileging of certain subjectivities, (entrepreneurial, self-responsible, self-regulating) over others, of course, comes at a cost to those excluded others. This use of postfeminism, as a sensibility (Gill, 2007) allows for continued analysis of the issues facing mothers, which include (but are not limited to) childcare, paid work, and identity, which is to say, the same issues that researchers found twenty years ago (see, for example, Hays, 1996; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). In this section, I have identified that part of the neoliberal project entails rendering certain subjectivities, and certain practices invisible, and that gender and class are both implicated in this process. I will now turn my attention to the final part of this review of the literature to reflect on 'intensive mothering', an umbrella term coined by Hays (1996) for child-rearing practices that are especially child-focused and gendered.

2.10 Intensive Mothering

Intensive mothering might be succinctly summed up as an emphasis on mothers' role to meet their child's needs and for those needs to be complementary to her own. This has the effect of constructing the 'good' mother as fulfilled and satisfied by her obligation to the child (while accepting and indeed being happy with self-sacrifice). As Skeggs remarks 'if pleasure can be gained from that which is oppressive it is far easier not to notice the oppressive features of it' (Skeggs, 1997: 46). A central paradox is that this is understood to be both instinctive and natural (Badinter, 2012; Crossley, 2009), but also as learned through hard work and skill (Hays, 1996; Gillies, 2005, 2007). As discussed above, the naturalisation of care renders the work that goes into it invisible, and this throws up another contradiction, which is that powerful discourses of mothering normalise intensive investments of time, emotion, and money to fulfil a 'natural' role.

A further complication for mothers is that the amount of time spent with her child becomes closely linked to the ability to claim a moral maternal identity. This presents a difficulty for

mothers whose time is also demanded under the political austerity project discussed in my introduction (section 1.8) and the broader neoliberal commitment to the transformation of 'passive recipients of state assistance into active self-sustaining individuals' (Clarke 2005: 448). This transformation is expected across multiple and various aspects of life that intersect with the state (e.g. health and education), it is, however, especially the worker-citizen who has assumed prominence as the central conception of activity (Lister 2002). Not only is paid work presented as the route to social inclusion, it has come to be judged as de facto beneficial, despite the vast inequalities extant in the workplace (Byrne 1997; Levitas 1996) or the social problems that low pay and unsociable hours can create for families (Freedman 1993).

I suggested earlier in this chapter (2.7) that 'natural' and 'normal' incorporate an imperative to do the best for one's child, or to put their needs first. The child is understood in this scenario as a 'moral enterprise' (Hays, 1996: 67). Integral to the discourse is a deficit model of mothering in which some women are positioned as lacking the necessary moral attributes to be a competent and confident mother. In this thesis I will argue that intensive mothering is a technology of the self (Foucault, 1987, 1988), and so the question is: what is it that intensive mothering renders unintelligible, (in)visible, and brings into being?

As noted by Hays, intensive mothering assumes:

> that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out primarily by individual mothers and that it should be centred on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labour-intensive and costly.

> (Hays, 1996, 21)

Before looking at how this might translate into practices of mothering, I will briefly examine attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby, 1951) which was developed by the (non-Kleinian) British Object Relations School shortly after the Second World War, and later popularised via radio broadcasts by Winnicott (1953, 1964). Bowlby formulated the basic tenets of the theory which sought to understand the ties between mother and child and the effect on those ties in children separated, bereaved or neglected by their mother (Bretherton 1992). Bowlby (1951) argues that neuroses in children could be explained not only by the mother's absence but more pertinently by the quality of her engagement with the child. His work suggests that mothers (or mother substitutes) who are sensitive to their

child's needs produce secure attachments which have a positive impact on the child's mental health and well-being. In his words:

> The infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his (sic) mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.

(Bowlby 1951: 13)

Building upon Bowlby's early work, Ainsworth (1963) argues that mothers who are sensitive to their child's needs, and pace their interactions in accordance with the child, especially in infancy, produce children who are 'normally attached'. Further developments based on the original theories have tended not to critically assess some rather basic assumptions such as class and culture (Burman, 2008), but have expanded the 'reach' of attachment theory. Development psychology suggests that there are stages of the 'naturally developing child', who evolves into an adult in more or less predictable ways. Regularities in development are somewhat universalised and elevated to the status of the norm, and consequently 'natural' (Burman, 2008); importantly the children most frequently observed and from whom these theories develop are mostly white, western, and middle class (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012). In effect, this serves to normalise what are fairly specific qualities and to suggest that they are desirable, measurable and achievable without ever questioning what makes them valuable.

As discussed in my introduction numerous character traits that are held to be undesirable and for which parenting style is held to be responsible form part of the merry-go-round of 'evidence' and calls for family intervention (e.g. Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008; Allen, 2011; Demos, 2009, 2011). There seems to be little room for manoeuvre; the child is presented as a project, whose 'proper development' will ensure specific 'outcomes'. The psychological language has become so normal that it seems scarcely questionable. Indeed, some of the resulting capabilities and behaviours may be useful skills to acquire, but this does not mean that they are neutral. Why do we value self-confidence (Gill and Orgad, 2015) or happiness (Davies, 2015) or resilience (Gill and Donaghue, 2016) for example? Each, I would argue, operates as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988) to produce what neoliberalism values: the self-regulating and enterprising individual, and places responsibility for producing such subjects in the hands of mothers.

The practices that signal 'intensive mothering' include a large amount of time spent with the child, putting the child's need first, buying educational toys, and engagement in cultural activities (Wall, 2004, 2010). It is child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and a financially expensive endeavour, in which the mother is responsible for the nurturing and development of the child. Hays describes a gendered model of child-rearing that expands the demands and consequently increases the pressures on mothers to fulfil its moral obligations (Hays, 1996; Wall, 2001). Existing research shows that mothers place on themselves a '*non-negotiable moral obligation* to put children's needs first' (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2000: 791, emphasis in original), which, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, certainly holds true for my participants. What is clear is that the repertoire of 'needs' is itself ever-expanding and anxiety-inducing, despite being (indeed forgotten as) *theories* which, despite containing many assumptions, are presented as neutral.

Attachment parenting is one such example that contributes to the intensification of mothering. Several versions of attachment parenting exist, but it typically includes breastfeeding (often extended and usually on-demand), co-sleeping, baby- wearing (carrying the child in a sling that the mother wears for extended periods), and being child-led, rather than maintaining a routine or schedule (Bobel, 2002; Liss and Erchull, 2012). It is framed as a natural way to bring up children, and, it has been argued, is a feminist approach to child-rearing that is less medicalised than other approaches (Bobel, 2008; Etelson, 2007). Further, it has been argued that the majority of tasks can be fulfilled equally by men or women and is therefore especially compatible with co-parenting (Etelson, 2007). Such claims, however, do not stand up against the wealth of research that shows attachment parenting to be almost exclusively aimed at, and fulfilled by, mothers (Badinter, 2012; Liss and Erchull, 2012). It is undeniable of course that breastfeeding is aimed at women, and it forms a mainstay of attachment parenting advice. Faircloth (2010, 2013) found that the 'accountability strategy' most often used by her participants for the decision to breastfeed to full-term, typically up to age four, was linked to scientific evidence. This included claims made about nutritional benefits but also 'the purported neuroscientific, cognitive and developmental benefits of attachment parenting more broadly'. This is perhaps not surprising given the authoritative voice of 'science' in our culture (Bourdieu, 1975; Turner, 2007). As discussed in my critique of David Cameron's speech (1.5), the claims made regarding 'baby brains' remains unproven, and the evidence base long-since denied (Bruer, 1999). Just as the political field is convinced

by what is claimed to be neuroscientific evidence, so too are the producers of child-care advice, the women who draw on them, and the health care and social work professionals who work with them. One result of this is that theories, which are open to contestation, are taken as 'truths' about human nature, leaving little room to resist them (Lawler, 2000; Rose, 1998).

Hoffman (2010) suggests that mothers tend to form identities based on their parenting style, and can feel hostility in real or imagined encounters with mothers who parent a different way. Similarly, Faircloth (2014) argues that support between women who share the same mothering ethos is very high, but that full-term breastfeeding is viewed by others as 'extreme' and 'evangelical'. The pressure to conform is present to some extent in all lives, and while those considered to be 'abnormal' may experience more overt regulation by way of visible intervention, those who are 'normal' self-regulate to conform to the same definitions. As Rose (1990: 203) puts it, normality is both 'potent' and 'pervasive'; norms are the collective expectations of proper behaviour and exert pressure discursively. While Faircloth's 'militant lactivists' subvert to some extent the expectations of wider society, they do so in the knowledge that within their 'parenting tribe' (Hoffman, 2010), their choice is 'normal'. It is also interesting to note that the arguments on both sides of this particular breastfeeding debate call on what is 'natural' to support their position (Faircloth 2010).

Attachment parenting is perhaps the most recognisably derivative of attachment theory, however, a great many of the practices associated with intensive mothering can be traced to the same root, and hold to similar tenets. As Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) critique of the concept of 'sensitive' mothering reveals there is extensive creative, emotional and physical work that goes into raising children to be the 'right' kind of selves fit for democracy. I will discuss in Chapters Four, Five and Six, many of the practices that Walkerdine and Lucey identified as middle-classed to illustrate that they are now commonplace and have become taken-for-granted. As I will argue, contemporary mothering is shaped and legitimised by middle-class practices (Gillies, 2005, 2007; Klett-Davies, 2010; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989), and discursively re-produced. It is perhaps unsurprising then to find that a quarter of a century after Walkerdine and Lucey's germinal study, that this is what has happened. As Lawler (2005) has pointed out, not only can the middle-class define what 'counts', they have the social authority to make it 'stick'. If, as I will argue, mothering practices are part of a

process of accruing social and cultural capital, only two choices are available for the middle-class to maintain their position: change what counts, or gain more of it.

Research into intensive mothering has tended to cluster around middle-class parents (Hoffman, 2010; Perrier, 2010, 2012; Shirani *et al*, 2012; Vincent and Ball, 2007, Wall, 2010), in part, no doubt because it is coded middle-class and white. Notable exceptions are Vincent *et al* (2012) who conducted research with Black Caribbean middle-class families in London, and Elliott *et al* (2013) whose study in the USA researched low-income, black, single mothers. Each of these studies contributes to understanding the complex and often contradictory effects of intensive mothering discourses and demonstrate that what defines 'good' mothering is bound tightly to the social, economic and cultural capitals and dispositions of the middle classes.

Drawing on the distinction Lareau (2003) identified between 'concerted cultivation' as a middle-class parenting style, and 'natural growth' which she found in working-class families, Vincent and Ball (2007) found that a key difference lies in seeing the child as a 'project for development' (2007: 1068). Using a Bourdieusian analysis, they suggest that their middle-class participants engage in converting economic capital into social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu 1986) as a way of 'making up' the middle-class child. The aim of preparing their child for school, to be equipped with the skill to learn and to instil 'legitimate' taste all play a part in the pressure to buy into enrichment activities (Vincent and Ball (2007). What they found was a clear understanding on the part of their respondents that 'concerted cultivation' plays an important role in the reproduction of class position (Vincent and Ball, 2007). While Vincent and Ball were concerned to show the labour these efforts for social reproduction entail, they pay less attention to the affective dimensions of such work, save to posit that anxiety about the future and a 'fear of falling' (Ehrenreich, 1989) may be a driving force. Perrier (2012), on the other hand, found in her research that it was much less clear-cut and parents worried about the additional pressure and emotional impact of too many classes and activities might have on their children's well-being. Both of these studies looked at middle-class parents who were sufficiently resourced financially to make the choice, something which each acknowledges is not the whole picture. For Perrier, the aim was to show that although 'resourcing the middle-class self' (Skeggs, 2004) to sustain middle-class moral authority is *something*, it isn't everything. In other words, that it is a mistake to understand middle-class parenting as reducible to 'acquisitiveness' (2012: 658). Following

Reay's (2000) concept of emotional capital, Perrier argues that for some middle-class mothers there is a conflict between 'doing the right thing' in terms of concerted cultivation, and being seen as a 'pushy parent'. This she suggests is a similar distaste for excess that is more usually theorised as distinction between classes; *too much* involvement is as incoherent as too little. Perrier calls for closer attention to the 'uneven effects of power on the lives of the privileged' (2012: 668) as an important caution against inflating the logic of concerted cultivation to a cultural norm in researching middle-class mothering.

Shirani *et al* (2012) suggest that the cost of enrichment activities can be understood as creating risks for fathers in what they refer to as 'intensive parenting'. Their research then considers the different implications there may be for 'men and women's moral parenting identities' (Shirani *et al*, 2012: 27). They make it clear that the participants in their study do not fall neatly into traditional breadwinner/housewife roles, with a degree of shared responsibilities within the families. Their findings echo previous research that mothers feel a much stronger moral responsibility to care (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2000; Wetherell, 1997), experience greater anxieties (Doucet, 2007; Walzer, 1996), and are more likely to use 'expert' guide books (Hays, 1996). The fathers in Shirani *et al's* study felt pressures much less intensely, except in the provision of financial resources. This they argue suggests that further research is needed 'to account for men's paid work as a manifestation of family commitment rather than a project of the self' (Shirani et, 2012: 27). There is no doubt that the financial cost of intensive mothering is high, and that with inadequate resources it is more difficult for mothers to fulfil what are seen as obligations rather than choices. What cannot be assumed is that all husbands and fathers are 'benevolent' and that the money they derive from working outside of the household is 'family income'. Furthermore, I agree that more research into fathers is welcome, (see, Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011; Williams, 2008): however, a key strength of Hays' (1996) work is the insight that this is a gendered model of childrearing with implications for the selves of mothers. Extending the theoretical base to 'intensive parenting' runs the risk of undoing its potential to make mothers visible. Furthermore, as already stated, mothers continue to shoulder the responsibility for child-rearing (Doucet, 2007; Fawcett Society, 2016) a fact that is certainly borne out by my research. To be clear, I am referring to the labour of raising children at the micro-level, that is, practices within the family. It is difficult to be precise at the macro level because the ONS does not collect statistics that contain sufficient specificity, however indications are that 88%

of full-time carers are women.[17] This figure must be read with caution as it clearly includes people who care for other adults as well as those who care for children.

In my introduction to this thesis, I examined the Prime Minister's speech launching the *Life Chances Strategy*, to illustrate the ways that the state attempts to regulate mothers to raise their children in particular ways. This was, I suggested, simply the most recent of many state-led interventions in the lives of some of its citizens; writing about responses to similar concerns in the nineteenth century Skeggs notes:

> The concerns about the potentially polluting and dangerous working class were seen to be resolvable if mothers were educated to civilise, that is, to control and discipline themselves and their husbands and sons who were likely to be the cause of anticipated problems. It is part of a process in which the mother acts as an invisible pedagogue.

> (Skeggs, 1997: 43)

Skeggs has argued that throughout the period social order was linked to moral order, with women carrying the responsibility for keeping society respectable advantage for the middle and upper classes insofar as it allowed them to turn class conflict into an issue of morality and ethics, thereby avoiding questions about wider structural issues within society. Hays (1996) also identifies the beginning of the intensification of mothering at around the turn of the twentieth century when she says 'the child (whose needs are interpreted by experts) is now to train the parent' (1996: 45).

Powerful cultural discourses construct mothers as responsible for their children's education and are fundamental to their commitment to teaching at every opportunity (Lareau, 2000; Reay, 1995, 1998; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Domestic tasks are turned into learning opportunities and so the home becomes an important pedagogic site, where mothers' self-scrutiny is key to the anxiety of fulfilling her role. As one of the mothers in my study, Helen, remarked, 'you're not allowed to, you know, just *be* together'. It's an interesting choice of

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[17] The ONS collect data under the rubric 'Economic inactivity by reason: looking after family and home.' For men aged 16-64 the figure between March and May 2015 was 246,000. For women, the figure was 2,020,000. Clearly not all refer to caring for children, for which there is no separate data available.

words, and as I will discuss in Chapter Five, not an unusual sentiment; mothers, even when they are not being scrutinised, regulate themselves intensely.

There is beginning to emerge a body of research that calls into question the direct impact of learning activities in the home on language and literacy skills for example (Hartas, 2012, 2015; Lee and Bowen, 2006), whilst parental education, employment and income all have been shown to have an impact (Hartas, 2015). In other words, life chances are determined more by socio-economic factors than the minutiae of mother-child interaction (Reay, 2013). Which is not to suggest that reading with children and helping with their homework is not a positive thing, but that addressing it, while ignoring other factors places responsibility on mothers rather than look to the structural inequalities that exist. When reading think tank reports and policy recommendations (e.g. CSJ, Demos, Allen Reports) it is clear that although poverty and disadvantage are acknowledged to impact on children's lives, the recommended solutions turn to micro-managing mothers. Class disappears from view as 'the privileged, for the most part, continue to either deny or ignore its relevance to lived experience' (Reay 2006, 290).

2.11 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the key literature that informs this research. It begins by addressing the 'slippery' concept of neoliberalism. As discussed there is a suggestion that its promiscuity is such that it has ceased to be a useful model from which to theorise. I have set out my understanding and explained why and how I use it in this thesis. In particular, I bring attention to the notion that it is a governmentality that brings the logic of the market into everyday lives. What this means in Foucaultian terms is that it is a governing rationality that entices citizens to work on themselves, to be competitive, self-regulating, and self-responsible. In return, individuals are 'guaranteed' freedom from state interference.

Having set the scene, I continued this chapter by introducing the key theories that I have enlisted to make sense of the accounts of the women who took part in this research. In addition to setting out a framework to understand how power/knowledge are implicated in the production of 'truths' about mothers and mothering, I drew attention to the normalising gaze. I will argue that (self-)surveillance is a persistent feature of contemporary life and that this panoptic gaze is trained on children, other mothers, and inwards, and is the mechanism by which moral judgements are made. Moving onto the work of Rose, I discussed the entry into everyday life of psychologically infused language, built around interiorised 'authentic'

selves. This shapes subjects and behaviours in line with socially valued ways of living and embeds notions of choice, morality, reflexivity and rationality. In my analysis, I will illustrate how taken-for-granted such notions are and how they contribute to discourses of motherhood.

I have contended that one of the features of neoliberalism is a retreat from collectivity; the claim of classlessness fits this rationality. I suggest that it shifts attention away from structural issues to personalise problems and manage them at the level of the individual. To counter the myth of classlessness there has been renewed attention from academics, and I draw on their work in this thesis. I introduced Bourdieu's 'conceptual toolkit' of habitus, capitals and field, and set out my understanding of class as a dynamic and relational concept. I further discussed the concept of misrecognition as a process that naturalises what is arbitrary as a means to legitimate the refusal of status. By drawing on this concept I will argue that raising children remains classed and gendered through the attribution of 'natural' qualities to women, and in particular to middle-class women. I continued this chapter by examining postfeminism, which brings together gender and neoliberalism. In this section, I focused on constructions of a maternal ideal and used it to highlight the invisibility (still) of mothering work. Furthermore, the literature shows, this is an identity that in privileging specifically neoliberal ideals, works to exclude others.

In the final part of this literature review, I turned to existing research into intensive mothering. This body of work clearly illustrates the demands on women in terms of time, emotion and money. Drawing on this literature I suggest that developmental psychology continues to dominate conceptions of how to raise children and that attachment theory has cast a wide net. This, I argue is the basis on which intensive mothering is structured, and has been firmly set as the best way to raise children. As I argue this is not a homogeneous set of principles, but rather a framework around which child-rearing is understood. 'Concerted cultivation' is discussed as a particularly middle-class element of mothering discourse that illustrates how mothers gain and sustain advantage for their children. It illustrates the conversion of economic capital (buying expertise in the form of classes for example), into social and cultural capitals, and hence the intergenerational transmission of privilege. This also introduces the concept of emotional capital, and the trade-offs and uneven terrain for mothers in securing advantage. Lastly, in this section, I considered a key part of intensive

mothering, that of the demand for pedagogy, which I suggest is a means to governing mothers' by expecting them to micro-manage their children.

As this review of the literature shows, motherhood is complex and contradictory; classed and gendered; a public and private concern. In the next chapter, I set out the methodology for this thesis to explain how and why asking mothers themselves is the best way to understand these issues.

3   CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This research is a qualitative enquiry, based on data generated in semi-structured interviews with twenty-five women, each with at least one child under the age of five. The focus of this chapter is an explanation of the decision-making and the practical elements of conducting the research. In chapter one I posed the following question:

> What does it mean to be a mother at a time when the welfare state is in retreat, when inequality is on the rise, and (dis)advantage is framed as an individual achievement?

So far in this thesis, I have set out to define the terms of that question, the context in which it is set, and the key theoretical and empirical influences from which it flows. I will now outline my reasons for conducting the research in the way that I have, and describe the process of planning and design, carrying out fieldwork, and analysing data. This chapter will reflect the messiness and challenges posed by research, and will make clear that it is formulated on a series of decisions, interpretations and selections. Methods and methodological approach are directly related to the ontological, epistemological and theoretical positions that inform any study, and this research is no different (Berg, 1995; Bryman, 2012; Flick, 1998; Punch, 2005). Which, to be clear, means that no one approach to research can be considered 'best'; rather the decision is based on the purpose of the study, the research aims, and the conceptual framework (Silverman, 2005). This chapter is divided into two parts; in the first section I will discuss the methodological considerations that underpin the research, and in the second section I will discuss the 'doing' of the research. There are many points of overlap, and so the sections are not entirely discrete, but rather reflect a change in tone, with the second part being more descriptive than the first.

3.2   Methodological Considerations

As my review of the literature illustrates, this thesis is informed by the principle that neoliberal governments 'govern at a distance' (Burchell *et al*, 1991: 18); power is exercised through networks of relations, knowledge, and practices of normalisation and not through explicit or direct coercion (Walkerdine, 1990). This means that this is a study concerned with ways of knowing and acting; with how 'truths' emerge, and are enacted, and with what is at stake (Rose, 1999: 19). Having set out that my interest lies in mothering, and that the identity 'mother' is an effect of discourse, it follows that to find out how that identity is

negotiated means asking mothers themselves. This lends itself to a qualitative enquiry, which as Mason (2002: 1) explains:

> allows for the exploration of a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses and relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate.

This scope to explore the insights, understandings and experiences of mothers is the main reason that I chose to conduct qualitative research, and more specifically, semi-structured interviews. I will discuss the mechanics of designing and carrying out interviews in section 3.5 of this chapter, but before doing so I will consider the issue of power within the research process, whether it can be erased (I think not), and whether it can be managed (I think so).

3.3   Power, Objectivity and a Feminist Perspective

At the outset, it is important to note that there is no single feminist epistemology. It follows then that there cannot be a distinct, singular feminist method or methodology (Harding, 1991, 1993). Broadly speaking, feminisms have a shared interest in bringing attention to gendered inequalities (Tong, 2009), though this does not mean that feminist research is always qualitative, nor clearly, that it is always about women. As Stanley and Wise (2005: 1.3) contend 'feminist sociology is not a "specialism" … but is rather a way of rethinking and reconfiguring the whole of the discipline in feminist terms'. With this in mind, I describe my research as being formulated from a 'feminist perspective' (Maynard and Purvis, 1984), which positions me as a feminist, but that also recognises the complexity over what is meant by the term (Harding, 1993; Letherby, 2003).

Simply identifying myself as a feminist does not, of course, mean that the research itself can be described as such, nonetheless, it sits within a body of work that would look very different were it not for feminist scholars. It was feminism after all that brought motherhood to the table (Rich, 1976) and feminists who have kept it there (e.g. Jensen, 2010a; Lawler, 2000; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). Furthermore, it is within feminist debates that, now mainstream considerations in the research process, such as power relations and reflexivity, have been hotly debated, theorised and adopted into best practice (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Edwards and Holland, 2013). Identifying myself as a feminist, and situating the

research within a larger body of work is already part of the reflexive process. It is not merely intended to insert biographical detail into the research but is part of making the research process more transparent. In doing so it situates the claims I make for the benefit of the reader, whose own critical interpretation can take my epistemological positioning into account. It also brings forward the issue of objectivity, which it is argued, sits within a tradition that is always-already concerned with hierarchical power relations (McDowell, 1992; Oakley, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1993).

As I have illustrated so far in this chapter, my research sits within an established methodological approach, that recognises the value of qualitative enquiry, and that is informed by a feminist perspective. A key insight that emerged from feminist research is the issue of power, which Oakley (1981) linked to her critique of the research process as inherently 'masculinist'. In particular, Oakley (1981) argued that research interviews are steeped in unequal power relations that position participants as passive respondents to a researcher who is positioned as 'superior'. Oakley contended 'that detached, uncontaminated interviewing practice was impossible and morally indefensible' (Edwards, 2012: 19), and argued that:

> the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

> (Oakley, 1981: 451)

This was a significant intervention in social research, which not only stimulated an important discussion[18] about engagement in the process but that has had effects beyond feminist research. However, Oakley's suggestion that power relations could be erased through developing a relationship akin to friendship, have been criticised, in part because as Lawler (2000: 6-7) points out, participants are motivated by many things, and making friends with the researcher is not necessarily one of them. The simple fact of both being women does not cut across other axes of identity, and imbalances of power may still arise (Allan, 2016). Furthermore, the balance of power is not necessarily always tipped in favour of the researcher, so 'over-coming' imbalance may be a misguided aim. Rather it may be better and

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[18] For full discussion of these debates, see Letherby, G. (2003), *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

more achievable to aim to 'handle' imbalance. A completely power-balanced approach has been dismissed as naïve (Skeggs, 1994), unachievable (Hollands, 2003), and not even always necessary (Heath *et al.*, 2009), nevertheless these goals, formulated and debated within feminist research, have bequeathed a commitment to strive for mutual respect and non-exploitative research. Power in the context of the interview is not, however, the only consideration; the knowledge that is produced in the process of analysis and writing-up does not involve the participants in this research. This raises an ethical issue about what counts as knowledge, how it is legitimated, generated and represented (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Denzin, 2009; Foucault, 1980; Hacking, 1999, 2004; Millen, 1997; Skeggs, 1997). As Denzin puts it:

> Who has the power to control the definition of evidence, who defines the kinds of materials that count as evidence, who determines what methods best produce the best forms of evidence, whose criteria and standards are used to evaluate quality evidence?

(Denzin, 2009: 142)

Relatedly, there is the question of whether there is an objective reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered, tested and proved. As an exploratory piece of research, this is not my aim, which is, rather, to understand how knowledge is produced and becomes meaningful; accordingly, the 'doing' of research itself must be approached with the same critical attention. My own position is that knowledge about the social world is humanly produced (Cope, 2002: 43), and further, that 'knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its constructors' (Code, 1991: 35). Put simply, I and the women who participated in the research brought experiences, beliefs and values that have shaped the study.

To be clear then, inherent within research design are important issues of power, and while this is not entirely one-sided, the research participant is clearly absent from this process in the early stages of research. Furthermore, even if the unevenness of power is temporarily overcome during the research encounter, the researcher is 'a tangible presence' not only in 'what they research, [but also in] what they write' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 176). Part of the reflexive process, especially from a feminist perspective, is to ensure that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is made explicit. Clearly, this cannot retrospectively change the power dynamic that existed, however, it is only by careful

reflection that any effects of the imbalance can be known fully to the researcher. Writing those reflections into the thesis presents a more complete picture to the reader of how the relationship may have shaped the research.

As might be expected, this raises some difficult issues: how to incorporate experience into the research without reifying it; how to interpret the accounts without erasing the women; and how to acknowledge my own self as implicated in the process. I will consider these issues in the next section of this chapter, which is concerned with the 'doing' of the research. I will begin with a discussion of the recruitment strategy and some brief details of the women who took part, before outlining the process of conducting semi-structured interviews.

3.4   Sampling and Recruitment

Approaches to sampling for qualitative studies do not aim to be representative of the larger population (Bryman, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994), but rather for the richness of the data 'from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research' (Patton 1990: 169). For this study, I have spoken with twenty-five women, each with at least one child under the age of five, and living within a twenty-mile radius of the university. I began with a purposive sampling strategy and conducted a search of the local authority database of private child-care and nursery providers, Sure Start centres, and GP surgeries. I anticipated that these were places that mothers, whether in paid employment or not, might reasonably be expected to attend, and it was my intention to place recruitment posters to garner attention and attract participants. As it transpired, only one GP practice gave approval, no private providers agreed, and individual Sure Start managers advised that they could not give permission. Changing tack, I contacted the head of Sure Start services in the city and secured an appointment to meet her. She gave approval for posters to be displayed and took charge of distributing them on my behalf.

In addition, I posted a request on the Mumsnet website, in a section dedicated to the local area. This was intended to capture some individuals who, for instance, don't use Sure Start centres or any of the private nurseries where posters were (planned to be) displayed. Furthermore, it had also been suggested to me during both pilot interviews that Sure Start centres are off-putting to some parents precisely because of the socio-economic background of other users of the service, and so posters there might be ineffective. Interestingly in the first of these pilots I was told that the other mothers there were 'too posh', and hence off-

putting; in the second, that the people who went were 'cliquey' and 'unfriendly'. In an attempt to attract more participants, I used snowballing techniques, asking everyone who took part to pass on details of the study as well as my contact details.

I had a meeting with an outreach worker in a community centre in a deprived area of the city, however despite a very positive meeting and the assurance that some participants would be forthcoming, it was an unsuccessful strategy. I also visited two community centres in other parts of the city, handed out leaflets in the street, and asked several shops to display them. Six of the participants saw posters at their Sure Start centre (four different centres); five responded to the Mumsnet posting; one was from my visit to a community centre; four had seen a poster (each at a different location); and nine were recruited by snowballing, these were, however, four different 'snowballs'.

My call for participants was very loosely worded in order to attract as many as possible to take part (see Appendix One). As it transpired, none of the women was in a same-sex relationship, and the majority lived with a partner. This clearly reflects the heteronormative nuclear family, although not by design, and although there is some variation across other axes of identity, I have not recruited anyone who could be described as either extremely disadvantaged or advantaged. The youngest participant was 22 when we met, the oldest was 41, and the average age was 32. Of the twenty-five, 2 are Bangladeshi-British, the remaining 23 are White-British. This is unsurprising as the region has a population that is 96% White-British.

Two of the women are full-time, stay-at-home mothers (Amy and Claire); Five are currently on maternity leave (Anna, Hannah, Heather, Sarah, and Vanessa); Thirteen work outside of the home, full-time (Amanda, Danielle, Donna, Eleanor, Helen, Jayne, Kelly, Laura, Leanne, Melanie, Michelle, Natalie, Rebecca); four are in part-time paid work (Erin, Lina, Nicola, Ruqsana), and two are students (Laura [who also works full-time] and Suzanne). The unemployment rate in the region at the time of conducting the interviews was 10%, so on this measure, the sample are not representative, which was not my intention, but should be noted nonetheless. Class position has been interpreted by drawing on the Bourdieusian concept of capitals: economic, cultural, social and symbolic, as discussed in chapter two (2.5). Appendix Two shows the demographic information in table format for ease of reference.

Interviews were arranged by text, over the telephone and via email. I conducted two pilot interviews followed by the twenty-five that comprises the data. Each interview lasted between fifty and ninety minutes and was digitally recorded. All of the participants were provided with a Participant Information sheet (Appendix Two), which I asked them to read. I advised them verbally that they need not answer any question if they chose not to, that they could withdraw from the research any time up until submission of the thesis, and that they need not explain their decision, but merely inform me of it. I repeated this information at the end of the interview. Before the commencement of the interview and before the recording equipment was switched on, I asked them to sign two copies of the consent form (appendix three), one for their retention, the other for mine. Where possible interviews were conducted in the participant's home, which was advantageous not only because this is their own 'territory' and therefore more relaxed (Daly, 1992), but also for confidentiality and less disruption. In total, sixteen meetings took place in the participants' home, three at the University, two at the participants' place of work and the remaining four in cafés.

3.5   Semi-structured Interviews

The main reason I selected semi-structured interviews to generate data is that they are a way to encourage a dialogue that allows me to explore the women's views and understandings, their actions and experiences, and their feelings and concerns (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Mason, 2002). Semi-structured interviews fall between the extremes of a single question designed to open up debate with the occasional prompt (unstructured), and a verbal questionnaire (structured). Each of these interview styles has their place, however, a particular strength of semi-structured interviews is that although the topics and questions are predetermined, they are designed in such a way that allows further exploration of issues as they arise in the conversation (Berg, 2004: 81). What the women share during the interview is, of course, subject to their own comfort and willingness (Finch, 1993). They have the absolute right to withhold any information they choose, and ethically it is important that they both know that, and do not feel that there is any need to explain why or what (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). There were not any occasions when anyone refused to answer a question, and, having listened to the recordings a number of times, I cannot detect any obvious deflection of a question.

One of the most beneficial aspects of this method of generating data is the potential to prompt explanation by encouraging reflection. Questions, followed by prompts or nudges to

consider how and why things are done gave me an insight into what practice means for the women and how this might be influenced by wider social structures. In addition, they facilitate an immediate response to questions as they arise, allowing both researcher and participant to explore meanings and to resolve any ambiguities in a friendly and relaxed manner (Gorman and Clayton, 1997: 124). Ultimately, the hope is that in encouraging participants to tell their own story, in their own words, some degree of power remains with the participant, who can, to some extent shape the direction and content of the interview. This has to be carefully managed of course, to maintain the focus of the research, but also to be open to issues that I had not considered in advance. This is not to suggest that interviews of this type are problem-free. They can be time-consuming, extremely personal and open to bias (Gorman and Clayton, 1997: 125); for the interviewee, this may be difficult both physically and emotionally, and for the researcher, the sheer volume of data can make it difficult to sift out what is meaningful.

I designed a semi-structured interview schedule, built around key themes (see Appendix Four). Although the interview schedule was not intended as a script to be followed verbatim, it is written in a conversational style and makes it clear that my endeavour was to achieve an approximation of everyday dialogue. I grouped questions under broad topics that I thought would open the discussion as much as possible but remain close to the original aims of the research.

Transition to motherhood: Asking questions about when they decided to become a mother, for example, was intended to get an idea of whether motherhood is a 'natural' expectation. Asking if there is anything they miss was intended to encourage them to talk about changing perceptions of identity.

Advice, Practice and Comparison: Asking how they learned to be a mother was intended to extend the issue of whether motherhood is natural, however, it was also intended to gain some insight into their attitude to 'expert' knowledge. Questions about comparison to others were designed to open a discussion about judgement and distinction.

Skills, Traits and Imagined Futures: This topic was intended as the point when the women could have the opportunity to talk about their children, what they imagined their efforts would mean for the adult they would become, and to uncover some aspirations and values.

Responsibility and Intervention: This section was intended to discover attitudes to larger issues, who the women consider responsible when things go wrong, and what solutions might be appropriate. I expected this topic to reveal more about values and value.

I spent a considerable amount of time planning the questions and operationalising my themes. These descriptions are very broad brush strokes and do not capture the intention behind each question. Furthermore, as discussed, this is an exploratory piece of research, so regardless of my plans, I went into each interview being flexible about how the conversation would unfold. I always planned to take cues from the discussion rather than follow a linear path and to explore, not impose meanings.

As it turned out many of the issues I wanted to find out about developed organically as the conversation went on. I found in the early interviews for example, that the questions I had prepared regarding 'Broken Britain' felt cumbersome in the context of actual interviews, in a way that hadn't been clear in the pilot exercise; on the other hand, I had not prepared questions about paid work, other than to ask about occupation in the initial 'demographic' questions. During the course of the first interview, it became clear that this was an omission on my part, and became an issue I probed more in subsequent interviews. Despite the best of intentions, I did not (probably could not) know in advance what turns the interviews would take. This, however, is part of the iterative process of this type of research; I reviewed each interview after I completed it, and made notes of what worked, and what didn't. Of course, this does not mean that after each the process was completely changed, but I remained mindful, and where patterns emerged adjusted accordingly. I have kept the interview schedule as it was in the interest of transparency and because as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the process is messy (Bryman, 2012: 15).

I was not worried that the women would have nothing to say, or that they would be closed in their responses. Rather, I assumed they volunteered to take part because they have something to say and relied on the fact that 'interviewees frequently know that they are expected to be expansive in their answers' (Bryman, 2012: 44). From the outset I wanted the interviews to be conversational; my interview schedule although worded as if it were a script was a prompt designed to ensure I remained within the terms of my theoretical concerns. I carried the schedule with me, and during the interviews kept it open in case I needed to refer to it, however, that rarely happened. Some of the women inevitably would have felt less comfortable talking to me than others, and this wasn't always something I could

mitigate. Claire, who I met in a café was worried her sister-in-law would walk in, or that someone else may overhear and report back to her; Erin's partner stayed in the room and played video games during our interview; and Kelly was very concerned her dogs didn't bother me (they didn't). In chapter six I will discuss Kelly's concern about the dogs in more detail, but note at this stage that they were a source of anxiety about potentially disparaging judgements made by health visitors. As someone else who was coming into her home to ask about her mothering, I suspect she viewed me with a slight sense of suspicion.

3.6 Analysis

As noted earlier in this chapter, the interviews were all recorded using a digital recorder. While this means that there is an accurate recording of what was said, and was certainly easier than note-taking, it must be acknowledged that the equipment itself can affect the data that are collected. As Back (2010) notes recording devices can be:

> enabling in the sense that it allowed for the voices of people to be faithfully transcribed with accuracy. Paradoxically, the fact that the recorder captured the voice and the precise detail of what informants said meant that social researchers have become less attentive as observers. The tacit belief that the researcher needed merely to attend to what was said has limited the forms of empirical documentation.
>
> (Back, 2010: 23, 24, cited in Edwards and Holland, 2013: 70)

I agree that there is a potential for that to be the case, however, I found it freed me to be more, not less observant. Furthermore, using a recorder meant that I could engage more fully with the women than if I had been trying to keep a written record during the conversation. There are other issues that are worth noting, however, including the difficulty some participants have in 'forgetting' the equipment is there. Some people are embarrassed or shy about being recorded, and may be reticent about divulging some information, knowing that there is a verbatim record of it. Often the women concerned themselves with whether the recorder was working, and it seems that children are endlessly fascinated by them, so on more than one occasion it was switched off, or picked up and thrown. I experienced some difficulty on occasions when the interview was conducted in a public place, with background noise occasionally obscuring the voices. Finally, on one occasion the batteries went flat, and I failed to notice immediately, thus losing part of one interview.

Despite each of these issues, on balance, I felt the conversations flowed more easily, and the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

Following each interview, I recorded field notes in my research diary (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Parker, 2000). I included notes about what I thought had stood out or that had been unexpected, which later helped in drawing out themes for my analysis. These notes augment the verbatim transcripts, and I have used them throughout as aides-memoires. Whenever possible I transcribed the recordings immediately after the interview. I understand the act of transcribing as part of the analytic process, rather than something that precedes it (Taylor, 2001). Everything that is recorded on the transcript is already an interpretative decision (Kvale, 1996); moreover, the way in which accent, pauses and tone are notated may reflect my interests and assumptions differently depending upon the stage of the research. Accordingly, I have retained the voice recordings and moved repeatedly between them, the transcripts and my interpretations throughout the analysis and writing stages. The recordings are invaluable resources that allow me to not only remember the interview more clearly but to add texture to the words spoken.

Before ever conducting the interviews, I had of course already immersed myself in a review of the literature, think tank reports and some of the commercial products related to 'parenting'. As discussed in chapters one and two, terms such as 'sensitive' (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989), 'intensive' (Hays 1996) and 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2003) have all been used to describe styles of mothering associated middle class mothers and are associated strongly with conversion into social, economic and cultural capital. Inevitably, these literatures informed my first tentative links with the empirical data, acting as indicators for thematic coding and analysis.

At the analysis stage, the development of categories was itself a qualitative endeavour; the process of critically assessing emerging patterns included challenging those which may seem apparent by examining links to alternative explanations (Marshall, 1999). Talk is not neutral; it is a complex phenomenon and statements can be understood as serving several purposes. Rather than simply accepting statements at face value, the context in which they are made is important. Choices about what is mentioned, emphasis, rhetorical style and non-verbal communication are indicative of the speaker's assessment of the audience as much as the events, processes or beliefs being spoken about (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). By bringing

together notes, recordings and the transcripts, and reading across them, I found it easier to make sense of the meanings expressed.

Thematic analysis involves a close reading of the transcripts in order to identify themes and concepts. The intent is to look for not only commonality but also differences and relationships across the data (Gibson and Brown, 2009); codes are created to reflect regular occurrences, strong emphasis and instances of ready (dis)agreement. Coding is at the centre of qualitative research (Flick, 1998: 17), and is directly related to interpretation and analysis of the data. I adopted an 'open coding' approach, which entails concepts and categories being coded at the level of the paragraph, sentence and word (Flick, 1998: 179-180). These codes act as basic units, from which to examine relationships between categories, and from there develop theories. In order to apply these principles, my first full reading was what Mason (2002) refers to as 'interpretative and reflexive' to gain an overview of the different types of experiences and views held by the women. During this reading, I noted how I responded emotionally and intellectually to the participant, a 'reader response' which subsequently proved very useful during the interpretive process. The second stage involved re-reading and marking the transcripts in relation to the research questions, to reduce the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). During this phase, I also noted and recorded themes that were not necessarily related to the research questions, but that recurred across transcripts. Despite believing that I had identified the key themes, in the process of writing up it became clear that I had not picked up on issues of place and their meaning for both me and the participants. This entailed a return to the data, and a further reading and identification of instances recorded. In particular, my own field notes, which form a private log intended to capture as much detail as possible about environments, interactions and feelings, proved invaluable.

3.7 Reflexivity

'Epistemic reflexivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 46) is the attempt to understand one's own habitus and how it influences both interactions and their analysis. In the interview situation it means putting into practice the:

> sociological 'feel' or 'eye' [that] allows one to perceive and monitor on the spot, as the interview is actually taking place, the effects on the social structure within which it is occurring.

66

Bourdieu identifies three 'key filters that alter the sociological gaze' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 39) that can be resolved by reflexive practice. This is defined as the systematic and iterative exploration of 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine thought' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 40). The first of these filters is self-awareness, that is, the identification of the researcher's own social location and origin (class, gender, ethnicity etc.); the second is the researcher's position in the academy and what they owe to that position 'as defined by their difference and distance from certain others with whom they compete'; and thirdly, intellectual bias, which is predetermined by the rules and procedures of sociology as a science (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Reflexivity is partly then, a self-awareness of the researcher's contribution to the research process, including personal positioning in the formulation of the research question; partly, her theoretical influences that shape the research, data collection, and analysis. As part of that process, the researcher must reflect on the personal values, experiences and beliefs that have shaped the research topic and how it is investigated. For Bourdieu, reflexivity should be 'epistemological, collective and objective' (Maton, 2003: 58).

Research is a collective enterprise, not only between the researcher and the researched but also between the researcher and the collective body of knowledge that already exists. Finally, it is an enterprise between the researcher and herself. Planning, designing and carrying out research are as stated at the beginning of this chapter a series of decisions, interpretations and selections. None of them can be achieved without recourse to what has gone before:

> Reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research and it entails the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge. Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share.

> (Sandelowski and Barroso, 2002: 222)

In this thesis, so far I have set out the theoretical and empirical work that has informed it, and situated my work within a feminist epistemology to make sense of what is known, and how it is known. There are of course alternative histories on which I could draw, and conduct an enquiry into motherhood, but that would be a different kind of research, asking different questions, and finding something else worth finding. The point I'm making is that I acknowledge that this is partial. The call to self-reflexivity is decidedly not a narcissistic insertion of the researcher's own story into the process, but it is instead a critical reflection of how the self has shaped the process and practice of the research (Skeggs, 2002). From the earliest part of the process, the research is formulated in line with my ontological and epistemological position (Mason, 2002).

Reflective practice should not be an exercise that shifts attention from the topic being investigated, but rather brings an added dimension to understanding how the research is designed and conducted. My own biography cannot but have influenced my choice of academic texts, how I conducted myself in the interviews and how I have applied an interpretivist stance to the analysis. At no stage of the research process can I claim neutrality because all have been brought forward as a result of my own ontological and epistemological assumptions (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Being reflexive means having to be aware of the effect of the researcher's involvement and how this might influence the participant's answers to questions (not only what they are, but also how they are phrased, and when in the process of the interview they are raised).

Arguably, similarities in age, gender, background and other identity markers between the researcher and the participant can act in some ways to reduce a perceived uneven distribution of power. Though there was, of course, considerable variability in which of these markers I and each of the women share: one of the strengths of semi-structured interviews is that their flexibility means that with due care, potential social barriers are easier to handle (Fielding and Thomas 2001). In the research process, I place myself as a white, working-class woman without children. In any other circumstances I would not consider childlessness to be something I should declare, much less examine; however, I could not discount the possibility that it would be important to the participants, and potentially affect their responses to me. Addressing how differences between researcher and participants permeate research outcomes is an important consideration in the way knowledge is produced. By inserting myself into an academic process of knowledge gathering, (as a postgraduate student), and

with the credentials of the university as a backdrop, my self-positioning is not necessarily how the women in the study place me. What is clear is that to ignore my own identifications or lack of them, would be akin to claiming an objectivity or detachment from the study. Diane Reay (1998) explains:

> It is problematic for feminist researchers to try and find a space between theoretical standpoints which does not address the specificities of their own experience. The end result could be the objectification of both themselves and the women they interview.

> (Reay, 1998: 62)

Perceptions of my position as an academic, or indeed as a non-mother may have influenced the accounts given. This is not something that I can prevent absolutely. However, I am aware of this potential and have been mindful during the analysis stage. It is possible for example to pick up contradictions within the interview that might reveal discomfort for example. There is, of course, a danger that the women involved in the study adjusted their responses either to conceal or mislead. This can happen if participants are concerned about how they presented themselves, perhaps in ways which they believe are inconsistent with being a good mother. Again, this is something that requires close scrutiny during analysis, to pick up any hints from the conversation rather than simply allowing the delusion that there are no consequences of being interviewed and recorded.

Interestingly, only three women asked me if I am a mother, and each time it was after the conversation was over. I have tried to decipher in other responses whether there is any indication of their assumptions but can detect none. Such observations form part of the analysis and rely upon my own 'active and methodical listening' (Bourdieu, 1999b: 608). Ideally this is done throughout the interview, using including diligent care to avoid reading meaning during the conversation, but instead, asking the participant to expand upon what they have said and what they mean.

3.8 Ethics

Ethics refers to the 'moral principles and rules of conduct' that ensure that research is both 'fair and respectful' (Morrow and Richards, 1996: 90-91). As a researcher I have been entrusted with the stories and opinions the women shared in the interviews, and regard the outcome of this study as constructed between us. This brings up a series of concerns regarding confidentiality, participant and researcher anonymity and participant consent for

qualitative data. These issues are addressed formally in the process of gaining ethical approval and put into practice beginning with gaining informed consent.

Informed consent is an agreement based on clear and accessible information, is a cornerstone of ethical research, and is not a one-off event, but is rather an on-going process (Morrow and Richards, 1996). There were no issues related to literacy, and to the best of my ability to determine, all the women understood the consent that they gave. In practice, the ability to halt the interview can be difficult, although one participant asked for the recorder to be switched off when a family member entered the room, although this was only after I suggested it by reaching for the recording device. On one other occasion a partner entered the room, but at that point in the interview attention was being diverted by the child and no request, or indeed offer, was made regarding the recorder. On reflection, it should have been suggested by me. This perhaps highlights issues of confidentiality and anonymity which are key, and although some participants like to be acknowledged by name in a piece of research (Nayak, 2009), it is generally accepted as best practice that anonymity is promised and assured, accordingly names, places, workplaces and so forth are disguised. This is especially important to ensure that identifying a participant does not inadvertently identify others who have not agreed to be researched.

Finally, it is reasonable that people, once asked for their opinions, should expect something to happen, and can sometimes be disappointed if nothing does (Hill, 2006). It is, therefore, important that from the outset I explained that the purpose of the interview was in the process of gaining a qualification and that although it is intended that it will be published as a thesis, there is no way to know at this stage whether there will be any wider dissemination. All participants reacted kindly, and wished me well, and indeed expressed that they had enjoyed the opportunity to speak about their experience as a 'stand-alone' event.

All of the participants were given copies of the Participant Information Sheet, Informed Consent Form and the Recruitment Flyer; all were particularly assured that they would be unidentifiable in the published thesis, and advised that they should simply let me know if they changed their mind at any time before publication about being involved in the research, in which case any request to withdraw would be honoured, without further question.

Approval was sought and gained from the University. It complies with their code of ethics, and with the BSA, following their statement of ethical practice (BSA, 2002)

3.9   Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological considerations that have informed and structured my research. I have positioned this research within a feminist perspective and have drawn from feminist methodology to demonstrate that there are many points at which this research overlaps with its ontological, and epistemological bases. The research does have a political motivation and it begins with the experiences. Having established the perspective from which I have proceeded with the study, I have critically reflected upon the production of knowledge, power in research and the need for reflexivity. I have shown that at times the research process was messy, and especially in the analysis phase a process of iteration and refinement. In the following three chapters, I will present my analysis which is very loosely structured around knowing, being, and doing. I will begin by considering how mothers access, prioritise, and value different forms of advice and expertise.

4   CHAPTER FOUR: Expertise

4.1   Introduction

> With certain things, you know, there are certain basic needs that children need. They need plenty of sleep. They need enough food, healthy-ish food and then, you know, they need to run about a bit and – but I just think that sometimes they're so specific and they say 'oh, you should be doing it like this and you should be doing it like that and if you're not doing it like that, then you're wrong'. And you just think 'well, no'. You know, parents survived for hundreds of years without a parenting expert telling them what to do.

> (Amanda, Psychologist, Mother of two boys)

> 'Mother' as a social category is constituted in relation to the *prior* category 'child': what children are considered to need for development is used to define 'good mothering'

> (Lawler, 2000: 4, emphasis in original)

The precise details of what constitutes 'good' mothering are neither universal nor fixed; neither, as I will show, is what are defined as children's 'needs'. Moreover, for as much as Amanda might suggest that sleep, food, and being allowed to 'run about a bit' are all that children need, neither she nor anyone else in this research subscribe to that philosophy. Her rail against child expertise is insightful though: What counts as knowledge when it comes to raising children? Who has the power to decide? What sort of mother does it produce? Do mothers have to be taught how to bring up their children? The following three chapters are based on the accounts of the women who took part in this research; it is on the basis of what they told me that I will link the mundane and everyday meanings and practices of mothering to the larger political project of producing neoliberal subjects.

As I discussed in chapters one and two, neoliberalism brings with it a conception of the 'ideal citizen', who is self-responsible, self-regulating and entrepreneurial. As the 'architects of a fairer society' (Demos, 2011), it is mothers who are held responsible for raising good citizens and keeping moral order. In this, and the following two chapters, I will discuss the ways that mothers' everyday lives and subjectivities are organised and regulated through those responsibilities. It is this privatising of social and public problems that I argue sits at the heart

of the austerity debate, and that works on and through mothers by inciting self-management. To be sure, appealing to mothers' desire to meet their children's needs is persuasive, and is undeniably pleasurable in many ways, but these pleasures and desires so neatly resemble the 'sensitive mother' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989), who 'naturally' responds to her child's needs that they must be seen as produced as an effect of the same discourse. I will discuss the implications of 'needs-talk' (Fraser, 1989; Lawler, 2000) in more detail in chapter five (5.1). However, at this stage, it is important to note that needs make for a particularly powerful injunction for mothers to act in certain ways when bringing up children[19].

One of the many contradictions in the discourse of mothering is that children are presented as having needs that are universal, measurable and progressive, but also that each child is unique. Mothers are similarly understood paradoxically as natural, but also in need of being taught. What is heavily implied in the political rhetoric and the swathes of 'parenting' literature, is that mothers are not merely expected to do *their* best, but *the* best job of raising their children. To begin building a picture of what that might entail, I now consider how the women in my study encounter and understand 'expertise'. This, I will suggest, relies on an expectation that mothers *ought to* see themselves as having the capacity to learn, gain skills, and then practice what the experts advise. I begin then by exploring the take-up of advice from the 'child-care gurus'. These are the commercially and culturally available books and television child-care experts who all of the women knew about and had accessed to greater or lesser degrees during pregnancy and during their child's first years. It's worth noting that successful child-rearing is almost without fail defined as being child-centred in these guide books, although techniques may differ (Lee *et al*, 2014).

4.2 Setting Expectations

> I think during pregnancy, you buy them because you *should be* buying - or you feel like you should be buying them perhaps…and you're like, 'right, I need this' kind of thing.

> (Vanessa, Paediatrician, mother of 4-month old daughter)

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[19] Lawler notes: Theories of children's needs become so naturalised, so much part of common sense that they cease to be recognised as theories. This can make them particularly intractable; they are not part of a debate, but authoritative knowledges through which normality is constructed (Lawler 2000: 144).

I don't think I even read it. I think I just bought it because I thought I *had to* have a book about a baby [laughs].

(Danielle, Senior Administrator, 2 sons aged 4years and 2 years)

The purchase of advice books is framed for both of these women as an obligation, suggesting that there is more to this than simply learning about their impending motherhood. Buying advice books it seems is coded as the right and responsible thing to be doing[20] (even if following the actual guidance is secondary, or doesn't happen at all; Danielle was not the only participant to tell me she didn't read it, as I will discuss shortly). Viewed through a Foucaultian lens of governmentality, this speaks to how individuals are impelled to behave in particular ways to demonstrate that they are responsible citizens (Rose, 1999; Rose, O'Malley and Valverde, 2006). Moreover, the decision to purchase a 'parenting' book, already positions the women as neoliberal citizens, who are reflexive about the kind of mother they wish to be, are entrepreneurial in actively seeking out how to become it. The books are effectively an invitation to a new relationship with the self, achievable through the work of transformation (Hazleden, 2003). Having firstly accepted that there is a form of expert knowledge that explicates 'good mothering', secondly that they must acquire that knowledge, and thirdly that through its acquisition they will be improved, all points to motherhood as a project of the self. In Foucault's (2003) terms this is closely tied to the way power operates through technologies of the self, which are:

Techniques which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.

(Foucault, 2003: 146)

To be clear, this I would argue is a technique of neoliberal governance that operates across discursive fields, of which motherhood is one. The women in my study do not live in splendid isolation from other fields, and all broadly speaking have grown up with neoliberalism as the political norm. In other words, they come to motherhood already in the embrace of

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[20] Both of these women work for the National Health Service, although to my knowledge don't know one another. Vanessa's specialism is children's medicine. Danielle works in a department that provides support and services for new mothers, and so presumably has access to the kinds of materials and professionals who could provide advice.

neoliberal ideals of being 'subjects of capacity who can lead responsibilised and self-managed lives through self-application and self-transformation' (Scharff, 2014). What is interesting to note is that few of the women spoke of their partner taking the time to read child-care manuals, much less do the labour involved in thinking about the kind of parent they wanted to be.

Amy, for example, explained to me:

> There are a few books I've read, which is not, it's not specific... a lot of them are more about managing yourself. Because that's what I notice, that when I'm having a stressful day, I parent badly… because I'm not managing my own sort of emotions.

She went on to say:

> There's a book called *The Wonder Weeks*[21] that he [her husband] liked that tells you how the baby's developing, not how to parent them, it's about how the baby's developing'

According to Leanne, her husband took no interest in either pregnancy or child-care books, while she took a lot of time to find out what to expect:

> I think because obviously from day one from finding out I was pregnant, I read *all the books* and I did all this and I did all that and my husband, he was excited but he wasn't - he never picked up on any of the books. It didn't really affect him as much in that way. So I think - I don't know. I was like 'well you don't know what you're doing

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[21] The Wonder Weeks is advertised as an 'academy' with the strapline 'No Parenting Advice but Baby Insight' https://www.thewonderweeks.com/no-parenting-advice-but-baby-insight/ For a flavour of what it claims, this is from their website:

Use It or Lose It

The Wonder Weeks helps your baby to get the most out of his development during the most important mental developmental phase of his life.

All babies go through the same changes in the mental development at the same time. This is called a mental leap. With each leap, your baby is given the possibility to learn new things. And every baby wants to learn, much less master, these new skills, as learning these makes him master that 'puzzle' or 'chaos' that is in his brain since the leap. Learning new things helps him to get through the fussy phase and is good for his development for the rest of his life.

With each change and new connection in the brain, your baby enters a sort of "use it, or lose it" phase, in which he tries out his new skills while they are still fresh and new. As a parent, The Wonder Weeks tells you what your baby want to explore after each leap and gives you ideas as to what you can play with him that will stimulate the new brain possibility. The Wonder Weeks tells you what he can use from what point forward, when he can use it and what you can do to get the most out of his development.

so I'm not leaving them with you'. [Laughter]. Not necessarily because of the books but - I don't know. I just - I just felt like I- there wasn't room for mistakes.

Amy's household is established along very traditional lines, with her as a stay-at-home mother and her husband in the traditional breadwinner role. Leanne's is less so, in the sense that she works both inside and outside of the home, however, she takes the lead in carrying out the child-care of their two children. While I am wary of extrapolating too much from such brief mentions of their male partner's attention to advice books, these remarks do suggest some interesting gendered differences. Amy presents the book her husband read as a fairly instrumental and rational guide to measurable development. Rationality has long been coded masculine (Benyon, 2002; Code, 1991; de Beauvoir, 1960), so when Amy also refers to the books she reads as teaching about managing her emotions, which has been coded feminine, the gendered difference must be noted. Leanne's description of her and her husband's approach to child-care advice is different but no less gendered I would suggest. She took on the task of reading 'all the books' (no doubt an exaggeration, but indicative of the endeavour), and having become an expert in her own right takes on all of the responsibilities of early child-care. This has echoes of Shirani *et al's* (2012) findings that men are more reluctant to follow expert 'parenting' advice and draw upon 'resources of masculinity' (Doucet, 2007) including an 'emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance' (Shirani *et al*, 2012: 32).

Reading the accounts of Vanessa, Danielle, Amy and Leanne together can, I suggest, illustrate the problem with talking about 'parenting' instead of 'mothering'. The mental work of deciding there is a need for advice, locating it, reading it, and then sharing it, all happens in addition to evaluating it and implementing it (Walzer, 1996). All of which is being performed by the mothers, and which does not figure in what counts as work. It is certainly possible to argue that mothers-to-be would be more interested in pregnancy advice since it is after all their bodies that will change. However, the same exclusivity cannot be said about child-care advice. At this point, I also want to note the advice mentioned by Amy regarding emotion-management. This is an 'issue' that much of the child-care literature addresses, framed just as Amy did, that being stressed or angry should be hidden from the child.

Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) re-interpretation of Tizard and Hughes (1984) study *Young Children Learning* is instructive here. The original research argued that middle-class mothers were sensitive to their child's emotional development, and reasoned with them, and this

helped to develop confidence and autonomy, leading to later educational success. Walkerdine and Lucey argued that in part the study normalised middle-class practices and pathologised those of working-class mothers. They further argued that hiding power from children as the middle-class mothers did by using reasoning, is designed to create an illusion of autonomy that is so convincing that the child believes herself to be free (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989: 29). In a similar vein to Rose (1989, 1999), they argue that such freedom is, in fact, a sham, but is the basis on which democracy can function. I am not suggesting that the complex and nuanced arguments made by Walkerdine and Lucey, or Rose are considered by the producers of the child-care advice, nor even that they knowingly suggest 'classed' solutions. Rather, I am making the point that practices associated with middle-class mothering are normalised in the advice and made meaningful in the practice of mothers who follow it.

To make one final point before moving forward in this chapter, the injunction to manage her emotions is not questioned by Amy, she went on to say:

> **Amy:** A lot of the time, I'll take my frustration out on [first child, aged 3], and actually, it's because I'm frustrated at myself, and we're running late, I'll get really angry with him, but actually I'm really angry with myself...I mean the book didn't tell me that, I knew all that stuff anyway haha...

To readily accept that emotions are something to be managed and that the root cause is to be found by scrutinising her own actions, suggests that self-help and its basis in psy-knowledges is part of the weft and weave of everyday life. This knowledge and the language around it is not simply the domain of professional psychotherapists and the like, but is repeated across multiple sites; and everywhere it is inviting reflexive, self-scrutiny so that everyone can become an expert in their own subjectivity. As discussed in chapter two (2.3), Rose (1989, 1998) argues that this process of self-actualisation is so normalised that its regulatory power is very largely unnoticed and unchallenged. Moreover:

> The government of the soul depends upon our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of person, the unease generated by a normative judgement of what we are and could become, and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy by following the advice of experts in the management of the self. The irony is that we believe, in making our subjectivity the principle of our personal lives,

our ethical systems, and our political evaluations, that we are, freely, choosing our freedom.

(Rose 1991: 11)

So far in this chapter I have suggested that the decision to buy expert child advice is indicative of an already existing relationship of the self to itself, and as illustrated by Amy, that the advice literature itself invites yet more self-scrutiny. I have also suggested that the take-up of the literature is gendered, and the advice is classed. Furthermore, I have pointed to how the mental work that goes into these practices is so taken-for-granted that it is rendered invisible. I'm aware that such an interpretation packs a lot into what is a short section of the thesis; these themes will all be further developed throughout my exploration of the women's accounts of their everyday mothering.

As I discussed in chapter two (2.10), intensive mothering requires the needs of the child to be prioritised, is costly in terms of time, money and emotions, and has been adopted widely among mothers (Hays, 1996; Perrier, 2012; Shirani *et al*, 2012; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Wall, 2010). It is an approach to raising children that puts a heavy burden on mothers and simultaneously constructs them as either 'good' or 'bad' based on their ability to meet high expectations. Those women with middle-class capitals, a partner and good health are much better positioned to claim and be recognised as a 'good' mother than those who do not have the same resources. Despite the unequal distribution of resources, whether women follow this model is largely understood as a matter of choice, although as my discussion of political rhetoric and early years' intervention in chapter one shows, some mothers are positioned as not knowing and in need of being taught.

4.3 The Good Book?

This chapter is focused on how women use, prioritise and privilege information and advice, as well as the ways in which they compare and judge themselves against it, and against other mothers. I will discuss how mothers negotiate their identity as a 'good mother' through and against competing forms of knowledge. My concern here is with what kind of knowledge is trusted as valid or true, and how that may be interpreted differently for different women, and at different times. Trust in 'truth' is a central plank of Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge; the veracity or otherwise of any claim is not the point, but rather how a discourse becomes accepted as 'true'. Indeed, the 'truth' is under almost

constant re-negotiation through various competing discourses, so what 'counts' as true, normal or natural relies on a particular discourse *appearing* to be and circulating as truthful. Within any discourse the most authoritative voices, those whose 'truth' is legitimated are highlighted, with others barely earning a mention, except as in need of correction or discipline (Foucault, 1977, 1991). It is my contention that the legacies of both Bowlby and Winnicott live on through contemporary child-care advice, as discussed in chapter two (2.10); development psychology remains the accepted 'truth' regarding raising children. In Foucaultian terms, it is mothers who are positioned as in need of discipline, which employs techniques of surveillance and self-surveillance as key mechanisms in the exercise of power.

Feminist scholars have pointed to the limitations of a Foucaultian analysis of gender (Alcoff 1991; McNay, 2000; Moi, 1985) and the lack of attention paid to subjects who are unequally placed in society. Hence his view of power as beyond both structure and agency leaves no room for a subject affected by relations of class, gender, ethnicity, disability and so forth. His theory does much to illuminate the suppositions of neoliberalism, which assumes everyone is equally able to transform themselves, but it is less useful to understand how this may not always be achievable. Bringing a Bourdieusian (1984) analysis and the application of a feminist perspective means that it is possible to understand why it may be more difficult for some women than others to 'make' themselves in the way Foucault seems to suggest is effortless.

If for the moment, we assume that good mothering is achievable through a combination of 'decision making, emotional labour and consideration for the future' (Bryce, 2014: 34), the question remains, can mothers rely upon experiential knowledge, or must this be supplemented with experts who 'know' about everything from sleeping, eating, education to discipline, resilience and autonomy? Of course, it is worth pointing out that experience itself is not unproblematic, and is always both mediated and interpreted[22]. The 'fuzziness' of distinctions between different types of advice means that mothers' relationship to it can be contradictory so that the privileging of experience over professional (or vice versa) is never quite as clear-cut as it might appear. For example, both Laura and Melanie are well-educated

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[22] Laura claims that her 'mum never had a book', (as did several others in the research) however as Laura is a British born woman in her early forties, it is certainly the case that child-rearing manuals were available when she was a child. Ehrenreich and English (1979), and Hardyment (2007) explore the history of these manuals, and provide interesting insights into the different modes of child-care and the competing forms of personhood they engendered. By the time Laura was born, the influence of both Bowlby and Winnicott was well established, as was the best-selling child-care book of all time Dr Spock's *Baby and Child Care* (1946).

middle-class women, both working in professional jobs, Laura is a speech therapist, Melanie, a teacher at a school for 11-16 year-olds with behavioural difficulties. Their attitude to professional expertise is similar:

> **Laura:** so I did- I did read a lot. I, you know, I looked at parenting websites, I looked at the Baby Whisperer[23] book and I was of the opinion that these were the rules. And that's- and that's what I had to do… and I think there is a lot of- of pressure and, you know they do- you know, my mum never had a book and I turned out all right.
>
> Erm, so yes. I was baby whispering I seem to remember. And following this baby whispering routine. Nothing like that crossed my mind when I had [my son]. Because I'd figured out how to do it. And also, he just had to fit in with the family.

Laura's son was born four years after her daughter; her use of books and websites and following the 'baby whispering routine' all relate to her daughter.

> **Melanie:** When they were new, when [my eldest daughter] was new-born and I had no idea what to do with a baby, we bought a Gina Ford[24] book. And I think I spent the first three weeks of her life trying to follow some stupid routine and then the dog ate the book. And then we came and visited my mum and she's, 'oh, just go with the flow', and so I did. And that was fine. And I think I bought a book called Toddler Taming once which was quite useful, with a few ideas on how to deal with toddlers and my eldest child was a particularly challenging toddler. Which was hilarious actually…So I think for sure with [youngest daughter] I don't think I've picked up a parenting book.

If, as I have suggested, seeking expert advice is not only the marker of a good neoliberal citizen but of a good mother, then turning their backs on professional expertise as Laura and Melanie describe might be seen as a risky strategy. I would argue that what they are both telling me is more complicated than it appears. Firstly, as discussed above with Vanessa and Danielle, the buying of the books in themselves is a demonstration of being a responsible

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[23] One of two books mentioned frequently, this, authored by an ex-midwife, Tracey Hogg calls on mothers to see the world from the baby's point of view, to tune into her personality and be 'baby-led'.
[24] The second of the books most frequently mentioned, *The Contented Little Baby Book* advocates routines and regulation, as well as leaving babies to cry for up to sixty minutes to train them out of expecting to be picked up on demand.

mother. Melanie only refers to two books, both of which were discarded, however as I will discuss later in this chapter (4.7) she has also accessed information on the internet. Laura, on the other hand, spoke at some length about accessing information and researching as much as she could before and after the birth of her first child. In part, she suggested because she was an 'older mum' and more aware that there were many unknowns ahead of her (she was 32 at the time, and 40 at the time of our interview). Partly also perhaps 'because that's the way I am' (this she linked to her current studies for a PhD while working 'nearly full-time'). Laura told me that her mental health had suffered and that it was a very difficult and anxious time for her following her daughter's birth. Her decision not to engage so much with the literature when she had her son she said was because of that.

Laura's experience sounded painful in the telling, and it highlights the point I made earlier that there is a great deal of mental work that goes into raising children. It isn't isolated to acquiring knowledge of course: the day-to-day planning and organising to meet basic needs, taking part in activities, worrying about myriad issues, are all part and parcel of the women's everyday lives. Both Walzer (1996) and Hays (1996) found the majority of this work is done by women, and as the accounts of the women in my study show, this remains the case. Melanie's experience was related to me in much more light-hearted terms than Laura's and suggests her concern over accessing information was less stressful. What is clear is that neither Melanie nor Laura have simply ignored the advice of course but rather that both, having gained experience during their first pregnancy, birth and child rearing, have the confidence to underplay the value of professional expertise in favour of their own acquired knowledge and experience.

Miller (2005) suggests that although expert advice is privileged before and shortly after birth when women come to realise that their own experience does not match the idealised version presented in advice manuals, they begin to lose faith in expert knowledge. This is what Choi *et al*, (2005) refer to as 'the myth of motherhood' that mothers' own experience rarely meets, but the risk attached to admitting to struggling that means few do. As Miller puts it 'expectations are replaced by experiences' (2005: 61), and to maintain a sense of ontological security, develop a narrative that makes sense. Ricoeur (1980: 186, cited in Lawler 2009: 19) conceptualises narrativisation as a 'spiral movement' in which the past is reinterpreted through the lens of the present and thus becomes part of the present. While it may certainly be true that Melanie and Laura are, I would suggest, trying to make sense of a

less than perfect experience by saying that the expert advice was faulty; the confidence gained as the child grows and certainly when there is a second child, made a difference for many of the women in the study. For Hannah, who has two children, who bought a number of books 'you read all the books in the world, nothing can prepare you for having kids'. Danielle remarked about her second son 'I wasn't as by-the-book with him, at all', and Amanda compared the gasps of amazement at everything her first child did by telling me 'with the second one, you're just like 'oh, he'll grow out of that'. The message coming from each of these women was that they are much more relaxed having gained experience and that as they gained confidence in recognising and understanding their child's needs, they developed self-reliance (Miller, 2005).

The mothers I have discussed so far are all well-educated, are partnered, white, and either they, their partner, or both are securely employed, most are home-owners. These details matter for a number of reasons that relate to the purchase and use of expert child-care advice. The first is quite simply a matter of affordability. Only four of the women either told me they had not, or did not tell me they had, bought a book. Lina, who is a mother of a 3-year old daughter, told me that no, she hadn't bought books, but had watched *Supernanny*. She had wanted to buy a child-care book, but had been unable to because: 'my husband was like, 'don't you know? You're a mother''. Lina works as an office administrator, but only four hours per week, and had told me about the struggles she and her husband had in finding work. The second was Eleanor, who works four days per week for a charity, and whose partner also works. They have a son who is 11 months old. Eleanor simply ignored my question when I asked if she had bought a book, so I cannot be certain, but she did go on to tell me about using 'google' and a mobile app that sends monthly updates about stages of development. The third was Erin, who is the youngest participant at 22: her son is 2 years old. Erin's partner is a full-time student and she works part-time for Sure Start assisting teenage mothers, she told me she had 'just read the Mumsnet things'. The last of the women who hadn't bought a book was Rebecca, who is 26 with an 11 month-old son; immediately prior to our meeting she had been unemployed since her baby as born, but was planning to head off to Africa[25] to begin working for a charity just a couple of days after our meeting. Her answer was 'I think, to be honest, I know they say it comes naturally but most

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[25] In the interest of preserving anonymity, I have chosen not to be more specific about Rebecca's destination country.

of it seems to have come naturally'. This is clearly an interesting viewpoint, and like Lina's husband, essentialises mothering, as normal for women. Rebecca is the only mother in my study to tell me she follows the guidance of 'attachment parenting', which as I discussed in chapter two (2.7, and 2.10), is especially labour intensive and underpinned by claims to nature and biology.

In addition to the cost of buying the books, I would suggest that there is a classed dimension to the reticence to engage with the child-care literature. I discussed in chapter two (2.10) the normalising of middle-class mothering practices and their incorporation into child-care advice. Furthermore, many of the features of the current advice reflect the sensitive mothering theorised by Walkerdine and Lucey (1989). One of their important insights was that middle-class girls were socialised differently to working-class girls. Lucey (2004: 191) sets out the key features of middle-class practices:

> the lack of clear boundaries between work and play, the turning of domestic work into educative play and the importance of rational argument, as a means of power for the young girls themselves. Alongside this was the turning of passionate emotions into nice and nasty feelings, sensible and silly behaviour.

The features of the current child-care advice will be very familiar to those women who grew up in middle-class households since the 1980s. For those women, the likelihood is that reasoning and almost automatically turning interactions into pedagogic opportunities is 'second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990). For Bourdieu, early socialisation in the home, especially by the mother, is central to the formation of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). It is here that we first unconsciously internalise the knowledge, dispositions and attitudes that formulate the habitus, which is 'the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). The alignment of practices from their own childhood means that for some mothers the advice fits with what they already know and take for granted. In other words, they already have a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990: 67). Adapting to, and adopting the current advice is then easier for some than others.

When I asked Lina how her mother brought her and her siblings up she described a happy home, where, as the eldest she had some responsibility towards looking after her brothers and sisters. I asked if she was the same kind of mother as her own, to which Lina responded:

Lina: My mum brought me up in this *stupid* cloud. I didn't know anything, like - well I did. No, I didn't. No wonder she used to call me stupid, though.

I certainly didn't have the impression that Lina took issue with her mother, but this doesn't paint the picture of the careful use of language to encourage autonomy that Walkerdine and Lucey describe. Nor Rebecca, who told me:

Rebecca: She's not very sympathetic. Like, when we got a bit older and we would cry about something, she wouldn't really be sympathetic to that. She sort of sees crying as, like, well there's no point in crying. It won't solve anything.

To be clear, I do not presume to know the relationship any of the women had with their mother. I am simply pointing to the ways they describe their mother for an indication of how they were socialised. Eleanor's description of her childhood, which I will talk more about in this chapter, sounds very close to how Walkerdine and Lucey spoke of working-class mothers and daughters. We had the following exchange when talking about trying to 'be perfect':

JC: So again, just looking back, did your mum ever shout at you?

Eleanor: Yeah. [Laughs].

JC: Is- is your life ruined?

Eleanor: No. [Laughter] I turned out alright.

The laughter from Eleanor and her tone suggested to me that shouting was not unusual in her childhood home, not in a way that was problematic, but also not suggestive of the emotionally controlled 'sensitive mothering' theorised by Walkerdine and Lucey.[26] When I asked Erin about her mother, she told me 'I was a bit of a tearaway' and 'ran off' with her boyfriend when she was aged fourteen:

Erin: And actually, that had nothing on how she brought me up, erm, and all she could do and what she did best was just, kind of, keep an open arm and wait for me

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[26] As a minor autobiographical aside, I also grew up in a household where shouting was not an unusual form of communication, and although sometimes upsetting, was no indication to me of a lack of love. Ours was a working-class household, some 20 or more years earlier than the women in my study, and clearly times and advice change. My reading that shouting is not necessarily problematic may be shaped by my own background and experience of a loud, but loving home.

to come back and never shout and never be, like, cross. She was great, actually. And, erm - I think it's very easy to…I think a lot of people judged her.[27]

The story provides some interesting background to Erin, although it doesn't tell me much about whether not shouting or being cross was unusual or the norm for her mother. Perhaps the fact that it is noteworthy in the story indicates that another reaction seemed more likely to Erin.

By drawing out a little more about the women who have not bought books, it is possible to see that costs may be prohibitive, but also that the guidance itself may not fit so easily with working-class mothers' dispositions. In the first place, this could merely be off-putting, and seem not to speak to them. I suggest that is unlikely, the messages are almost ubiquitous across different channels. What I would argue is that it is simply more work to digest and make sense of, for women for whom it is not 'second-nature'. This is not to say that Lina, Rebecca, Eleanor and Erin do not mother intensively: they do, as I will illustrate further as the thesis progresses. It is rather to argue that the books are written in such a way as to address a particular (middle-class) kind of mother, and may act to exclude others.

Before moving on to more formal expertise, I want to turn to Amanda, who is a practising psychologist and who I quoted to open this chapter. She is the mother of two sons and so her own experience as well as her professional training combine when she tells me about the competing claims of child-care experts:

> **Amanda:** There's so many programmes, like *Supernanny*… And in three days, she will solve all your parenting problems. How bad is that going to make - parents are watching this and I'm quite, like - I'm just sitting there thinking 'what a ridiculous …' There's obviously so much going on off camera.…But some parents will be sitting there thinking 'oh right, okay' and they'll try it and they'll fail and then they'll feel awful that they've failed because, well, she did it on the telly.

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[27] Erin's mention of other people casting judgement is interesting. Being judged is a prominent feature of many of the women's accounts, and I will return to it in chapter six; it's worth noting however that from a Bourdieusian perspective it is telling of how Erin positions her mother (and herself) in relation to others. Moral judgements are both classed and classing (Lawler, 2008; Skeggs, 1997), but it also speaks to an awareness of the surveillant gaze (Foucault, 1995).

The programmes clearly exercised Amanda, and she spoke at some length about them, before coming to the conclusion:

> **Amanda:** I do think some of it is just - it just makes you feel like, 'oh, God', you know, 'there's so much that I should be doing that I'm not doing' and … it just makes me quite angry actually. And it just makes me sort of think - I just think children are so individual and, you know, you- you can't just generalise.

Although Amanda suggests that such programmes and the plethora of advice available can be damaging, she does so in a way that distances herself from their effects, stressing her own ability to be discerning. However, by the end, she has contradicted herself by telling me that the programmes do make her question her abilities. What is particularly interesting is that although Amanda is not taken in by the programme (she knows there's 'a lot going on behind the scenes'), she does not wholly question the underlying assumptions, that self-surveillance, and working on the self, are the key to success. Nonetheless, she does resist the notion that expert knowledge is unquestionable by appealing to her own (professionally acquired) understanding of children's individuality to justify her anger.

There is a growing body of literature about the transformative project of 'make-over' television programmes, and their presentation of classed, gendered and racialised bodies as flawed, but 'amenable to reinvention' (Gill, 2007: 163; see also, Jensen, 2010a; McRobbie, 2013; Skeggs and Wood, 2008). Following a regular format, where a problem is identified, often by the participant herself, an expert monitors and evaluates, presents a solution and the problem is solved, usually by the woman changing her behaviour. *Supernanny* and *House of Tiny Tearaways* were the two programmes mentioned by women in my research, and both follow broadly similar formats to the make-over shows. Both of these programmes draw heavily on psychologised language and solutions to child-care problems and are, I would suggest, key platforms where psy-knowledges attached to mothering become normalised. This is not, of course, the case for Amanda, whose work as a psychologist puts her at the heart of the constellation of professions (psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy, but also counselling, nursing, social work and health visitors) that Rose (1985) identifies as central to the construction of subjectivity. As a practitioner Amanda is already well-versed in the therapeutic discourses that 'construct personal and interpersonal experiences (…) in individualised, interiorised, and psychological ways' (Guilfoyle, 2005: 106). This clearly fits with her comment that 'children are so individual' which is another way of

claiming that there is a 'true self' to which there is access, and on which it is possible to work towards autonomy. In a discussion of make-over programmes in general Skeggs (2010) notes:

> The middle-class concern with uniqueness and individuality is exemplified by the consistent emphasis placed on depth psychology via excavation – finding and promoting the idea of the inner self. What we see is the paradoxical production of normative uniqueness: as if the individual is unique but actually corresponds to the middle-class particular-universal.[28]

(Skeggs, 2010: 77)

In much the same way as the advice books then, the television programmes that Amanda, and others (for example Lina), talked about, present a way of bringing up children that is associated with middle-class practices. The programmes also position their (racialised, classed, and gendered) participants as not knowing how to raise their children without the aid of expert advisors. Indeed, Amanda's comment that other parents watching might not realise that 'there's so much going on off-camera' positions other viewers as the presumed target audience, as ignorant. The programmes are, I would argue contributing to a discourse of mothering that not only makes 'good' mothering in the image of the middle-class but also the 'good' neoliberal subject, ready to work on and transform herself.

In this section, I have suggested that accessing the child-care books is more complex than it may appear. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, becoming 'expert' is part of the process of being able to claim value, and is particularly prized by neoliberalism as a means to achieve self-managing subjects. While deciding to buy the book (if not necessarily going by-the-book) can be seen as already taking up the mantle of self-responsibility, it is a process that has some cost. Firstly, it is clearly part of mothers' labour but is so taken-for-granted that it doesn't 'count' as work. Yet, as illustrated by Melanie, however light-heartedly, the books don't necessarily make mothering easier, and there is always another book to feel impelled to try out later. For Laura, the cost of trying to 'get it right' was anxiety and pressure with her first child, which in part she claims were caused by researching and trying

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[28] [. . .] the middle class then colonised the resulting empty social and cultural space, with the result that it has become the particular-universal class. That is to say, although it was in fact a particular class with a specific history, nonetheless it has become the class around which an increasing range of practices are regarded as universally 'normal', 'good' and 'appropriate'." (Savage, 2003:536, cited in Skeggs, 2010: 70)

to keep up with the advice. For both of these women, the experience of caring for their first child seems to have lessened the need for such additional work. I have also suggested in this section that guide books and the advice contained within them may exclude some mothers, firstly on financial grounds, but secondly by a narrow focus on a particular style of raising children.

In the final part of this section, I have contended that reality television programmes contribute to the wider discourse of mothering by drawing on and reproducing familiar tropes of who is 'failing', who they can be transformed into, and how. From a Foucaultian perspective, everyone has at least *some* power. The state doesn't have all of the power, but it is sustained by its flow through networks such as cultural products like books and television, health and social care practitioners, which I will discuss in the next section, and the family and friends to whom I will turn in the final part of this chapter.

4.4   Breast is Best[29]

While the books and television programmes I discussed in the previous section are created and marketed as child-care experts, it is in the more formal environments of the medical and healthcare professions that expertise has a more authoritative voice. One issue that the majority of the women referred to during our conversations was breastfeeding, which is, according to Faircloth (2013), the most conspicuously scrutinised of mothering activities. Perhaps testament to that is the women in this research linked it across the topics of our discussions. Advice about breastfeeding spans the guide-books, doctors and midwives, health visitors, and Sure Start centres. The most frequently mentioned were classes run by the National Childbirth Trust (NCT[30]). There is a slightly more balanced approach to advertising now than when the 'Breast is Best' campaign ran in 1999 so that now bottle-

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[29] I take the title for this section from Stanway A and Stanway P (1978) Breast is Best, London: Pan Books and a government campaign that ran in 1999 designed to persuade mothers to breastfeed. It led to controversy for its lack of sensitivity to mothers who could not for any reason, breastfeed. According to the BBC archive: The Government says the breastfeeding rate is particularly low among Britain's poor, with just 50% of mothers in the lowest income bracket breastfeeding their baby at birth, compared with more than 90% in the highest income level. London and the South East has the highest post-birth breastfeeding rates with 76%. In Scotland, the level falls to 55% and reaches just 45% in Northern Ireland. The national average is 66%. By four months, only 33% of babies are breastfed in the South East, 24% in Scotland and 12% in Northern Ireland. Mothers who breastfeed are at a lower risk of pre-menopausal breast cancer, ovarian cancer and hip fractures later in life. American researchers have found the risk of breast cancer can be reduced by up to 25% by breastfeeding. Breastfeeding mothers **also get their figures back more quickly than those who bottle-feed [!]** (My emphasis) BBC (1999) http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/345693.stm

[30] NCT website: https://www.nct.org.uk/parenting/feeding

feeding and formula milk are not demonised as was claimed about the 1999 campaign (Murphy, 1999). Nonetheless, the NCT website currently shows eight articles about breastfeeding, and three about bottle feeding. According to the NHS Choices[31] website, 73% of mothers start to breastfeed at birth, but by 6 months this reduces to 34%. Concerns about breastfeeding rates among poorer mothers resulted in a government scheme being piloted in 2014[32] for mothers to receive £200 in food vouchers, although it has now been discontinued. According to one of the women in my research, Heather, mothers are more pressured by Sure Start staff depending upon where they live. We had been talking about the centre that Heather uses, which she told me:

> **Heather:** It's better - not better social class but, erm, compared to somewhere maybe, like, erm, down in Riverton, because one of the mums did comment that when she left the hospital, she was breastfeeding and she got about five phone calls a day offering her support and advice and she thought was she doing something wrong because I never got any phone calls. And they openly admitted - she's a teacher and they openly admitted to her - they didn't know she was a teacher - they openly admitted to her that it was because of her postcode.

Statistically, there is a class difference in the take-up of breastfeeding, which seems to explain the different experiences of Heather and her friend. I will discuss the 'spatialisation of class' (Mooney and Johnstone, 2005; Lawler, 2005; T. Slater, 2015) in chapter six (6.2), however, my research tells me little about why that might be. When I asked Erin about her own experience she told me that she breastfed her son until he was eighteen months old but that in some ways she found the experience quite isolating: 'it was pretty much just the three of us'. Although she attended a breastfeeding group she 'probably got on better with, like, the kind of younger bottle-feeders than the kind of, middle-aged breastfeeders', which indicates that Erin believes that there is an age divide in who takes up breastfeeding[33]. Erin, as I mentioned above, works for Sure Start, assisting younger mothers, so I asked about her experience of whether they also are more likely to bottle-feed.

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[31] NHS Choices: http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/benefits-breastfeeding.aspx
[32] NHS Choices: http://www.nhs.uk/news/2014/11November/Pages/Breastfeeding-voucher-scheme-shows-promise.aspx

[33] This view is supported in a press release by NCT (2012) https://www.nct.org.uk/press-release/infant-feeding-survey-nct-response

> **Erin:** I think it's a lot of pressure from their families and a lot of pressure from possibly their partners as well. I mean, I work a lot with teenage parents from [two areas of town of high deprivation[34]] it does tend to be the whole 'food is love' thing. So their man wants to feed them or the granny wants to feed them. And it's kind of, they don't actually get that time themselves to try and, kind of, do it.

There is limited research into teenage mothers and breastfeeding, although Thomson *et al* (2011) found that across their research women felt 'embarrassed and vulnerable' and this was 'especially true for the younger women' in their study (2011: 78). Clearly, what Erin is relating is her interpretation of what may be the reason why the young women she works with are less likely to breastfeed. According to the women in my study there is a great deal of pressure to breastfeed, and not simply from the healthcare professionals, but also advertising, other mothers, and for Michelle, her own sense of guilt:

> **Michelle:** I think that's where a lot of the guilt comes from... it's people think that they're not doing what they should be doing because somebody else says that they should be doing this. I mean breastfeeding is the prime example... Yeah. But it was just - it was just what worked for us and it was because he needed it [formula milk] because he was small. But there is that awful judgement that you get whereby people say 'oh, formula feeding, you're not giving your child the best', then you know, 'how can you not try?'. But you don't realise sometimes that people can't. Some circumstances are against them.

> **JC:** Did anybody ever say anything to you or is it just what you're thinking?

> **Michelle:** Nobody said anything directly to me but you see it a lot. Like - you know that the judgement is out there and particularly when you see, like, the formula advertising of TV, they always have to say that breast milk is the best but you can always use this... And it's like it's - like it's the lazy option or something to use formula. It's the easy option. It's not. It's a right faff making formula all the time. It would be a lot easier just to breastfeed

Michelle works for the National Health Service, offering advice and guidance to new mothers; although not medically trained she is very well educated in child development. Her

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[34] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation

own experience of not breastfeeding was not by choice, her son was born prematurely and formula milk was advised to her at the hospital. She spoke to me about the issue at length, explaining the intricacies of the care and advice she received, as well as the medical issues related to her health and his birth. There is, I suggest, much to be learned from Michelle's account, which I have included here to give a sense of how moralised and normalised the discourse around breastfeeding is, and why it may be so difficult to resist. The sheer detail she went into, which I have not fully reproduced here, suggests that this is a subject that *matters*. Murphy (1999), argues that 'By deciding to formula feed, the woman exposes herself to the charge that she is a ''poor mother'' who places her own needs, preferences and convenience above her baby's welfare' (Murphy 1999: 187), and that how women talk about it is a way 'to establish their moral credentials' (Murphy, 1999: 191).

Michelle justifies her use of formula milk as beyond her control because of her son's medical issues, which suggests that the 'freedom to choose' does not extend to the freedom to choose 'inappropriately'. To be clear, I am not making a judgement about whether bottle-feeding is an appropriate choice, but rather that choice is constrained here by how closely breastfeeding is related to 'good' motherhood. Furthermore, she specifies how much guilt is attached to the decision before going on to say it is a matter on which other people pass judgement. This, she then turns back by saying that nothing has been said to her, and so this is perhaps more a case of self-surveillance. When she then remarks that it could be seen as the lazy option, it reveals that as Murphy (1999) noted, she is at risk of being 'accused' of prioritising her own needs. Breastfeeding, it is clear has come to stand for much more than simply nourishing the child, and is an important site of value. The young women that Erin spoke about seem able to resist the narrative, which when read alongside Michelle is intriguing. I did not speak with those young women, and so rely on Erin's limited description of them as young, from a deprived neighbourhood, and attending 'parenting' classes.

I would suggest that this positions them poorly against the ideal neoliberal maternal subject (Allen *et al*, 2015; McRobbie, 2013), with her endless capacity for self-transformation. I discuss teenage mothers in section 4.7 of this chapter, but for the moment I would suggest that these young women do not sit outside of the discourse of mothering; indeed, as my discussion in chapter one illustrates, they are at the centre of the political debate. This is rather to point towards what Foucault (1998: 95) argued: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of

exteriority in relation to power'. Again, Bourdieu's concept of habitus can add a dimension that I argue is missing from Foucault's work; children grow up understanding what is 'for them' and what is not:

> Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits, sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, place and so forth from which one is excluded.

(Bourdieu 1984: 471)

In light of the resistances of the young women that Erin spoke about, and the extent to which breastfeeding matters, I have suggested that it reveals something about the classing of both the 'good' mother and the ideal neoliberal citizen. This is not, however, clear-cut. Erin herself is a young working-class mother, and yet she chose to breastfeed until her son was eighteen months old. I would suggest that this is influenced by the work that she does for Sure Start, part of which is to act as a facilitator for the young mothers in accessing professional advice. This means that her work colleagues are the very people who are arranging and running breastfeeding classes, and in which she also helps the young mothers. Entry to this new field of social relations positions Erin more favourably than the other young mothers, as her stocks of social and cultural capitals increase (Bourdieu, 1990). At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that embedded within Amanda's rail against 'parenting experts' was a question of whose knowledge 'counts'. So far I have discussed the use of cultural forms such as guidebooks and television programmes, before turning my attention to more formal expertise by exploring breastfeeding. I now want to consider how experience is valued, and under what circumstances it may 'count'.

4.5   Mother Knows Best

I want to begin this section as a continuation of the last by looking at Eleanor's decision not to breastfeed, which interestingly she framed as making an active choice, yet when she described her experience it was clear that it was physically extremely difficult, talking about trying to express milk every three hours 'all for like, the tiniest little drop'. Unlike the young mothers I referred to in the previous section, however, there is an opportunity now to consider Eleanor's 'accountability strategy' (Strathern, 2000), that is, how she explains her decision, which illustrates there is an emotional cost to going against formal advice.

Several of the women told me they don't follow advice, but rely on their own experience, as I discussed above regarding Melanie and Laura. My conversation with Eleanor was peppered with details of when she asked her mother, cousins and sister-in-law for advice. Eleanor had very high hopes for a perfect pregnancy, birth and motherhood. In the event, due to complications in the pregnancy her son was born prematurely, spending a long time in the hospital and receiving medical help once she brought him home. The healthcare professionals in the hospital were 'brilliant – like family'. The use of the term 'family' is high praise from Eleanor, who throughout our conversation privileges the advice she receives from her own mother above any other source. With her mother's approval, Eleanor came to the conclusion that breastfeeding was not right for either her or her son, but when faced with telling her nurse, was afraid that her decision would reflect badly on her:

> **Eleanor:** My milk hadn't come yet because obviously, I was three months off. So I found it really difficult to … And the- just the pressure of other- other mums I met at antenatal groups and things, or 'oh, you're not breastfeeding. Oh, you're …' and when I start - because I had to just decide not to. And I was absolutely devastated. I broke my heart. But so - I felt like a complete failure because I couldn't provide milk for him. But that was not through any fault of anybody, it just was the situation. And- and- and I was happily bottle fed. I think it should be more about encouraging mums who want to- to breastfeed. Giving them the right advice and information and help to do it, but not - there's just so much pressure… I asked my mum about everything.

> **JC:** And what did she say?

> **Eleanor:** She said if you don't want to, you don't - you just tell them you don't want to. And then it's - but then when I came home there was like, a breastfeeding nurse that used to come out and see us and stuff. And she put so much pressure on us to do it. I was scared…I had to tell her that I'd stopped breastfeeding. That's how bad it was. Like, I- I was terrified because I thought 'oh gosh, she's going to be so judgemental and she's going to think I'm an awful mum, an awful person just because I don't want to breastfeed'.

The circumstances are almost the same as those of Michelle. Both women had their babies prematurely, and hadn't begun lactating. Both tried, and found it difficult. What is interesting is that both try very hard to justify their decision, because there is 'pressure' to

conform. There is a 'real' reason, it's not her fault, she 'knows' the 'right thing' and can demonstrate her knowledgeability. The similarity between the two is quite telling; what is more, the 'appeals' that Eleanor makes map almost identically to those found by Murphy (1999) almost twenty years earlier. She condemns the professionals who 'should be more encouraging'; makes a claim for maternal autonomy through her mother 'just tell them you don't want to'; and in the end prioritises the 'lay' advice from her mother. I would suggest that each 'defence' is a way for Eleanor to try and negotiate an identity as a 'good' mother.

Feeding children was an issue raised by many of the mothers, as was the pressure to breastfeed, and as shown in research by Murphy (1999), Faircloth (2010) and Bryce (2014) entails a complex negotiation of maternal identity. It is an issue with a heightened sense of scrutiny for mothers and it became clear during our conversations, an important aspect of being able to claim a moral self and its presentation to the outside world. The prevailing sense of being watched, not only by health professionals but by others, emerges as a way to understand the power of surveillance on mothers. Although more aware of being judged than of judging, mothers nonetheless actively self-reflect, compounding the gaze with relentless self-scrutiny (Rose 1989).

Being responsible for decisions that impact on others carries a higher level of scrutiny both internally and externally, and as the responsibility for the child rests predominantly with the mother, this is particularly relevant to the choices they make, and the potential risk to their moral identity (Murphy, 1999). Although Eleanor expressed trepidation about sharing her decision with her breastfeeding nurse, it is clear that she negotiates her self-definition as a good mother by claiming the 'lay' expertise of her mother in higher regard. I found this more frequently in the accounts of the working class mothers I spoke with, such as Eleanor herself and Nicola, the mother of one daughter, who again stressed the importance of her own mother's advice.

Nicola tells me that she is a confident mother and that her youngest sibling is the same age as her own daughter, so she and her mother are sharing a lot of advice, and help one another out with child-care. She takes special pleasure from the fact that she recognised that her daughter required medical assistance, despite the fact that doctors did not, and only through her own persistence was her daughter diagnosed with what was a distressing condition, but one that was easily remedied upon correct diagnosis.

Nicola: She was - she - as soon as I stopped breastfeeding at five months, she suffered acid reflux. Screaming out. Went to the doctors six times a week and I was suggesting things, they didn't suggest anything and I was suggesting everything, like lactose intolerance.

While it is true that Nicola felt the power of the medical professional, she also turned to first her mother, then other mothers and the internet to search out a solution to her daughter's problem. Her recounting of her experience was lengthy, involving not only the acid reflux but also a problem with geographic tongue[35], again undiagnosed despite repeated visits to the doctor's surgery and asking for help from her health visitor. Despite her frustration, Nicola continued to pursue the matter and also did some research herself. When asked how it made her feel, to have struggled so hard to be taken seriously by her doctor, her response was she felt pride, that she had known there was something more wrong, and more than that, she had 'stood up to' the professionals.

JC: How does it make- how does it make you feel about your skills as a mother?

Nicola: Erm - pretty good, like, knowing that I knew it was something else. And- and for my first one. And then- and listening off other people as well helped loads. So - that was a good thing, was listening to other mothers. Helped more than what, er, listening to other doctors did.

Expertise is of course contested, in particular between health professionals and mothers; research into the unbalanced relationship between mothers of disabled children reveals little opportunity within medical encounters for mothers' experience to be taken into account (McKeever and Miller, 2004). I'm unaware whether the doctor that Nicola dealt with was male or female, so cannot comment on whether there was a gender imbalance in the relationship, however, Nicola describes herself as 'a bit rough, I'm dead common me like'. She laughingly told me this in response to my saying what a nice town she lives in. In light of this, I posit, that classed assumptions may have played a part in her encounter with the doctor.

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[35] A common condition affecting the surface of the tongue that makes eating certain foods uncomfortable (details available at https://www.dentalhealth.org/tell-me-about/topic/mouth-conditions/geographic-tongue)

According to Skeggs (1997), class divisions are drawn along the lines of respectability and mothering an important field in which respectability is judged. This judgement has a tendency to be made on the basis of behaviours, accent, ways of comportment and so forth, hence Nicola's self-description is, I suggest, salient. For Vincent (2010) motherhood is a site of class production and reproduction that exposes some, who do not conform to the normative ideal (aspirant middle-class), as 'morally insufficient' (Vincent, 2010: 118). This risk of exposure drives women to present themselves in ways that exhibit their 'goodness'; In the telling of these experiences to me, Eleanor and Nicola were both at pains to demonstrate that they found advice and mobilised it, whether it is 'lay' advice, professional, or a mixture of the two. In the process they worked to become more expert in their own right, which I would suggest is just as much part of the wider demands of neoliberalism as for middle-class mothers. To reiterate, it is very difficult to completely resist such a moralised and responsibilised discourse as that of mothering. Nonetheless, the difficulty evident in both Michelle's and Eleanor's experiences speaks to the distinction made between professionals and mothers themselves for who 'counts' as the authoritative voice of having children. With little resistance, of course, this means that women are part of the flow of power, and the reinforcement of discourse.

4.6   Is that you?

Research that has considered the classed differences in maternal practices often suggests that middle-class mothers are more future oriented, whilst working class parents are more focussed on the present (Gillies, 2005; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Lareau, 2011). By contrast, both middle-class and working-class mothers in this study were forward focussed although there were differences in how they saw the future for their children. Their decision-making relies on knowledge of the perceived risks inherent in each possible strategy, however, it also relies heavily on access to the range of possibilities, and this is not distributed evenly across society. This is not to suggest that middle-class mothers are not also beset by doubts about their mothering ability, simply that it takes different forms and access to 'expert' knowledge it seems is no defence against uncertainty. As Miller puts it:

> the practiced, recognisable, gendered and embodied self, which makes up our identity is challenged by the experience of first-time motherhood, over time a new social self as a mother has to be learned

(Miller 2005: 15)

So, despite being medically trained, Heather, a paediatric nurse, and Vanessa, a medical doctor whose specialism is paediatrics, both express unwillingness to claim expertise as mothers. For both, neither their existing knowledge, nor the ability to source and understand specialist information is sufficient to avoid being doubtful. Indeed, both were keen to stress that looking after a baby medically is not the same as mothering her.

Having access to information alone then is seen as at best unhelpful, compelling mothers to seek advice elsewhere. In so doing, they looked to other kinds of expertise including their own, garnered through knowing their own children, from the peer support of mothers who held similar social positions to them and family expertise of their own mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts who had experience of bringing up children. In this way, expertise was perceived as something far broader than that lying with professionally trained individuals. Heather is very clear in her distinction between her professional and personal identities:

> **Heather:** However, it is very different being a mummy to being a nurse. And that's like, taking off your nursing hat and being a mummy is sometimes quite a challenge.
>
> **JC:** Yeah. What - tell me why that's different?
>
> **Heather:** When she was four months old, her weight had kind of tailed off, plateaued and she was feeding, breastfeeding constantly and the health visitor was like, 'no don't wean her'. And I was like, 'I think she needs weaned. I really think she needs weaned' and the health visitor was very firm. 'No, she doesn't need weaned' and all that. So in the end, the GP saw us and the GP was, like, 'oh, her weight has totally dropped', because she'd had a cough for three weeks…and the GP referred us to the kids' doctors at the RVI? Went in there and the first thing the consultant said was, 'oh, she needs weaned'.
>
> **Heather:** And I said - and he sort of laughed about it and looked at me and he knows me through my job. I said, 'it's really hard taking off your nursing hat and listening to another professional'.
>
> **JC:** So which wins out for you? Do you feel stronger as the nurse who's capable who knows what she's talking about or the mummy that's not sure?

> **Heather:** I think it's - I think it's really a grey area because there's some things that I think, 'oh, if I was on the ward and that was a child on the ward, I would do this'.

And on another occasion:

> **Heather:** And, like, my mum and dad were actually here and I was asking my mum for advice. And mum was like, 'you know what to do' and I was like, 'yeah, I know but …' and it was just that panic of it was the first time that [my daughter] was sick.

While Vanessa, although acknowledging that she is seen as a useful resource by friends and family, who ask her opinion about their children, separates the 'theory' from the 'practice' of motherhood.

> **Vanessa:** I'm a paediatrician. [Chuckles].
>
> **JC:** Oh wow. So you knew everything!
>
> **Vanessa:** I don't know everything at all. I know all the theory [laughs] but not about motherhood. But I know about children. [Chuckles].

Vanessa tells me that she is no longer breastfeeding her daughter who is four months old, but that she continues to go to the breastfeeding support group every week.

> **Vanessa:** And- and that's nice because whilst you know the theory, it's nice for someone else to say this is something my baby did when she was twelve weeks old or whatever.

What is interesting is that both women are confident in their role at work, and are I assume a source of reassurance for the mothers of sick children they deal with at work. Yet both take comfort in attending classes and speaking to other mothers, and neither is immune from the lure of baby books, although Vanessa is very clear that she does not use them unreflectively.

> **Vanessa:** I think I've been quite selective in the ones I've used. For instance, there's all - there's all the Gina Ford. Which is one extreme to the complete opposite of Gina Ford, kind of you- let the baby kind of just relax and do what you do. The- the books - I think - I think they put a lot of pressure on people. And I don't think they're right for every baby. And I don't think the whole book's right for one baby, I think little bits of it are probably right for little bits of the baby.

In much the same way as Melanie and Laura discussed above, Vanessa is already sure that the combination of her expert knowledge and the experience she is gaining in looking after her first child, will improve her standing as a 'good' mother.

> **Vanessa:** Whether that's because of my experience but, because of my experience with her, I think things might change if I had another child; I might be a better mum. But that's through experience of being the mum and being around mums, I think.

Although Vanessa can show a level of expertise beyond that of most new parents, she is demonstrating here her commitment to work on herself, to be a 'better mum'. In part, this can be understood in light of the need for mothers to make decisions on behalf of their children, who are not capable of making these choices for themselves. In other words, as discussed in chapter two (2.10) the '*non-negotiable moral obligation* to put children's needs first' (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2000: 791, emphasis in original). This is not for a moment to suggest that they don't feel a responsibility towards the children in their care, but instead to suggest that the mother-child relationship is not reducible to a set of skills or techniques, nor solely to a set of obligations. Neither is it simply a loving relationship, but a complex mix of all of these personal, social and political factors.

In this discussion about how women learn about mothering, I have so far discussed books, television, professional and lay sources of advice. I now want to turn my attention to social media, focusing primarily on *Mumsnet,* which many of the women access, and indeed as discussed in chapter three, where I posted a request for participants.

4.7   Digital Communities

In a relatively short time during the twenty-first-century social communication via the internet has risen seemingly inexorably, (We Are Social, 2016). While some argue that social media technologies offer the opportunity for more democratic engagement in the public sphere (Gauntlett, 2011; Castells, 2012), others note that the online public sphere looks remarkably similar to the offline version, inhabited by the same privileged subjects, and 'reproducing inequalities of access, voice and agency' (Jensen, 2013a: 127). Furthermore, the sheer volume of advice available to those who have access to the internet, manuals and magazines, means, according to Hardyment (2007) that 'information overload is turning parenthood into a nightmare of anxiety and stress' (Hardyment, 2007: 283). While much of the information available is expert-led, with sites that email monthly development updates

based on the child's age, for example, the most popular network amongst the mothers in my research is *Mumsnet* which describes itself as 'the UKs busiest social network for parents' (Mumsnet, 2015).

Ostensibly, *Mumsnet* is a site where its members exchange opinions outside of hierarchies of authority. In practice, although issues are raised that query the advice of professional practitioners, the site offers an opportunity for some mothers to display their competence and knowledge of professional expert advice. While this shows the potential for mothers to disrupt the normative relationship between mothers and experts, it is also clear that the playing field is uneven. As Gambles notes "'*Mumsnet* does appear to encourage and enable personal disclosure in a way that promotes self- responsibility through an emphasis on personal empowerment and the therapeutic' and in doing so often segues neatly into current policy discourse that 'plays up personal choice strategies and eclipses and privatises socio-economic or deeply gendered contexts in which such 'choices' can be made' (Gambles, 2010: 38).

The difference in how mothers relate to the online communities is telling in a number of ways. In the case of one of the younger mothers in my study, Rebecca, the informal exchanges and the anonymity afforded seem to provide a break from how she feels she is perceived in face-to-face encounters. At 25, Rebecca is older than she looks. Very slight and fresh faced, she tells me that people often mistake her for a teenager. She also mentions that her child is "half and half" ('mixed race') when discussing the 'looks' she receives if her son is not peaceful when in public:

> **Rebecca:** There- there's been times when he's been doing things in public and I'm just, like, please - no-one should feel that this is normal [chuckles]. Sometimes they do just throw you a curveball and you're like 'oh my God, how do I deal with this?'
>
> **JC:** Do you think other people do judge?
>
> **Rebecca:** Yeah. Despite- well again, especially because I look so young, if he's having a tantrum or something, you'll see - well not a tantrum, I know he's too little for tantrums. But if he's crying and I haven't shut him up immediately, then people will sort of be like 'young mums (!)'.

Of course 'looks' may be entirely unrelated to Rebecca's status as a young mother of a 'mixed race' child, nonetheless, it is her perception that she is being judged in that way. The sense of being judged poorly is not uncommon among younger mothers, who are acutely aware of stigmatisation (Wenham, 2016). Indeed, how could they not be? In her article *Chav Mum. Chav Scum,* Tyler (2008) explores the extent to which young, working-class, single mothers evoke disgust and marginalisation. Drawing from across media, in particular, the BBC's comedy programme *Little Britain*, she argues that 'chav' is a figure that captures 'contemporary anxieties about sexuality, reproduction and fertility and "racial mixing"' (2008: 18). Tyler cites comments from the website *urbandictionary* to illustrate her point:

> Human equivalent of vermin ... Most reproduce by the age of 14, sometimes younger.

> The chavettes have ... a large 3 seater second-hand pushchair, with 3 different coloured children in, all at different stages in the chav development, with caps already fitted and ears pierced.

> (urbandictionary, no date, cited in Tyler, 2008: 26)

To be clear, Rebecca did not use the term 'chav', nor did she indicate that it had ever been used towards her, however, the coding of youth and 'mixed race' children as lacking value is widespread. Rebecca, in drawing my attention to her youth 'people usually think I'm about sixteen!' and her son's heritage when relating a story about being judged poorly, demonstrates that she is aware of the connections being made. Furthermore, this coding places her outside of the 'legitimate culture' (Bourdieu, 1990: 298) of motherhood and thus unable to accrue the value that would otherwise be attached (Skeggs, 2004; Tyler, 2013). Nor does it attract the same empathy that Amanda suggests:

> **Amanda:** I think most people actually are thinking 'oh poor you'. I think, like, some people think they're thinking 'oh, control your child' but I don't think they are. But I think most people do look at you and think 'oh, I've been there' you know?

I suggest that Amanda is more positive about how she is perceived for a number of reasons. Firstly, she is a more experienced mother than Rebecca, she has two sons, and 'has been through it all before' she tells me, and has a strategy for dealing with her son's tantrums. There is more to it though, she when expresses the 'normality' of the situation as shared

with other mothers, it positions her, and them together, as 'normal' middle-class mothers. Amanda is white, not too young, nor too old, is educated, married, and employed – this is, of course, a very shallow characterisation. Nonetheless, they are potent markers of her classed position, and hence her status as a 'good' mother.

There is no doubt that ideals of femininity course through these debates. The unmarried mother still is seen as a threat to the nation, her lack of morals, so the narrative goes, will be 'inherited' by her children, who will be poorly educated, workless, demand money from the welfare state, and reproduce further cycles of deprivation. So when Rebecca worries about how she is perceived, it is because she, and we, know that this is the story. I mentioned in the introduction Cameron's (2016) reference to 'dadlessness', a theme returned to frequently by think tanks Bright Blue and Centre for Social Justice. CSJ (2013) for example reported 'man deserts' which they claimed are areas where 'many' children 'have no male role model in sight'. They also headline that 'around one million children grow up with no contact with their father', and use the report to call the government to take action to deal with 'the tragedy of family break-up [which] is devastating children, parents and communities'.[36] Not only does this assume that lone parents are female, but also that all are so because of family break up, rather than say, the death of a parent. Furthermore, the 'devastating' effects, which they claim extend to communities, such as 'teenage crime, pregnancy and disadvantage' are explained solely to result from being in a single-parent household rather than analysing any other socio-economic or structural issues that could prove to have an impact. As I discussed in chapter one (1.3, 1.4), this characterisation is very much a part of the narrative around mothers during 'austerity' but has a much longer history.

The difference in how mothers relate to the online communities is telling in a number of ways. In the case of one of the younger mothers in my study, Rebecca, the informal

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[36] Press Release 17.06.13
http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Press%20releases%202013/CSJ-Press-Release-Lone-Parents.pdf
On the day of the press release, Bristol 247 checked the claim that 67% of families in Lawrence Hill were headed by single-parents - and found that if you included all households in the area, that proportion dropped to just 12% http://www.bristol247.com/2013/06/11/blaming-our-ills-on-tiny-number-of-single-mums-is-shameful-67564

exchanges and the anonymity afforded seem to provide a break from how she feels she is perceived in face-to-face encounters.

In a separate part of our conversation, Rebecca tells me of her first visit to a Sure Start centre:

> **Rebecca:** I mean, when I first went to me session, I was offered literacy classes and I was like - and it's good that they're there because people who need them but it was fairly obvious that I didn't and I thought they should be able to use their discretion on those things and not offer them, sort of, as- as a given, that someone who's under twenty-five - I was twenty-five when I was pregnant …Will need these things.
>
> **JC:** And was it based on age, or …?
>
> **Rebecca:** Yeah. Just based on age and the fact that I was sort of by myself since I'd stayed in Africa… I would rather that they offered it to someone who didn't need it rather than not have it but …

It's worth noting at this point that Rebecca has a Master's degree from a prestigious, Russell Group university and is very eloquent. Her understanding is that the staff offer of literacy classes was based on their perception of young mothers rather than anything she may have said or done. This is Rebecca's interpretation of course, and may not be the reason she was offered classes. What it reveals is what Sennett and Cobb (1972: 33) refer to the 'fear of being summoned before some hidden bar of judgement'; whether the judgement is real or perceived is in that sense incidental, the effect is the same.

For women such as Rebecca, the internet is potentially a site where the absence of a material body can give her a break from the sort of judgements that position her as inadequate, or at the very least, from her sense that she is being judged in this way. That said, she is clear that some users on the message boards are judgemental, but does not give me any indication that she has been on the receiving end of criticism. Her interactions on the board, have on the whole been positive, and she uses it to mitigate her sense of aloneness, as in for example:

> **Rebecca:** If there's something I'm concerned about or think I need an answer to, quite often I'll just look on Mumsnet and see if someone else has had that problem. I

posted something the other night about him not being asleep at four o'clock in the morning and I didn't really want any advice. I just - I needed somewhere to put it.

Here, the internet is a source of support that Rebecca does not feel she has in her off-line life. Although as mentioned above the internet can be seen as replicating offline inequalities, that is clearly not Rebecca's experience, and while it is certainly possible to overstate the significance of disembodiment, anonymous online interactions are conducted with some very powerful markers of class, race and status, obscured.[37] From a marginalised position off-line, Rebecca is able to construct the forum as a place of inclusion in a way that she has found difficult otherwise. This does not suggest however that the space is egalitarian, indeed, some mothers find it extremely oppressive.

For several of the women, the draw of the websites initially was access to the experience of other mothers. In some ways, this can be understood as a way to disrupt notions of the professionalisation of mothering and the dependency on experts (Mungham and Lazard, 2011). Further, by privileging experience, in an open discussion in which mothers admit to their failings, it can be seen as a minor form of resistance to idealised notions of 'good mothering'. Unfortunately for some, the experience opened up a level of judging that they did not expect.

> **Melanie:** We're bloody women. We should be supporting each other, not judging each other on it. And I think that's part of the reason why I stopped reading books and I stopped going on Mumsnet.
>
> It's just because of the 'judgeyness'. And I was just, like, I haven't particularly experienced much of it in real life. But I was like, wow. If this is how judgey people are on an internet forum, like writing threads about someone giving their kid a Fruit Shoot[38] in Sainsbury's. Or wearing this type of clothes or that- or- or bottle-feeding

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[37] There is some interesting research beginning to emerge that suggests that the content of online messages may reveal more than people intend, and hence 'real lives' are less obscured in anonymous profiles than users assume. See for example Enli, S. and Thumim, N. (2012) Socializing and Self Representation Online: Exploring Facebook, *Observatorio* 6(1): 87-105.

[38] Fruit Shoots, I discovered by visiting the Mumsnet site myself, are much debated online. A general internet search for 'Mumsnet fruit shoots' returned 5860 results; opening one thread at random I found the first three postings referred to how the products are marketed and whether they are 'healthy'. The following response, which opened up a wider debate, was especially interesting:

Oh - and the reason that they provoke debate is because they enable smug middle class parents to make assumptions about their own moral, educational, and general superiority over the "type" of person that feeds their child fruit shoots. There are much bigger fish to fry in the world, but hey-ho (although I guess people who are militantly anti-fruit shoots would **never** fry their fish).

their baby rather than breastfeeding or - but, you know, whichever. It was just- I was just like 'do you really worry about why- what other people do with their children to that extent?'

Despite Melanie's clear anger at what she perceives to be the injustice and lack of feminist credentials on display in the exchanges she is recalling, she does so by challenging both the content of the criticisms and the notion of 'perfect' motherhood implied within them. The nature of online discussion sites invites polarised views, but rather than enter into the debate, Melanie decided to stop visiting the site altogether. Within this small vignette, Melanie narrates herself as being arguably the 'ideal' neoliberal mother. She is well-educated, critical, reflexive, self-governing and choice-making. What she also does is articulate some of the indicators that suggest 'bad' motherhood, although it is unclear whether these are directly from postings that she has read on the website or her own knowledge of what is coded as 'bad'. What is clear, however, is that foods, clothes and bottle/breastfeeding are used here as part of a process of inscription, which Skeggs (2004: 12) notes 'is about making through marking'. Moreover, these markers are all classed, so not only are these 'bad' mothers, they are simultaneously working-class mothers. In Chapter Six, I will be analysing the types of judgements that Melanie is alluding to here, especially the 'classing' of mothers through taste and food choices so merely note that at this stage. What is important in the context of social media as a source of advice, is that it is anything but neutral and that 'virtual' identities are drawn in ways that reproduce distinctions grounded in 'real life'. Rather than disrupting existing divisions as Rebecca seems to suggest, the terrain is uneven.

Lack of being judged is one of the stated reasons Sarah uses an internet forum for advice. Hers, however, is a closed forum, with invited members only, which was set up after having registered with an open network. Sarah and several other mothers, who were expecting their child at around the same time, set up their "secret site". As a thirty-five-year-old, first time mother, Sarah classifies herself as being from a working class background, living a middle-class life, while the other members of her network are 'all different'. It is the breadth of experience that she enjoys, telling me that the lack of judgement stems from their differences.

   Sarah: And, that's lovely because you can bounce anything off them.

JC: Right. And they're a good resource?

Sarah: Yeah. Because you're not judged. Everybody's very different. You know? And there is different walks of life and stuff. A couple of people have left and said 'oh look, we had- I had different thing…' well, that's what was quite nice about this, the fact that everybody is very different and has different ways of doing it and … So, I probably go to them first for anything I need.

Although in different ways, Sarah's reason for using an online network as her first stop for advice has an echo of Rebecca's. She explained to me that her mother and mother-in-law have both expressed their perplexity at Sarah's decision to follow a technique of baby-led weaning[39]. Some of the women in her network, however, had tried it and were supportive of her decision. Despite having given her mother a book to read on the subject, she is confident that not only didn't she read it but also that she doesn't approve of the method.

Sarah: Because I thought, if she read it and she knew what I was doing and understood what I was doing…You know, that might be a bit of the battle.

JC: So how - where did you get that technique? From in books or other mothers or…?

Sarah: Yeah. Book. I read it from a book. There's quite a few mums seem to be doing it now. Erm, someone in the group had said, oh, like, why did I want to do it? And I was like 'because I can't be bothered with the faff'. [laughs]

In positioning the older two women as not being educated in the method, Sarah is at the same time claiming for herself the responsibility of being a good mother. She is also echoing a sentiment expressed by Heather, that the rate of change in child-care techniques is so rapid that their mothers are out-of-date. This tells us more than it may seem; Heather also grew up in a working-class family and now positions herself as middle-class. As Lawler (2005) notes this notion that the working-class are not progressive speaks to larger narratives of lack against which the middle-class can claim distinction. Both Heather and Sarah are creating a distance between their old and new class positions, but as Lawler (2000) argued this can also reveal 'insecurities around class positioning' and the way her own mother signifies 'a class position to which [she] fear[s] returning' (Lawler, 2000: 102).

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[39] This is a system of giving children chopped rather than pureed food from six-months and letting the child feed herself. http://www.babyledweaning.com/

When Sarah tells me about discussing in her internet group she reveals a technique identified by Jensen (2013: 141), often used by middle-class mothers on social media: self-mockery. Self-identifying as a bad mother in an ironic or self-mocking way is of course substantially different from being ascribed the label 'poor parent' by powerful and surveillant others (Gillies, 2007). The mothers who do so are being playful with the idea, with the implicit understanding that they are not really failing. Only competent, confident (middle-class, privileged) mothers can play around with labels in this way. Indeed, in so doing they demonstrate that their 'failures' are mere amusing asides in a context care and diligence.

As a source of advice and information, social media does seem to serve a purpose for mothers in my study, and as perhaps to be expected is experienced in different ways. It is not possible to draw a simple picture of either inclusion or marginalisation; there is certainly a sense that power relations might be obscured, but equally membership of these sites are real people, with real opinions and attitudes. It is important that *Mumsnet* and the other mentioned by the women in my research *Netmums* are gendered. They provide another source of advice and information, but the work of research remains with mothers, and the majority of users are women[40]. There is perhaps an element of resistance to more formal channels of expertise. Nicola, who I discussed regarding her challenge to doctors over the diagnosis of her daughter's geographic tongue, for example, found the diagnosis online. Social media sites are a place for the exchange of information that is most usually experiential, which it could be argued disrupts who has control over knowledge about mothering. There is one other issue worth mentioning, all of the mothers in my research had internet access, but it isn't universally available and it is expensive. In that sense, it still has the potential to exclude the least well-off.

4.8   Concluding Remarks

The focus of this chapter has been how mothers 'know' what it means to be a good mother. It is the first of three chapters that draw on the accounts of mothers as a way to explore motherhood as a 'site' where subjects and government interact and power circulates. I focus

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[40] I have been unable to find accurate figures, however a sub-group on the Mumsnet site dedicated to fathers shows 2012 as the most recent date anything was posted on it.

on ways that the everyday lives and subjectivities of mothers are organised and regulated within a neoliberal socio-political system.

I began by suggesting that contemporary 'parenting' advice invites a relationship of the self to itself. This I argue assumes an always-already neoliberal subject capable and willing to reflect, evaluate, and transform herself in line with the ideals of motherhood. I contend that these ideals are costly in terms of time, money and emotions. I considered the ways that mothers use cultural products such as guidebooks and television programmes, which I argued normalise middle-class practices, therapeutic cultures, and gendered assumptions about the 'best' approach to bringing up children. The mental work that goes into their use is, I contend, rendered invisible and hence is not valued, but simply taken-for-granted.

I considered the discourse around breastfeeding as a way to explore 'professional' expertise and found that this is an area of mothering that is particularly moralised, and anxiety ridden. It was also here that I found small acts of resistance on the part of young working-class mothers, who I argue are positioned outside of the 'norm' and I suggested exclude themselves from an arena that already excludes them. I discussed the ways mothers do manage to wrest some control by 'becoming expert' themselves and challenging the medical advice.

In the final part of this chapter, I considered whether social media presents a new way for mothers to break down barriers of exclusion of themselves and their experience. This I suggested is no less complex than more traditional forms of knowledge and expertise and to a large extent simply replicates existing divisions.

Throughout the chapter, I have drawn on Foucaultian and Bourdieusian concepts to illustrate the workings of power and to make tentative links between lived experience and the more abstract concepts and political processes that shape daily lives and subjectivities.

In the following chapter, I will continue to explore the women's accounts with a focus on the 'doing' of motherhood, that is, their everyday activities and interactions.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: Activity

5.1 Introduction

So far in this thesis, I have set out a political context in which mothering and mothers are produced as both the cause and solution to a range of society's ills. I have argued that the United Kingdom is organised in line with neoliberal principles, and I have also explained how that concept can be best understood. It is my contention that the ideal subject of neoliberalism maps onto the ideal subject of a discourse of mothering that has circulated for a number of years, identified by Hays (1996) as an ideology she termed 'intensive mothering'. This thesis is concerned to show that the principles that Hays theorised remain in circulation, however, I argue that it is not best understood as an ideology but as a discourse. Drawing on the conceptual tools of Foucault (1980, 1995, 1998) I have begun the process of demonstrating how neoliberalism functions as a technology of governance that shapes subjectivities, producing subjects who are self-responsible, self-regulating, and active choice-makers. This I have argued can only tell us part of the story, and so I have also drawn on Bourdieu's toolkit of habitus, capitals, and fields, to articulate the classed and classing work that constrains some subjects from the culturally and discursively 'ideal'. It is my contention that an exploration of the attitudes, opinions, behaviours and feelings of mothers can illuminate how larger processes of governance work.

In the previous chapter, I focused my attention on the circulation of 'knowledge' and how the women in my study privilege, prioritise and use information to make sense of themselves and their actions. I have argued that contemporary child-rearing is both classed and gendered and furthermore, that the work of mothering is invisibilised. In this chapter, I continue to draw on the same concepts to explore the women's daily practices. I will begin by suggesting that an expanding repertoire of children's 'needs' means that the demands placed on mothers are ever increasing.

5.2 Needs Must

> Secure early bonding is the difference between the baby that grows up a secure, emotionally capable adult, and a baby that will become a depressive, anxious child, who will not cope well with life's ups and downs. In the most difficult cases, this baby is more likely to later experience criminality, substance abuse or depressive problems.
>
> (Andrea Leadsom MP, 2012, in press)

Every child deserves to have positive well-being. We have had suggestions of different indicators, of love, hope and spirituality.

(Bob Fraser, Getting it Right for Every Child[41], reported in press, 2015)

In chapter one (1.1), I critiqued then Prime Minister David Cameron's launch of the government's *Life Chances Strategy,* in which he argued that 'neuroscience shows us the pivotal importance of the first few years of life in determining the adults we become'; and that 'we know the importance not just of acquiring knowledge, but also developing character and resilience'. The above two quotes are premised on the same reasoning, and again predict dire outcomes for the individual child, her family, and society as a whole. Children are now understood not simply as more vulnerable, but at the same time more out of control (Hoffman, 2010; Lareau, 2003; Wall, 2013). Children's needs have 'expanded and become elevated above mothers' needs and desires' (Wall, 2013: 163). What is more, according to Roberts (1995: 154) mothers' success is 'harder to assess than those of their mothers in earlier times, who were seen to have triumphantly fed, clothed and housed their children, often in the face of great hardships'.

To be clear, 'need' carries with it a weight that goes beyond simple demands; a child may want any number of things that she doesn't need. Nor does 'need' imply something that she should have, which more clearly suggests that someone has judged what might be desirable. For Woodhead (1990) 'identification of needs appears to be a matter of empirical study by the psychologist, or close observation by professional or parent' (1990: 64). In constituting needs in terms of scientifically verifiable knowledge, the values and political preoccupations that feed into their construction are hidden. I have already discussed the flawed interpretation of neuroscience that is part of the merry-go-round of evidence used to support claims of children's need for almost constant engagement (1.5). I also discussed the emerging scholarship that calls into question the literacy benefits of reading to children

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[41] This refers to legislation in Scotland only, under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and to the duties of the 'Named Person'
From the Scottish Government website: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/named-person
The Getting it right approach includes making a Named Person available for every child, from birth until their 18th birthday (or beyond, if they are still in school).
Depending on the age of the child or young person, a health visitor or senior teacher, already known to the family, usually takes the role of Named Person. This means that the child and their family have a single point of contact who can work with them to sort out any further help, advice or support if they need it.

(2.10). And yet, the mothers in my research are, as I will show, fulfilling ever more tasks to meet their children's 'needs', as if they:

> derive from some intrinsic quality of children themselves rather than from the social and cultural context in which adults formulate statements about children's nature. Indeed, in general, 'need' is often supposed to constitute a more or less fixed, knowable and objective part of 'human nature'.

> (Lawler, 2002: 126)

This naturalisation of children's needs masks the social and political concerns for the type of adults that are deemed fit for the society they will inhabit. Walkerdine puts it, 'the idea of development assumes a rational, civilised adult as its end-point' (Walkerdine, 2005: 14). Yet, talk of 'needs' rarely asks the questions of what meeting those needs is supposed to achieve. This is not restricted to mother/child relationships, rather, as Fraser (1989: 29) argues, 'talk about needs is an important species of political discourse… [It] functions as a medium for making and contesting political claims'.

Not only does this mean that 'needs' and 'wants' can be structured hierarchically, but it does so in a way that obscures what lies behind them. The result is a particularly 'thin' (Fraser, 1989) description of children's needs, which, within discourses of motherhood are presented in such a generalised way that mothers are never certain whether they are meeting them (Parker, 2006: 56); moreover, it relegates mothers' desires to just that, desires. Putting children's needs first is an 'unquestioned and unquestionable' moral imperative (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2000: 789), with consequences for mothers' own identity as well as practical implications for their everyday experience of child-rearing. Children's needs have, according to Wall (2013) 'not only expanded and become elevated above mothers' needs and desires, but they are also increasingly opposed to those of mothers' (Wall, 2013:163). I discussed in the previous chapter that time spent researching child-care advice was unrecognised as labour and therefore not attributed any value. I begin the next section by looking again at time, which will feature throughout this chapter as I explore how the women organise and fill their days.

5.3   Time

One of the central demands of the type of intensive mothering advocated across early-years' advice is unrushed, quality time spent with children. Mothers' time is somehow

understood to be infinitely elastic, and infinitely dispensable; not having enough time is simply not a recognisable reason for not achieving whatever needs to be done (Griffith & Smith, 2005). One of the women, Helen, returned to the theme of time many times during our conversation. Helen is in her late thirties and the mother of one son, aged four; she is also a part-time primary school teacher, which she told me is stressful and time-consuming to the extent that she has seriously considered leaving the profession. Some of her knowledge about child-rearing, she tells me, she gained from her teacher training and practice, so I asked her what advice she would give to other people:

> **Helen**: Time. Spend time.
>
> **JC:** Yeah? What sort of skills is it important that they learn? And why?
>
> **Helen:** Well, just – well…I don't know. There's that many, isn't there? There's that many things. But I think if you spend time with them talking- talk to them, the- any skill, you know, the skills that you've got will just …
>
> **JC:** Mmm hmm. Will be transferred?
>
> **Helen:** Yeah, just transferred to them. They see what you do, they see how you are with people and see what you say to people, they see - you know? I just think - I just - yeah, time I think, to do, erm, enough. Develop those skills, time to get those things wr- get things wrong as well, you know?

What is reflected here is the 'thin' description Fraser (1989) writes about. It is perfectly clear that Helen agrees that spending time is important for her son's development, but putting into words precisely what he will gain from it is more difficult. Helen's is a middle-class household, her husband is a university lecturer, and she is a teacher. Although she is vague about precisely what her son will learn, she knows 'if you spend time with them just talking to them'. Helen is describing the type of pedagogy that Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) identified as associated with middle-class mothers, where every interaction can be turned into a learning opportunity. As a teacher herself, Helen is very well versed with what will accord with her son's schooling. In Foucault's terms, this operates as a 'dividing practice' (Foucault, 2000: 208). Which is to say an unintended consequence is that school becomes a site where difference is made into inequality (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). The re-writing of

'needs' means effectively that the government is making mothers work hard to govern themselves, and in doing so, shaping their work and their identities.

Helen returned to the issue of time when later I asked her whether there are differences between older and younger mothers. She didn't think so, rather she thinks that what makes a difference is what people value, and the extent to which her family are 'lucky' to be able to spend time together when neither parent is at work.

> **Helen**: But if on a morning when it's a work morning straight away, that stress levels are rising because I've got to be out. Then it's all those little things then that …
>
> **JC**: So what gives? You know? What has to give? Do people have to work less?
>
> **Helen:** In an ideal - I personally think yes.
>
> **JC:** Oh do you?
>
> **Helen:** I think people - I think everyb- it's just that slowing down, that being able to spend … And it is [sighs] - it's not necessarily quality time, it's just spend time. Because I think the problem with- with the quality time is it ends up being that's got to- you've got to be going out somewhere or you've got to be doing something…. No- you know? But actually, quality time is just time. Time to just be…

Being stressed is, I would suggest, indicative that this is something Helen cares about. There would be no reason to be anxious if it wasn't something that matters. She suggests that paid work is what has to give, not any of the mothering work does, nor even sharing it with her husband. Of course, this is not an option for households where money is a struggle. I discussed the effects of 'austerity' in chapters one (1.3) and two (2.9) and the fact that more women than men are in precarious and part-time work. For some mothers, it simply isn't possible to give up work, which means something else 'has to give'. I suggested at the beginning of this section that mothers' time is imagined to be unlimited for tending to her child's needs, the near impossibility to fulfil that for working-class mothers is clear.

I will remain with Helen for one final issue regarding time, which did rather dominate our conversation, which suggests it is important to her, but can also shed light on the bigger picture. Time is important across her relationships; it crops up when we speak about her own mother, her brother, her friends, and her husband. However, what came through very strongly is that time for herself is almost fanciful. Her description of a weekend away with

friends, for example, is replete with explanations about having an obligation to them, being on edge because she couldn't get a mobile 'phone signal to contact home and her worry that her son would miss her presence.

Helen: I had my first night away from my son on Saturday.

JC: Oh, how did that go?

Helen: Erm - that was fine. My husband- you know; he was with my husband. Er, it was a girl's weekend, well a girl's night. Erm, it was lovely. Really, really, really nice.

JC: Yeah?

Helen Quite n- a bit weird when we couldn't- there was no mobile phone reception which was quite, kind of - not that I'm a big kind of 'oh, I need to be in contact with somebody all the time'. But I thought the first night might've been- just be able to say 'has he gone to bed yet?' or - but I think in some ways, it probably made it easier because I wasn't … No, I mean - no, probably it- it didn't feel quite as much like that as I thought it would. It was nice…

I discussed the mental labour associated with accessing, evaluating and putting into action childcare advice, following Walzer (1996: 222-224), I want to add to that worrying. Walzer divides mothers' worrying into '*baby worry*' (are the baby's needs being met?) and '*mother worry*' (am I a good mother?). Walzer suggests that both are highly gendered and that fathers do not have the same concerns. It strikes me that Helen really needs not be worrying; her son is with her husband, at home. He presumably is entirely capable of looking after him; their son is 4 years old. All of which suggests that this is 'mother worry', and rests on the gendering of child-care. Foucault's (1980) conception of power is that it is diffuse throughout networks, and through discourses, meanings are produced. Helen's worry is produced by the gendering, but also productive of it, and so it goes on. It should not pass unremarked that the amount of mental preparation mothers undertake in the planning, organising and fulfilling the activities and classes I discuss in this chapter, which are also simply folded into what mothers do.

Helen mentions relationships with other family members, friends, and colleagues as well as her husband and her son. Each of these relationships exists within its own set of rules and norms and carry different expectations. They overlap of course, but it points to the idea that

subjectivity is not unified and fixed. It is contradictory and formed and re-formed in interactions that need repetition to make sense. If women are being pulled in so many directions: mother, sister, daughter, friend and so forth, then the question is, when do they get the time to 'just be'. Foucault (1977) argues that discipline is operated through controlling time, or rather controlling activity. Timetables function to order people's time, how they use their day, and to leave no time ungoverned. It's a disciplinary technique that is clear to see in the ways mothers themselves behave and in the structuring of their child's lives. Helen notices it more than any of the other mothers, and it clearly bothers her. Yet, as I will discuss, most of the women in this research spend a lot of time attending class and cultural activities with their children. This they explain with reference to the development needs of their child, but also the opportunity to meet and talk to other mothers.

5.4   What about Me?

Erin is the youngest of the mothers who participated: at 20 she is living with her partner, works 30 hours per week in a Sure Start centre and has one son. She tells me that she is the first among her friends to have a child and that in some ways she misses being able to do the things her friends can, so although they can have the occasional night out:

> **Erin**: Like our friends, they'd be lying in bed for, like, 'til two o'clock the next afternoon and things whereas we've got to go and pick the child up at ten. And it's like the responsibilities are different. I think in, that you've always got to have food in the house. You've always got to have like…. Just simple things that if you don't have a child, you don't have to think about. So I mean, I do. I do kind of miss the more money and the, erm, so of more, kind of, self-time. But it's definitely nothing - like, I'd- I'd much prefer to be in this situation than having an extra few hours in bed. [Laughs].

The absence of the freedom to socialise was mentioned by a number of the women, though not in a consistent way. Amanda had just been away for a weekend with some girlfriends 'for one of our fortieths without the kids which was great'; Heather on the other hand: At the moment, I couldn't imagine leaving her for one night let alone… I mean, like, God, I struggled the other week to go out for my Christmas night out which was five hours or something like that!' I asked all of the women whether there was anything they missed from before they had their children, and the opportunity to socialise was primarily the answer. As illustrated by Helen, Erin, Amanda and Heather there was a mixture of responses about how

they felt about being away from their children, however, all said their social life had been curtailed, and that they missed that part of their life.

This stands against what the mothers suggest is the 'need' for their child to socialise with other children, which is often given as part of the reason they attend so many classes, and yet for themselves socialising is downgraded to a 'want'. The mother's need to be with her friends is effaced by denying that it is a 'need' at all. The 'good mother' it seems, does not complain about sacrifice, indeed rarely talks about it being a sacrifice at all, simply a change of her own desire. In this sense the needs of the mother and child are understood as being reflective of one another; indeed, intensive mothering holds that mothers' emotional needs are met by the fulfilment of their children's needs (Gunderson and Barrett, 2015: 3). As noted by Unwin (1985: 193, cited in Lawler 2002: 150) this is an argument that rests upon 'totally discounting the needs of the mother as an independent person altogether'.

5.5   Not Just a Mother

The expanded repertoire of needs and the setting aside of their own means that calls upon mothers are powerful. I do not want to suggest that women are being duped, they have agency and are certainly capable of modifying their comprehension or resisting certain ideas. That said, as Hughes argues, 'Through the negotiations of giving and receiving care, reputations as a 'good' person are at stake. In these enactments of responsibility, therefore, people are constructed as moral beings' (Hughes, 2002: 119). So it is with difficulty that mothers who have ambitions outside of the home negotiate their identity. As mentioned, most of the mothers who participated in this research also have paid employment. I have discussed the extent to which the discourse of mothering is produced and reproduced across multiple channels, and recap later in this chapter (5.7), I will discuss now mothers who have felt a sense of losing something of themselves on becoming a mother. Miller (2005) notes that in the 'West' the act of giving birth automatically confers a new social identity 'mother', and to be sure it is an identity all of the women in my research had planned for; some since their own childhood. And yet, as this research illustrates, it is an identity formed in interactions far beyond the mother and her child, and as with all identity, it takes work to make it.

> **Danielle:** I like, erm - I don't know. I felt like with both of them, I lost a little bit of my identity, especially with my first son, that I was just a mum. Then all of a sudden I was just a mum pushing a pushchair around.

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Heather, for example, is a mother of one daughter. Her husband works offshore and she spends two weeks out of four 'as a single parent'. She is a ward sister on a paediatric oncology ward and is unsure whether she can return to work part-time while maintaining her seniority. While making it clear that:

> **Heather**: my daughter's the *most* important but actually, like, I still really want to make a career for myself.' Going on to say 'I want to work. I wasn't just born to be a mummy.

Heather volunteers that she sees these as two separate identities, and in explaining how she might be able to reconcile returning to work at the same grade (which requires her to be full-time) and the practicalities of childcare. These all entail concessions that she will have to make[42] and she who must change, reorganise, or give up what is clearly an important aspect of her life. She tells me of some tension between her and her husband on his shore-leave which he 'thinks is him on holiday'.

Towards the end of our conversation, Heather returns to the theme of going back to work, telling me that she has been praised for how well she does her job 'you're far too good at your job to not do it. So it's - that is the bottom line of it, is that I love it and that's - so I'm going back for me.' This suggests that Heather is resisting the notion of having to put her child's needs first, but in reality, she is already working hard to ensure that her baby has a relationship with the woman who will look after her, meeting regularly and spending time together (all three of them). And yet, Heather still expresses her decision in a way that shows she is aware of the expectation, and that she could be judged poorly for choosing not to meet it fully:

> **Heather:** And I- I mean, being selfish and, like, I hope 'my daughter isn't compromised in any way but I know she won't be. We've got a childminder who's absolutely amazing with children. She's like my adopted mum.'

Selfishness is considered to be beyond the pale for mothers, as Hays says:

> Perhaps the strongest indication of the opposition between the logic of intensive mothering and the logic of a self-interested, competitive, rationalized market society

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[42] Heather's husband's job is not part of the discussion with me. This is not to say it hasn't been discussed between them of course, simply that in this discussion we spoke only about hers, apart from her sarcastic comment that he doesn't help when he's at home.

is mothers' persistent preoccupation with the theme of the good mother's lack of selfishness.

(Hays, 1996: 168)

Heather's desire to continue a career she clearly loves, with less intense feelings of guilt means that she has spent considerable time and effort in planning child-care to offset any charge of selfishness. It is similar to findings by Wall (2013) and Schmied and Lupton (2001), whose participants spoke about regaining a sense of their 'real selves' through paid work, but at a perceived cost to their maternal identity.

Suzanne stood out in the study as someone who in a very practical sense spoke about regaining a sense of herself. As a keen sportswoman, her sense of being her was tied to finding time when she could shake a sense of responsibility to anyone else:

> **Suzanne:** I feel a bit of an object rather than a person. I think you've got to craft time…in a day, in a month, in a year, or in part of your life, where I am me. And I'm – I have successfully managed to create 'Suzanne' again, but I'm not 'Suzanne' all the time because I'm a mum and I'm a wife.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Amanda, who as the mother of two children under five, also works full-time. She tells me about her ongoing professional development, and her excitement to attend a residential training course but that 'it's been on the back burner' She is clear that some of the things she wants for herself have been put on hold – socialising, career development, time alone with her husband – but she sees this as temporary 'I think it's quite important to try and not lose any of those for too long. I mean, you do have to sacrifice for a while', but, 'It's worth every minute of it'. Amanda explains that she thinks of herself as having multiple identities 'not in a pathological way, ha ha', and that while her children are small their needs means that she must inhabit the mother role as a priority.

Heather, Suzanne and Amanda are not alone in setting aside their own needs; that women forgo sleep, leisure and work, among other things is commonplace, being noted also by Wall (2010), Elliot *et al* (2013) and Dillaway (2006). Furthermore, as Lawler (2002) shows, Amanda's perception that this is confined to the early years of children's lives is misplaced, continuing as it does into adulthood, albeit in different ways. A sense of mothers' own identity is quite clearly at stake here, and this is clear in the desire for these mothers to hold

onto and continue to work on themselves. That they question, however tentatively, the social legitimacy of their own needs, is a challenge to understanding mothers needs as either identical to, or in opposition to the needs of their children (Lawler, 2002).

5.6   Stay-at-Home-Mother

I want to turn now to explore the experience of mothers who do not work outside of the home. In my study, all but three of the women were either working or on maternity leave. Amy told me she is a stay-at-home-mother. She defines herself as middle-class and as quite a 'girly-girl'. Her choice to call herself a stay-at-home-mother is then telling; it is a much more domestic and passive term than full-time-mother. There has been a notable rise in representations of 'the middle-class SAHM (stay-at-home-mother) who is outside the workforce' (Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015). Their study bears out findings of others, variously: the 'New Traditionalist' (Faludi, 1991); 'the thrifty austerity housewife' (Bramall, 2013; Jensen, 2012) or the 'mumpreneur/mumtrepreneur' (Allen and Taylor, 2012; Thomson *et al*, 2011). Critics note that this figure has emerged at a time of deepening inequality and political 'austerity' (Akass, 2012; Allen and Taylor, 2012; Jensen, 2012), and that there has been a commercially driven nostalgia of the 'thrifty, happy and responsible housewife' (Jensen, 2012: 23). Furthermore, she is presumed to either have the support of a productive, high-earning partner, to be independently wealthy. The only way that a stay-at-home-mother can be sustained as a valuable identity in a context that calls for women to be active, is that the activity itself is not the issue, but the expense of that activity falling to the state. Criticism of women who are not in paid employment is directed at working class women who are assumed to be receiving money from the social security system (Allen and Taylor, 2012; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015).

I asked Amy whether she had planned to be a stay-at-home-mother:

> **Amy:** Yes, well, it's been quite a ...long sort of journey really, so I, emm...the intention was always...'cause I did an arts degree, and it was, before we got pregnant and I thought I'd quite like to start my own business doing creative stuff, and I've got quite a lot of sort of administrative skills, and I'm creative and I'm good with people so I thought, you know, I'd probably be able to do something with business. So I started writing a blog, which was...I think a lot of people...because like we had gone to down to one salary, we were having to do lots of things to save money, and so we realised we couldn't really eat meat anymore, and stuff like that because it was so

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expensive, so I was doing lots of budgeting and a lot of people were saying 'oh you should write a blog' and 'you've got lots of stuff to share with people' so I did. So it was all sorts of recipes and em, ideas for doing parties and stuff like that with sort of cheap ideas.

This fairly long quote illustrates the ways in which Amy fulfils the figuration identified by Orgad and De Benedictis (2015). Not only is she staying at home with her two sons, but has set up a small internet business, relating specifically to traditional 'housewife' skills of homecare and baking around a theme of thrift. Despite telling me that her previous employment with a charity was under threat due to funding cuts, Amy is very clear that her decision to be a stay-at-home mother is a matter of choice. Not that it is without struggles: she is sometimes short-tempered she told me, as discussed in chapter four (4.2). She also said:

> **Amy:** I'll be like sat on my 'phone while the kids are playing rather than being on my hands and knees interacting with them, and I have to really force myself to have to do that. Emm, and I don't know if that's a good thing or if that's just the way that I'm wired or... I don't know, it's...

One of the markers of middle-class motherhood is 'the heavy investment of mother's time, energy, money and emotional commitment into enhancing the child's intellectual, physical, social and emotional development' (Vincent and Ball, 2004: 207). Amy is aware of this expectation, which is why she finds not feeling she achieves it tough. There are a lot of contradictions throughout what Amy talks about, while I was there, for example, she spent most of the time entertaining her son, on her hands and knees and appeared well at ease. But, after telling me she made a business blogging, she later told me she hadn't put anything on it for over a year. My sense was that Amy has a firm idea of how a 'good' mother *ought* to be. Furthermore, her many references to paid work that littered our conversation suggested that she constantly self-surveils and judges herself harshly. I will discuss Amy more in chapter six, (6.9), when, in relation to food and feeding her children she is much more certain of her abilities. Although I am unconvinced that Amy fits this, there is a possibility in an atmosphere of compulsory engagement in the paid workforce, that being a stay-at-home-mother could be seen as a radical act, or as Hays (1996: 171) suggests is 'an active rejection of market logic'.

It is instructive to return to the conversation I had with Suzanne at this point to illustrate the differential value placed on mothers who choose to opt out of paid employment. Suzanne is a full-time student when I asked about her daily routine she began by telling me about some of the tasks that she takes responsibility for:

> **Suzanne:** I do everything. a typical day is, er, he gets up; he goes for a run with the dog in the morning. Erm, I get up; I get showered. Our daughter gets up; I get her dressed although she's get- helping me do that. I do her breakfast. Erm, I get her lunch together; I get all her bags together ready for school. Erm, Keith comes in; gets his work kit on and goes to work; I take her to the childminder or my dad I'm then in; sort her dinner out; sort my dinner out. Erm, do some more work. He comes back, has his dinner, sits on the sofa.

Developing her theme, Suzanne turned her attention from her husband to the broader issue of how mothers are rewarded:

> **Suzanne:** I think it's about values or the recognition that, erm, it is - well I think it should be paid, actually. You know? Or it should be - I mean, I know studies have gone 'oh, it's the equivalent of a thirty-eight thousand pound a year job'.

> But that's just the mothering part. But actually, being a mother, erm - you- you - most people aren't just mothers. Like, I've got friends who have brought up children that have not worked. But they are working inside the home. Erm, and then a lot of them coach voluntary like I coach voluntarily.

> And actually, it sh- for me, it should be an occupation. Because- because as a childminder, you're - or an au pair, you are - you have an occupation. Erm, you know, it's twenty-four, seven. I'm an on-call - it's an on-call job.

I mention that a strand of government policy is the drive to get people into paid work and not be in receipt of benefits and that this can be difficult for mothers, so I ask whether she thinks they should be working outside of the home.

> **Suzanne:** I don't think anybody should if they don't want to but, erm, I - I - so, I think - I don't think people should be getting benefits just for the sake of getting benefits and I think that, I mean, everybody's situation is very, very different… So, me personally, I don't think - I don't see why a single mum should feel that they ought to

get benefits because they're just a mother. If they can afford not to go out to work without getting benefits, I don't have a problem with that.

JC: So what happens to your, erm, 'mothers should be paid'? Who's going to pay them if it's not benefits?

Suzanne: Well - but then I should be getting something as well, yeah?

I began to feel a little as if I was straying into presenting my opinion rather than asking Suzanne hers, so moved onto another topic. What is interesting though is the classing that Suzanne does and that the sentiments she expresses. As mentioned, disapproval and condemnation of stay-at-home mothers are primarily directed towards working-class mothers (Allen and Taylor, 2012; De Benedictis, 2012; McRobbie, 2013; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015). Despite the overwhelmingly positive message regarding intensive mothering as a way to be valued as a 'good' mother and the rhetoric of choice that surrounds it, it is clear that 'choosing' is not without limitations.

I suggested in my introduction that the government programme of austerity has been accompanied by some divisive language, such as worker/shirker; striver/skiver. This discourse has I would argue had wide-reaching effects on how people who are out-of-work, for whatever reason, are understood. There are of course financial material effects but there is also a hardening of attitudes towards people who receive welfare benefits of any kind, in addition to the mental and emotional cost of being socially excluded. I would argue that austerity is a technology of governance, designed specifically to entice people to work on themselves, to become the neoliberal, self-responsible subject. As discussed in chapter one (1.2; 1.3), women, and especially mothers have been hardest hit, and Suzanne's account is testament to its effectiveness. Moreover, her account can be read as a clear indication of distinction, where she can herself claim an identity of value against a single mother claiming benefits. I explore this issue in more depth in chapter six (6.8) and have discussed the representation of teenage mothers in chapter four (4.7) in reference to Rebecca.

5.7 Sure Start

In this section, I will discuss the activities and classes that mothers take part in as part of their commitment to intensive mothering. All of the women who participated in the study have attended classes at Sure Start centres, although as I will show they do not limit themselves to these, and not all are engaged with them to the same degree. I discussed in

chapter one (1.5; 1.6; 1.7) the political support for child-care programmes that promote the early years' development. I further discussed the legacy of Child Development Psychology from the 1950s in contemporary practices such as attachment parenting and the concept of the 'sensitive mother' in chapter two (2.10). The development paradigm is almost ubiquitous. The advice that comes from it forms the basis for childcare manuals and television programmes that I discussed in chapter four (4.3). It also forms the basis of training among health care professionals to be discussed further in chapter six (6.1) and in government approved children's centres and 'parenting' support providers such as TripleP in chapter two (2.8). As is clear the type of child-care advice that is available to mothers, and (within the commercial sector at least) presented as a choice, is a powerful discourse that overlaps with not only the 'psy' discourse but clearly with the discourse of mothering.

Within this mothering advice is a very strong push for child-centred activities designed to stimulate the child's cognitive development. Before exploring how mothers put into practice the 'need' for activities, I will give a brief overview of Sure Start Children's Centres, which all of the women in my research have attended, although as will become clear, not all to the same extent. As I argued in the previous section, 'needs' can be understood as part of the wider welfare state and political claims-making (Fraser, 1989). Sure Start was a response by the then Labour government to a broader political concern about child poverty and social mobility. Jensen (2010a) argues that part of the rationale for setting up Sure Start was the belief that parenting is at the heart of individual's success or failure in later life. As part of the 1998 Spending Review, Sure Start was originally conceptualised as a multi-agency early intervention programme, aimed at improving health, educational and social outcomes for children and their families living in the most deprived electoral wards (HM Treasury, 1998). Starting with 250 Sure Start Local Partnerships (SSLPs), this was increased to 524 by 2003, to cover the 20% most deprived areas (Melhuish and Hall, 2007).

The Ten-year Strategy for Childcare (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004), and subsequent 2006 Childcare Act brought a policy shift from the targeting of disadvantaged communities, characteristic of SSLPs, to a promise of universal provision, with a children's centre in every community by 2010. 3,500 children's centres were rolled out in three phases between 2006 and 2010 (Pugh and Duffy, 2006). With this move to universalism, Sure Start provision focused on the employability of parents with links to Jobcentre Plus, and offering childcare

and early years' education; those serving the most deprived areas were especially charged with focusing on children's educational outcomes (Maconochie, 2013).

Sure Start underwent further changes under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government:

> We will take Sure Start back to its original purpose of early intervention, increase its focus on the neediest families, [although this is not defined in the document] and better involve organisations with a track record of supporting families. We will investigate ways of ensuring that providers are paid in part by the results they achieve. We will refocus funding from Sure Start peripatetic outreach services, and from the Department of Health budget, to pay for 4,200 extra Sure Start health visitors.

> (HM Government 2010: 19)

Maconochie (2013: 71) argues that an increased focus on the neediest families restricts access to the services provided, and may result in the centres becoming 'stigmatised, and therefore less attractive to the families they are aimed at'. Maconochie further voices concern that cutting outreach work may leave behind disadvantaged families, contrary to the stated aspiration to support them. During the 2015 General Election campaign, the Labour party claimed that 763 centres had been closed during the coalition's time in office, although the government disputed this claim, saying many of the closures had in fact been mergers (BBC News, 2015).

I will be exploring the ways that Sure Start is a medium for what Edwards and Gillies (2011: 141) note 'has been a remarkably explicit and sustained focus on the minutiae of everyday parenting practices as linked to the good of society as a whole'. This broader political aim, I will argue, is rendered invisible by its focus on the intimate mother/child dyad, expressed in terms that chime with mothers' desire to do whatever is in 'the best interest' of their children.

5.8   Who Goes There?

Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I met two mothers from outwith the research area to pilot my interview schedule. They do not live near one another, but both live in areas with a mixture of ex-council, owner occupied and privately rented homes. Both of these women told me that their local Sure Start had changed over time and was attracting more middle-

class mothers; for one, this change had made going to the centre uncomfortable, as she felt that she 'didn't fit in'. For the other, the effect was the opposite; she told me that she 'was embarrassed to admit it', but that the change had inspired her to attend. As a result of these insights, I asked about other mothers during the conversations with the research participants, and later I will discuss in depth the identity work being done in their answers, (especially in terms of social class), but in the meantime, simply note a sense of belonging. To borrow from Devine *et al* (2005: 12), this is understood as 'socially constructed, embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a given site as appropriate given their social trajectory.' The rolling out of Sure Start to a universal provision has, I suggest, created a site where middle-class mothers especially, invite the state into their ostensibly private lives. Sure Start may be a place to attend classes, but it also I would argue a place where mothers and children can be surveilled and monitored.

I asked Heather about why she attends so many classes at the Sure Start centre:

> **Heather:** We're getting it free. I- I just don't know why- why you'd do that. (Pay for swimming classes). Because especially when you're on maternity pay. [Laughs] …
>
> **JC:** Well yeah, that makes sense.
>
> **Heather:** I just don't, like - when I was a student - I have to openly admit when I was a student nurse, erm, everybody who went to Sure Start was from a lower social class?... Erm, er - and, er - so I was a bit wary when I went on day one but it's not like that in the North East. I trained in Scotland. It's not like that in here. There's physios, nurses, doctors, doctors' wives. Like, it's very much, like, people like me. And that's very, very different to what I saw in Scotland, that it was basically all the, er, lower social class. People on benefits. Erm, people who needed educating about bringing up a baby and not putting Irn-Bru in their bottles.

Heather mentioned social class to me when she was discussing her friend being badgered into attending breastfeeding classes, which she was told was because of her postcode. On both occasions, she was hesitant to use class terminology. Her picture-painting of the people who attend the two different Sure Start centres in this section is telling. The 'people like me' are described in terms of their profession, which is left to speak for itself (Bourdieu, 1984). As a reminder, Heather grew up in a working-class family, and is a paediatric nurse, living in a middle-class area of the city. The 'lower social class' need more description it seems, they

are on benefits, ignorant, and bad mothers. This drawing of boundaries is a very good illustration of the way class is 'done' (Lawler, 2004; 2005; 2009), as relational and dynamic. Heather very easily identifies with one group and against another and is in no doubt which is which.

Sarah also mentioned that the classes are free, and speaks of the people who don't attend, but for who she believes the facilities exist:

> **Sarah:** Yeah. I know our Sure Start here at Corfield. I don't think that - I know they've said before that they don't seem to get, erm, an - funnily enough, they said, a lot of the right people in. You know, the Sure Starts were set up for those who don't have as much money. And that's what the facilities are there for. It's for them...and yet a lot of them aren't...erm...the mums that you get in.

While there is classing work here, it is much less symbolically violently (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). The non-users are described as the 'right people', 'those who don't have much money' Where Heather mobilises social, cultural and economic capitals to press home the point, Sarah refers only to economic capital, albeit the 'right' people is coded, but without attaching the same level of distaste.

5.9   Busy, Busy, Busy

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is primarily transmitted through the family, more precisely the mother. It is through her that 'children derive modes of thinking, types of dispositions, sets of meanings and qualities of style' (Reay, 2005: 570). Given that in all of the families in my research, mothers are the primary carer, it is they who spend the most time with the children. This is most especially the case for Sarah, whose husband is away from home for four months at a time, and Heather, whose husband is away for four weeks at a time. Both explained that even when their husbands return, they do not assume an equal share of the child-care. Research on the gendered division of labour bears out that this 'traditional' arrangement of child-care responsibility remains the most prevalent in the UK (Asher, 2011), and that it is mothers, therefore, who most directly transmit cultural capital.

Reay (2005) has drawn upon Bourdieu's conceptual tools to develop what she refers to as 'emotional capital', and in the context of her research into mothers' involvement in their children's education, defines it as 'the emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement' (Reay, 2005: 569). To be clear Bourdieu does not

argue that capitals are exclusively gendered. However, as Reay suggests, both cultural and emotional capitals can be theorised as being more the province of women than men (See also Gunn, 2005). In the context of the claims made for the activities and classes that the women in my study attended, the intended outcomes speak to the transmission of these capitals in particular.

To understand the extent to which mothers are investing in the cultivation of capitals (Lareau, 2003) in their children, one need only ask how many activities and classes they are taking part in (Vincent and Ball, 2007). Heather is one of the most active users of the Sure Start centre classes, although as I will show she is not unique in her level of engagement:

> **Heather:** So I've done a baby massage course, a weaning course, a sing and sign course, a baby safety course, and then that's, like, all the courses that I'd signed up for. And then on a weekly basis, they have a breastfeeding support. So it's like mums…you don't go just if you've got a problem. So that's Tuesday. On a Wednesday, there's Baby Social which, erm, it's really about the child and development and they do messy play for an hour to start off with. So it's like, sticking, paint, whatever. Anything and everything. Glitter. Anything that causes a mess. Erm, for the first half hour, forty-five minutes, erm, you can get your baby weighed there as well. and then on a Thursday, we get erm - there's swimming free. Er, these are all free.
>
> **JC:** Fantastic.
>
> **Heather:** Erm, and on a Thursday at Newtown, it's an hour long session and they do all the nursery rhymes in the water and it's just about baby's confidence. So that's for the first half hour and then for the second half hour, they get toys out in the water and it's just play in the water. And it's just getting them confident.

With a similar level of activity, although not all via Sure Start, Hannah, attends a class or activity daily with her two children. This includes a community garden project, movement and music classes, visits to museums, galleries and Sure Start. The list is extensive and involves a lot of organisation.

> **Hannah:** We're always, like, out and about doing stuff and I think a lot of it is expectation that they need to be doing something which will help their development.

It is telling that Hannah berates herself somewhat for just letting the children play with their toys when they are at home, but reveals that the activities outside of the home are an important way for her to judge whether she is 'good' at being a mother:

> **Hannah:** Because if I feel like I've got to a group, I feel like I've done my - I've done my job for that day.

And,

> **Hannah:** (…) the kid's development. I think - in my head, like, as long as I go to, like groups or, like, do stuff with them most days, I think they'll- they'll develop fine, sort of thing.

Hannah is planning to go back to work, but currently, is on maternity leave. She hasn't worked it all out yet, but is 'definitely going back'. Her comment that taking the children out is a measure that she has 'done her job' is interesting, and echoes the accounts of both Amy and Suzanne. This speaks to what Brown describes as the 'economisation of everything' under neoliberalism (Brown, 2005; 2013). Even the most intimate areas of life are subject to a market logic of investment, and future growth, with presumably, in this case, a fully functioning neoliberal subject as the end product. Visibility is what matters for the work to 'count' for Hannah; she can demonstrate her mothering skills in public to be measured as a worthwhile and effective activity. Brown suggest that the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* remains gendered male, and argues that *femina oeconomica* exists only to ensure he can.

Hannah high-level use of classes and activities, including visiting galleries and festivals, suggests that she is indeed heavily investing in her children's future. In line with McRobbie's description, she is the image of a particular cultural construction that embraces domesticity and maternity 'as a benchmark of successful femininity' (McRobbie, 2013: 130). McRobbie further suggests that she 'directs her professional skills to ensure the unassailable middle-class status of her children' (McRobbie, 2013: 130). It seems that Hannah has fully taken on board that to raise middle-class children, she must develop their tastes and talents, and for her, this is something separate from the tasks of cooking, cleaning and tending to the 'domestic' needs. The making of the middle-class child is about those talents as a 'product of an investment of time and cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2004: 17). Although she appears not to be confident that she has the correct composition of capitals, having grown up working-class, she has made it her job is to seek out and expose her children to as many different

experiences as possible. In effect, she has fully adopted the role ascribed to women 'to convert economic capital into symbolic capital through the display of tastes' (Skeggs, 2004: 142).

There is, I suggest, something more complex than meeting needs going on here, despite the huge expansion of 'needs'. Meeting them is a '*non-negotiable moral obligation*' (Ribbens McCarthy *et al*, 2000: 791, emphasis in original). At best mothers can claim to be 'good enough' if they meet their child's needs; there are no degrees on this, so while it is certainly possible to be a 'bad' mother if needs are not met, for mothers to claim to be 'good' they must go beyond 'needs'.

5.10 The Resistor

Only one woman I spoke with told me she had made an active choice not to attend numerous classes. It was Eleanor; I discussed Eleanor in chapter four (4.5). Having returned to work, and securing childcare with a family member, she was satisfied that her son was being cared for as she herself would, but on her day off work, she preferred to spend one-to-one time with him rather than take part in activities. Despite being willing to go against the expectation of attending *multiple* classes, Eleanor was not entirely willing to 'break the rules':

> **Eleanor:** Even at his age, though, I think now with having a baby, there's so much pressure to do things. Like, all the classes and things like that. You know, like now I only take him to one a week and I feel bad that I don't do more with him. But I spend - when I'm with - when I'm home from work, I'm like - between then and going back to work on Monday, I spend all of my time with him. But it's not at a class every - do you know? Do you know what I mean? That's - so I think there is an expectation to - even now, there's a pressure to- to do all of those things.

For Eleanor, whose baby was born prematurely and had multiple health problems, the classes helped her to feel more 'like a normal mother'. Having spent a long time in hospital after her son's birth, she felt the need to mix with people other than health care professionals. Furthermore, she is convinced of the benefits to her son:

> **Eleanor:** Because at first there was a chance that he wouldn't see, he wouldn't be able to communicate, he wouldn't be able to walk or move or to - wh-when he was first born because he was so early. So there were so many things but now I just don't

care. I just think as long as he's healthy and he's happy, I don't care. But I think it's really good for them to be with other babies and socialising because it's just good for their social skills and their development.

Embedded in each of the activities the women are taking part in are forms of social learning and behaviour, cognitive development and motor skills. Interestingly gym classes, baby yoga and music classes were among the most popular with most of the mothers. Eleanor spoke to me about her training as a dance teacher, and her feeling that her pupils were brought, 'because that's what you do. At six, little girls go to ballet, little boys to play football'. This is, of course, gendered; children are learning about femininity and masculinity in these activities as well as self-control, movement and grace, and as Bourdieu asserts: 'Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps shape the class body' (Bourdieu, 1986: 190), which perhaps explains the popularity of these classes and activities. Certainly my research bears out what others have found, that levels of enrichment activities and concerted cultivation is highest among the middle-class women and those who want to gain and sustain advantage for their children (Hoffman, 2010; Perrier, 2012; Shirani *et al*, 2012; Vincent and Ball, 2007, Wall, 2010). Eleanor, it appears is very comfortable with her family, and just as when she decided not to breastfeed, turned to her mother and other female relatives for advice and help. Hers is a small act of resistance, but an important one. Mothers produce and are produced by the classed and gendered discourses and are not able to easily or completely step outside of them.

5.11 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have explored not only the practical work of mothering but also paid work, and what impact that has on how the women construct their identity. I began by discussing 'needs' and argued that they function as a governmentality, mothers are obligated to meet their child's needs and set their own to one side so that hers and the child's needs become one and the same.

I *spent* some time discussing Helen, who spoke at length about 'time'. Hers was the exemplar example of this, however 'time' is an issue most of the women talked about. I argued that time is a disciplinary practice and that there is a heavy price to be paid. Mothers' sense of self is at risk, judgements about her as a mother can be made if she doesn't manage to *make* time. I reiterated my contention made in the previous chapter, that the mental work of mothering is entirely invisible, this includes worrying, but also the huge amount of

organisation and travel for mothers going to and from the myriad classes and activities they attend.

I have discussed the problems mothers have with reconciling a sense of self after becoming a mother, and the disjuncture this can cause when the would like to return to work. The accusation of being selfish is morally wounding for mothers who, as discussed already set aside their own needs, but which is made worse by a sense of loss of the self as if being a mother sits outside of the self, or replaces it altogether.

In this chapter, the issue of class came to the fore in more tangible ways than in the previous chapter This is not a surprise as this chapter was much more focused on interactions, and it is in encounters with others that the relational 'doing' of class comes to life. I used that as a springboard to argue that the divisive language which has come to the fore under austerity has real damaging effects. I argued that austerity is a governmentality, and works to regulate and produce neoliberal subjects.

Finally, I discussed Sure Start, and detailed its original aims, before turning to how mothers now access services and activities through the centres. I suggested that using the services is a way to invite the state ever closer into their private lives. I argued that the extent to which mothers are filling their time with activities is more than meeting an expanded repertoire of needs, but is about gaining and sustaining advantage for their children through the acquisition of cultural and social capitals. This I suggest is evidence that neoliberalism invites competition, and that by its nature, competition is the same as inequality. Not everyone can win the competition. I spoke about one mother who actively resists the volume of classes, but she, just as anyone else, cannot step outside of discourse entirely, and so her resistance is small but significant.

6   CHAPTER SIX: Matters of Judgement and Class

6.1   Introduction

As discussed in the preceding chapter the values and cultural practices normatively associated with 'good' motherhood are those which have traditionally been associated with the middle-class. Furthermore, I argued that those discourses fail to account for just how reliant they are on access to cultural, social and economic capitals to meet their exacting standards. For Savage (2003), in wider society, this 'colonising' of social and cultural space by the middle-class means that it 'has become the class around which an increasing range of practices are regarded as universally 'normal', 'good' and 'appropriate'' (Savage, 2003: 536). In Bourdieu's terms, this is the 'legitimate culture' (1984: 79) of mothering that sets the terms of how things 'ought' to be done in order to secure belonging. In this chapter, I will explore how class, comprising social, economic and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1984) acts as the mechanism for inclusion and exclusion, and how mothers negotiate their own sense of belonging.

The revival of class analysis, especially among academics extending and expanding upon Bourdieu's conceptual tools evidences that class remains a potent symbol in the UK and that there is much that can be learned by analysing the work that it does. For these scholars class is 'dynamic and relational' (Lawler, 2014), it is something we *do*, and something we *use* to set us apart from one another. Which is not to say that there is no economic base, indeed economic capital is one of the most efficient of the capitals Bourdieu identifies. It is the most easily converted into other capitals (social and cultural), its symbols the most easily recognised, and its arbitrary distribution seemingly readily accepted by the majority[43]. The breadth of work that draws on this more nuanced understanding of class relations contributes to what Reay (2005: 913) describes as 'the affective lexicon of class'. This includes taste and disgust, recognition and value, deference and shame (Lawler, 2005, 2008, 2014; Loveday, 2015; Reay, 2005; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2005, 2012). What these works show is that class is deeply subjective, and importantly, that the apparently most subjective acts assume objective social force.

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[43] For example, a recent poll by YouGov (2015) showed that inheritance tax is the most disliked of UK taxes, with 59% saying it is unfair and 22% fair. https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/03/19/inheritance-tax-most-unfair/

I begin by looking at encounters with professional services in the form of Health Visitors, before discussing the judgement of strangers in public places. Finally, I will discuss the judgements that are made about food and what that can reveal about who is, and who is not understood as a 'good' mother.

6.2 Professional Judgements

Every family with a child under the age of five is assigned a Health Visitor[44], the aim of which is:

> [to] provide expert advice, support and interventions to families with children in the first years of life, and help empower parents to make decisions that affect their family's future health and wellbeing.

> (NHS England, 2014: 4)

Health Visitors are part of what Bourdieu (1998: 1) referred to as the 'left-hand' of the state, 'which are the trace, within the state, of the social struggles of the past'. His distinction is between the technocratic and fiscal functions (the right-hand)[45] and the social functions by teachers, social workers and so forth (left-hand), which he says are in tension with one another (Crossley, 2015). My interest here is the kind of knowledge Health Visitors bring to their encounters with new mothers. Their training is steeped (uncritically) in attachment theory and child development psychology (Burman, 2005, 2008), which is then presented to new mothers as 'truths' about 'human nature' (Lawler, 2000). Moreover, the document from which the short extract above is drawn, repeats many of the claims regarding tackling individual and social issues such as poverty, long-term mental health, and crime, which I critiqued in Chapter One.

Few of the mothers mentioned Health Visitors during our conversations, however, those who did were revealing, not only for what they told me, but also what can be inferred from their absence in the accounts of those who did not mention them, especially given the

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[44] Details of the service and its aims are available at https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/hv-serv-spec.pdf
[45] See Crossley (2015) for a critique of the 'role of the 'right hand' of the state in realising the construct of 'troubled families' and how this work aligns with the wider neoliberal crafting of the state that took place under the coalition government.'

commitment to five visits[46]. An important aspect of Bourdieusian analyses of class is that they move away from preoccupations with stratification and quantification. In part, this opens the way for bringing factors such as space into explorations of identity. To begin I want to explore my meeting with Kelly, who I met at her home in an industrial town in the north of my research location. It is a fairly lengthy section, however, the details are important to gain an understanding of the effects of location on how people are seen and see themselves.

6.3   Knowing your Place

After Kelly contacted me we had a number of email exchanges about where and when we could meet. Although she initially said her home would be the most convenient, when I asked for details she responded by saying perhaps a café would be better because she owns dogs. In answer I let her know that the location that suited her was fine for me, but she then told me that home was fine. On contacting her again to set a time and date, Kelly again responded vaguely about where we should meet. In all, we sent seven messages between us. I found the exchanges quite intriguing and couldn't be sure whether she was trying to find a way out of being interviewed, but in the end, we agreed that I would visit her at home.

Kelly lives in an ex-council house on a housing estate whose name was familiar to me from my previous job that included visiting Estate Agents and Solicitors in the town where she lives. I had not been to her housing estate before, however, as Wacquant (2007) notes, the very name of the estate meant its reputation preceded it:

> ...these entrenched quarters of misery have 'made a name' for themselves as repositories for all the urban ills of the age, places to be shunned, feared and deprecated. It matters little that the discourses of demonisation that have mushroomed about them often have only tenuous connections to the reality of everyday life in them. A pervading territorial stigma is firmly affixed upon the

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[46] Available at https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/qual-clin-lead/hlth-vistg-prog/ The service provides five key reviews at the following stages:
- Antenatal
- New baby
- 6 – 8 weeks
- 9 – 12 months
- 2 – 2 ½ years

residents of such neighbourhoods of socioeconomic exile that adds its burden to the disrepute of poverty…

(Wacquant, 1999: 1644, cited in Johnstone and Mooney, 2005).

On driving into the estate, past some properties under construction, I noticed some overgrown gardens and litter on the roads and pavements. There were an abandoned shopping trolley, some broken toys and a partially dismantled quad bike on the grass verge. Some neighbours were outdoors, including a man dressed in an animal print onesie and a woman in a dressing gown chatting on the pavement.

Mooney and Johnstone (2005) provide an overview of the negative associations attached to council estates[47] and by extension to the people who live there. The description I have given of the estate is replete with imagery that is coded as deviant, disorderly and disreputable. Clearly, I am not unaware of these signifiers, which are reproduced across media, television and film, as well as in everyday conversations. Neither is it likely that Kelly is unaware; indeed, I believe her reluctance for me to visit her home demonstrates that she understands that categorical judgements are often made, and she couldn't know whether I would do the same. Indeed, as we chatted about housework she revealed her concerns:

> **Kelly:** I - I was always told to be careful of the health visitors. I went, "what do you mean?" Because if they come to your house, your house is pristine, they're worried about the child. If they come to your house … You can't get moved, there's mess everywhere, and they're worried about the child.
>
> **JC:** Right. So you can't win?
>
> **Kelly:** Yeah. And I- I was taught that as soon as I turned around since I was pregnant. They says, "Oh, you'll have the health visitor coming for you". They - because they look around your house and that before you have the baby and…
>
> **JC:** For everybody?
>
> **Kelly:** Yeah. It- it's meant to be for a questionnaire that asks you loads of random questions. If you've come from a violent background and different things like that.

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[47] Mooney and Johnstone's analysis extends beyond council housing but they use the term in their critique specifically because of its loaded connotations and negative value.

> Whereas to me, even if you had, you wouldn't - because you're worried what's going
> to happen … when I read the report that they'd done, they say, 'she's got dogs'.

Reflecting back on our initial email exchanges, the mention of her dogs becomes a little clearer. Questions about the power dimensions in the research encounter are sometimes difficult to overcome, and recognising the power and marginality of the interview encounter is thus an important element of (re)presenting the social reality explored (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). It strikes me that Kelly was suspicious of my motives and that this perhaps was a reflection of her distrust of 'official' interest in mothers. Being fearful of speaking, or of revealing what is really happening can be seen as a strategy by mothers who are already aware of their marginality. As she went on to tell me about a friend's dealing with a Health Visitor, a possible reason for her reticence emerged:

> **Kelly:** I know one, her house wasn't perfect, but literally been up all night with a very
> poorly baby. And the health visitor was questioning why her house was in that mess.
> And she was like, "right, okay. I'll be back tomorrow. I need to see an improvement".
> Er, because there was- there was- there was dirty nappies and clothes and dishes in
> the sink. And it was, I- I went to her house the same day to help her out. She couldn't
> put the little one down because it was so ill. I mean, the baby was clean. The baby
> was always clean. And seeing the dirty nappies piled up shows that she's been
> changing the bum regular.

In the telling of this story, Kelly points to what she sees as the unfairness of the judgement, and that her friend is a 'good' mother, partly at least, as evidenced by the pile of dirty nappies. Clearly, the Health Visitor felt there was some cause for concern, and made arrangements to return and Kelly stepped in to help her friend to present the home in the manner demanded.

The conflation of hygiene and the morality of working-class mothers has a long history, the Institute of Hygiene, for example, came into being in 1903, the Infants Health Society in 1904, and the Women's League Service for Motherhood in 1910. The concerns centred on the health of the nation, including the 'need' to populate the Empire, but became focused on the newly emerging urban working-class. As Weeks puts it 'bad hygiene, dirty bottles and dirty homes, and the general question of working-class ignorance were tackled with a fervour' (Weeks, 2012: 163) by a host of Victorian middle-class moralists and philanthropists

(Mort 1987: 38). The mapping of poverty and the connection between locations and the pathology of the people living there is part of the story of the rise of the middle-class as a 'class'. Although a relatively small sector of society, the middle class began to wield increasingly hegemonic influence 'through institutions and networks that had become central to the modern nation-state' (Nye 1999: 84). Fears abounded of an unruly urban mass, the misery of working-class life, including overcrowding, lack of sanitation and hygiene, as well as the mingling of men and women in both working and living environments. As Lawler notes, 'the spatialisation of class is, in many ways consistent with the logic of class as classification itself' (Lawler, 2005: 433). Hence, nineteenth-century social surveys, such as those conducted by Charles Booth, in London's East End, and Seebohm Rowntree, in York mapped poverty, crime and disease. Contemporaneous accounts paid attention to slum children, who were considered to be a threat to society rather than a victim of it (Hendrick, 1997), and their mothers who were deemed to be failing their responsibility for the 'future welfare of the nation and its possibilities for progress' (Platt, 2005: 34).

Both the Health Visitor's assessment and Kelly's response to it point to is the enduring connection between working-class mothers' cleanliness and respectability (Skeggs, 1997, 2004). Respectability is a key value for the women in Skeggs' research, who are systematically and repeatedly pathologised, and through claims to being respectable, find ways to defend their moral worth. Indeed, Skeggs conveys the confining power of class-inflected ideas about respectability when she described how working-class women would apologise for the untidiness of their front room even when it was spotlessly clean and immaculate (Skeggs, 1997: 90). This certainly occurred when I visited two of the mothers, whose homes were perfectly clean and tidy, Eleanor, and Natalie (both of whom are working-class mothers of one son).

The difference, between Kelly's and the Health Visitor's evaluation of her friend is both classed and gendered; and that it is this that constitutes the messiness of the house as saying more about her than simple untidiness, it is a painful judgement of her character. In Berlant's (1997) words:

> if the pain is at the juncture of you and the stereotype that represents you, you know that you are hurt not because of your relation to history but because of someone else's relation to it, a type of someone whose privilege or comfort depends on the

pain that diminishes you, locks you into identity, covers you with shame, and

sentences you to a hell of constant political exposure to the banality of derision.

<div align="right">(Berlant, 1997: 3)</div>

I asked Kelly whether she had experienced anything like her friend's meeting with the Health Visitor herself, but she very carefully distanced herself from being cast in the same light:

> **Kelly:** I've never. No. And my- mine was to the- the opposite end when they - when they want to do his one year check. They wanted me to go into the- the centre. But I couldn't and I was like "can you just come to my house?"

In this instance, Kelly is confident that her home will pass muster and that she will not be judged lacking in that regard, to the extent that she would prefer a home visit. This was not, however, the same for me when we first tried to arrange our meeting. What I take from Kelly's reluctance that characterised our arrangements is that she was unsure about how I might classify her on the basis of her location. Slater's (2015) insight into how residents use a variety of 'strategies to deflect spatial disgrace' is instructive:

> concealing the truth about place of residence; (…) rejecting being in any way like their neighbours and investing energy in spelling out micro-differences; a rejection of the public sphere as an arena for neighbourhood sociability; and exiting the neighbourhood as soon as possible.

<div align="right">(T. Slater, 2015: 11)</div>

In addition to her initial reluctance to invite me to her home, and the distancing from her friend's messiness, Kelly told me that she and her family hope to move home 'soon' in part because there are 'newcomers' who are 'bringing the place down'. The classing of the area is having real material effects, not only on Kelly but clearly in her interaction with the Health Visitor, on her friend, how she is judged as a mother and in Kelly's response to distance herself, both morally and physically, from similar evaluation.

6.4 Take it or leave it

Not all women have a difficult time dealing with Health Visitors of course. Few of the women mentioned them at all, and among those who did, the more confident mothers tended to treat their advice as something they could either take or leave. Amanda was the most vocal

about not being bound by the Health Visitor's advice when she told me about being admonished for cutting her baby's nails:

> **Amanda:** "Well, let me tell you, you should never ever cut a baby's nails. You should *never* cut a child's nails". She was just ridiculous.

As discussed earlier, in Chapter Four, Amanda is a Psychologist and has fairly strong opinions on mothering. Her dismissal of the Health Visitor as 'ridiculous' is indicative of a confidence in herself and in her classed position. Furthermore, her response to the Health Visitor mirrors her earlier reaction to Supernanny which was also 'ridiculous'. While Amanda is clearly being dismissive and claims to be very selective in which expertise she chooses to accept, she did speak at length about various professional 'experts' as I discussed in Chapter Four. Unlike Kelly or her friend, Amanda is unlikely to have experienced the anxiety that is prevalent among working class women and single mothers that Health Visitors have the power to register their child as 'at risk' (Bloomfield *et al*, 2005; Jensen, 2010a; Peckover, 2002). This fear was however voiced by Natalie:

> **Natalie:** I don't know. Like when his behaviour has been bad, he's just had a few weeks where it's been like that all the time and I have thought about seeing someone about his behaviour and then I think 'no they're going to think I can't cope' or you know – one of my friends said that's the worst thing you can do. They'll start watching you because they'll think you can't cope

Natalie is not unlike Kelly in many ways, she lives on a 'council estate', has a non-professional job, and didn't attend university. It's interesting to note that this fear is again something that has been discussed with a friend, or rather the warning came from her. It is clearly a fear that circulates among some mothers and certainly, has stopped Natalie from accessing help despite feeling she needs it. As I noted above, another of the women was concerned about the tidiness of her house, and that was Eleanor. She also voiced concern about mothers being too scared to ask for help:

> **JC:** Is there ever a feeling that - does that fear extend to 'if they see I'm not coping, they might take my baby'?

> **Eleanor:** Yeah. I don't think for me it did. But I think for other people, yes. I think for especially, like, the young parents that I've worked with in the past, definitely. Like -

because it's happened to their friends because- because they've been told that that's a chance that that can happen I think, for those. But even in- even in my situation, I thought 'oh God if people think that I'm not coping…the health visitor ' that- that - do you know, at one point I think the- the health visitor said somebody would be out to see us and they're like, they asked if soc- if I had a social worker involved?

When Eleanor refers to being 'in my situation' she means regarding her prematurely born son and the lengthy hospital stay after he was born as I discussed in chapter four, (4.3). There is a contradiction in what she tells me here, firstly saying she was not concerned, but when telling me about being asked if she had a social worker, her tone changed suggesting that being asked the question was worrisome. This, she followed by speaking about it being a real fear for the disadvantaged mothers she used to work with:

Eleanor: I found that when I was working with the young parents. Like, they just wouldn't open up to anybody. Because they're just terrified that whatever - and quite a lot of those had had their children already removed and they were working on, erm, plans to get them back.

Before returning to the ways that mothers respond to Health Visitors, I want to expand a little on the bad behaviour that Natalie indicated she would like some help with.

6.5   Baby Behaving Badly

When one sees children, one 'sees' parents. When one sees children who have problems, one looks for parents, especially mothers.

(Ambert, 1994: 530)

If, as intensive mothering advocates suggest, meeting children's 'needs' all but guarantees happy, well-balanced and well-developed children, then a child who is unhappy, or 'badly behaved' is a source of embarrassment and guilt for mothers. Tales of tantrums in public spaces were common among the women, and each told me of the 'shame' they felt, although clearly there were differences in how the stories were related to me and dealt with at the time. Natalie, who lives with her partner, works full-time and has some help from her mother in addition to employing the services of child-minder. She has one son, who has a chronic health condition. When I asked her if her priorities had changed since having her son, she was clear that he comes first:

Natalie: Yeah, it's, you know, well, basically, you've just got yourself to think about [laughs] before, you know, whereas now it's just him, you know? As I say, if he's bad (poorly) then the world's just got to revolve around him basically.

JC: So does that feel always like what you want to do or…?

Natalie: Oh no [laughs]. You know, I'd much rather go to sleep or you know, he's in our bed just coughing all right. Oh, he's poorly, you just – it's not his fault, but at the same time, you know, you've been at work all day. You're exhausted - and you'd just love to be able to go to sleep, but he stops – because my mum had him on Saturday. She come over on Saturday morning and brought him back Sunday morning and it was just bliss [laughs]. You feel guilty that you say that, because... It's just a bit relentless sometimes...

Natalie tells me that in addition to her son's illness, he also behaves 'badly' when they are alone together; he throws tantrums and hits her frequently she says, but not in front of other people. This is somewhat belied when he starts to hit her while I'm there and is taken to his room to "cool down". She expresses her embarrassment to me and apologises for his behaviour.

One of the expectations placed on 'good' mothers is that they enjoy their child, indeed, within intensive mothering discourses, it is made clear that 'children are 'sacred', 'innocent', and 'delightful', so mothers should always relish opportunities to spend time caring for and playing with them' (Gunderson and Barrett, 2015: 3). Little wonder then that the admission that being away from him is 'bliss' makes Natalie feel guilty despite already telling me that 'the world's just got to revolve around him'.

I detect that Natalie does not often reveal her difficulties with her son, who she tells me behaves beautifully for his Grandmother and the child-minder. No doubt this difference in his behaviour is a source of much pain and anxiety for Natalie who despite her best efforts clearly feels she struggles with him. Given that these incidents happen when they are alone, it is clear that her guilt is a result of monitoring herself and her abilities. Her calm response and explanation to him when he hits her fits with the sensitive mothering model, in which mothers are encouraged to rationalise and explain to their children; as Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) this is a strategy mothers use which renders power covert and is designed to instil a sense of autonomy in the child. Walkerdine and Lucey found differences in the ways

mothers dealt with conflict and aggression from their daughters, with middle-class mothers converting it into an opportunity to teach their children to manage their emotions. As Lucey (2004: 117) explains: 'It was far more usual for the working- class mothers to be very explicit both about power differentials and their own position of authority'. This is not supported by my research, with mothers from all backgrounds adopting similar techniques. It is, I suggest, a change over time; there is over twenty-five years between their study and mine, during which time discourses of 'good' mothering have changed. I would argue that this includes the adoption of practices once associated with the middle-class as 'normal', so the management of emotions in this way is commonplace.

As I discuss in Chapter Two, neoliberalism has operated as a governmentality that assembles around notions of the self to produce qualitatively different ways to understand subjectivity (Brown, 2003, 2005, 2013; Rose, 1989, 1999). The 'ideal citizen' now stands as self-responsible, self-regulating, and entrepreneurial; the making of such a subject rests upon the notion of an inner self, free to transform and self-actualise. Intensive mothering, which I again set out in Chapter Two and have developed throughout my analysis in Chapters Four and Five, shares a similar ethos and calls upon mothers to become experts who can put into practice its principles. This opens up an interesting dilemma for Natalie since to access the help she indicates she would like means relinquishing some of her own autonomy. Admitting to me, a stranger, that her son hits her seems to me to be an incredibly intimate revelation; not because I was shocked, which I wasn't at the time, but perhaps on reflection I am, but rather that she told me she didn't admit it to anyone else. As Hochschild (1979) noted, it is mothers who are held socially responsible for children's behaviour, and mothers' honour that is at stake when children's outcomes do not match social expectations. Admitting that her son behaves badly, or asking for help with it entails Natalie either giving up her privacy, exchanging her autonomy, or acknowledging she is a failure. It is not a pleasant process, and Natalie has clearly decided it is not worth it, after all, as she told me 'they'll start watching you if they think you can't cope'. I will be discussing shame and embarrassment, which is certainly detectable in both Natalie's and Kelly's discussions about Health Visitors when I discuss judgements made by strangers and passers-by in section 6.2. For now, I simply park the observation that 'shame, and its opposite, pride, are rooted in the processes through which we internalise how we imagine others see us' (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 41). To

which I would add that neither is simply an individual emotion, but are profoundly social in nature (Chase and Walker, 2013; Loveday, 2015).

6.6   In Favour of Health Visitors

Of course, not everyone is fearful or dismissive of Health Visitors, and I will now turn to the experience of the two women in my study who spoke positively about them. Both of these women are of Bangladeshi heritage, Lina was born in Britain and Ruqsana moved with her family when she was under seven. My study does not extend to a comparison between ethnicities, however, that is certainly a direction that a future research project could take. For example, Lina suggested that her decision to breastfeed, which I discussed in Chapter Four, was made difficult by conflicting attitudes between her 'two cultures', resulting in her feeling unsupported by her family and friends. A closer look at our conversation reveals that Lina is quite unsure about how well she mothers her daughter. She is worried about letting her watch television, that she doesn't pay her enough attention, and that she buys her too many toys and sweets. She is, however, certain that her daughter's attendance at playgroup is positive, but as with breastfeeding, it is another issue on which she feels badly judged:

> **Lina:** So people might judge me, like, I - I know that some of the people in my community are judging me. 'Oh, she's giving her daughter to playgroup because she can't be bothered to look after her'. Hello? If she's at home, what's she going to be doing? Watching TV?

Interestingly both breastfeeding and attendance at child-centred classes as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, are central tasks for women who intensively mother (Faircloth, 2013; Hays, 1996; Lareau 2003; Wall, 2010) which Lina indicates she agrees is the best way to bring up her daughter. However, in adhering to these tenets of 'good' mothering practice Lina is resisting her family and 'community', and privileging one set of practices over another, for which she feels harshly judged. It appears to me that the cultural difference for Lina is important and is the main source of judgement for her, however, she takes comfort in the assurances of her Health Visitor as the expert arbiter of her child's 'needs'. There is a competition between the mothering culture she finds herself immersed in and that of the traditional culture of her family, which adds to the burden of performing either fully.

Before meeting Ruqsana I had assumed that being instructed to attend parenting classes would be painful for mothers, which I took to be something they would understand as a

negative assessment of them as a mother. During the course of our conversation, she opened up quite extensively about being estranged from her family due to their disapproval of her marriage. Her sadness in missing close contact with her own mother and with her sisters was evident, and at one point she began to weep. She is living in a strange city, has financial worries, and few friends in the area.

> **Ruqsana:** There are loads of women, who do, you know, I see that they have this connection with their child, that loving relationship and it's great and – but they have the discipline side of it as well. Which is one area that I really – I'm really la-lacking, so I'm doing a course at the minute. It's like parenting skills. Every week, I suppose, we'd cover something different, so last week it was about rewards and praises and time out... I was referred by the health visitor, I have close links with the school liaison woman and she was – they all help.

It is perhaps not surprising that Ruqsana does not feel coerced into attending parenting classes, indeed she embraces them; the possibility to gain access to training that will guide and support her is in line with notions of self-improvement. I cannot be certain from what she told me whether the Health Visitor and school Liaison Officer would have used more coercive means had Ruqsana declined to attend, however, she seemed to embrace the idea. Her own assessment is that she is 'lacking' and is keen to work on becoming a 'better' mother. My sense is that Ruqsana interprets the intervention as an act of kindness from caring acquaintances rather than as a coercive measure. Hochschild (1979) suggests that emotion work is a skill that is useful for projecting an image that is publicly observable. In the setting of an interview, with me, a stranger, it is entirely plausible that Ruqsana is protecting herself from being judged. This may be an instance of claiming value for what she values (Skeggs, 2015). To be clear, Skeggs argues that race, gender and class establish the limits of proper personhood, and 'those designated improper do not internalise the norms as presumed' (Skeggs, 2015: 1). Rather than being the ideal neoliberal as she presents herself, perhaps what Ruqsana is doing is demonstrating how much she values 'good' motherhood, and that in the absence of other legitimated capitals (social, cultural and economic) still has a claim on respect. Of course, this is a very localised and situated claim, nonetheless, an important one.

While Health visitors enter the intimate space of the family home and are positioned as figures of authority, there is an expectation expressed clearly by Kelly and Natalie, that they

will be judged, whether well or badly, as part of the Health Visitor's function. As Rose (1996) says of social work:

> The everyday practices of living, the hygienic care of household members, the previously trivial features of interactions, were to be atomised by experts, rendered calculable in terms of norms and deviations, judged in terms of their social costs and consequences and subject to regimes of education or reformation.

(Rose, 1996: 49)

The questionnaire that Kelly referred to can be understood as part of a wider commitment to standardise mothering, or at least to measure it in a bureaucratic way that informs state agencies. What questions are included and the meanings that are drawn from the responses don't happen by chance. They are carefully crafted, and decisions about the level of state intervention that may ensue rest on the prior assumptions built into their design. The power that lies behind them is rendered invisible, in part because they are completed with the health visitor, and are framed as support for mothers, but also in part because the action that springs from them is different for different women. Kelly knows from the experience of her friend that the questionnaire will have consequences and that these consequences are not always positive. Judgements of mothering and mothers do not always occur in an official context of course and I want to turn now to moments when mothers feel that they are being judged when they are in public places, by people they do not know.

6.7   In the Company of Strangers

Jayne is in her early thirties and has three children under age four. On the day we had arranged to meet she cancelled, very apologetically and said she would get back in touch when she could re-arrange, which she did less than a week later. When we met she again apologised for cancelling but, she explained she had miscarried her latest pregnancy, so hadn't felt up to it. Jayne is very stoic and seems to be a robust character. She grew up in the countryside and was educated privately, although is unsure whether her own children will be. She and her husband run a creative business together and their recent move was for two reasons: firstly, to finance the business by selling their home, and secondly, to move within the catchment area of a highly-rated state primary school. The approach to Jayne's home is markedly different than that to Kelly's, which I described above. The house itself is a large, stone-built villa with a garden to the front filled with mature shrubs and rose bushes. It's

positioned at the end of a road that has no painted markings, the houses are large and all different from one another, and opposite is a high wall, behind which is woodland. The only thing littering the road are fallen leaves. Jayne tells me that a treat for the children is to go for walks in the woods when she teaches them about nature and they 'run wild'.

Jayne's children are very lively and although they have been told to stay in the play room there are many interruptions during our conversation, including at one point with musical instruments. Following that interruption, she begins to tell me about taking them out for the day on the bus:

> **Jayne:** I don't think anybody who's not there really can, er, sort of empathise. I come across quite a lot of people and there's not necessarily aimed at *my* children but I'll be out and about with other friends or whatever and it is sometimes aimed at my children as well but people are very intolerant of children in society. They're just - you know, they're so [sighs] roll their eyes… So they were standing up on the seats in the bus stop, just sort of singing and just doing what kids do; they weren't doing any harm. And this lady walked past and she went '[sighs]' and rolled her eyes and made it perfectly clear that she didn't approve. Now, maybe it's because they were standing on the seats but it wasn't wet, they didn't have muddy shoes or anything like that.

What Jayne is showing, both in her interaction with the children during our conversation and in this vignette is that she allows her children the freedom to explore and play as a pedagogic device. Jayne showed a lot of patience with her children while I was there, asking them to clear away their toys with the promise of a woodland walk as a reward. They were rather more interested in playing instruments, getting cuddles, and joining in the conversation. As Walkerdine and Lucey (1989), and subsequently, Parker (2006) found this is a feature of middle-class mothering, part of which is that responsibility for the educational success of the child resides with the mother. Moreover, this style of interacting with children, which uses reason and negotiation, is understood as a way to not only equip their child with the skills to learn but also the ability to be separated from her by developing the child's autonomy and independence. As I argued earlier, it is no longer the case that this style of mothering is restricted to middle-class mothers, however, there is no doubt that it remains a cornerstone of their mothering practice.

Jayne seemed entirely unfazed by the disapproval of the woman at the bus stop, but when she tells me of another occasion, her tone and her angry reaction were quite different:

> **Jayne:** And there was another time when I was in town and I had all three of the kids in the back of the car. I've got a double buggy which obviously was pretty essential. So pulled the car in the marketplace. Now, you can park practically outside the florist. And I thought, right well I'll do that because there's no way I can get a double buggy in there. I'm not even going to attempt it, it's stupid and I'll be two seconds and I can see the car. So I ran into the florist. In the meantime, Annabel - she was just a baby, you know, just a new baby. Had started to cry and this lady was standing by the car and I could see her and I thought 'what's she doing?' When I came back to the car, she said 'you have a screaming baby in there' and she told me off. And she said, "You should never leave your children in the car". And I said 'I was right there and I could see you standing by my car'. And I said "I've got three of them in there. Can you suggest how I could get three children into that tiny shop?" and she went "you've got three? [tut] oh" and she just put her nose in the air and walked off like it was a most awful thing in the world that I had three children and I'd left them in the car and - and I just thought 'you're being so judgemental and you don't know. And actually, how …' you know, half the time it's safer to leave them in the car than it is to attempt to get them into the shop. Because George would be going out the door into the road, and … I think society is intolerant of children and I think people forget too quickly.

Although Jayne relates that she justified herself to the woman, in the telling of this encounter she was more hesitant than at any other time during our conversation. She reddened a little and expressed her anger at the woman both by imitating her own sharp tone and by being defiant about what it could tell anyone about her ability to care sufficiently for her children's welfare. Ahmed (2004) points to the experience of being shamed as one that doesn't subside after the encounter, but it, and the witness to the shame remain in the imagination. It is also interesting to note that in both of these stories, Jayne remarks that 'society is intolerant of children'.

For Jayne, the encounter seems to have really stung her because her position as a 'good' mother was called into question; and it clearly matters deeply to her. When I asked her whether there is a classed element to how mothers are judged, she told me:

Jayne: Erm - but again, you do - I mean, generally speaking, you do tone your behaviour down and, you know, in the same way, that you expect your children to tone their behaviour down. "Look, we're in public. You know, you don't need to shout" ...And, you know [chuckles] I don't know how to put it politely but you can spot the- the mum a mile away that's, like '[mimics shouting]

There are echoes of the 'disgusted subjects' that Lawler explored (2005) when Jayne says 'you can spot the mum a mile away'. Their behaviours and bodies are easy to read and are understood for the class they are and what that means. The shame attached to Jayne's recounting of the story seems tinged with not only being judged a bad mother, but she understands the relationship between maternal identity and class. To have been, however briefly, (and perhaps not at all) as 'other' strikes a deep chord. As Sayer puts it:

> Sentiments such as pride, shame, envy, resentment, compassion and contempt are not just forms of 'affect' but are evaluative judgements of how people are being treated as regards what they value, that is things they consider to affect their well-being.

(Sayer, 2005: 948)

In this instance, Jayne's emotional telling of the story reflects the fact that these things matter; they are about how she is valued and I would suggest, given her certainty in her position, it is unlikely to be something she experiences often. Shame then can be understood as an embodied practice. The key here is that shame does not only exist in the moment, it is felt again in the re-telling, but more than that it is a response based on what we already know about the 'shaming' episode. So, for Jayne, she not only flushes and is agitated when relating the story to me but also seeks again to justify her actions. She knows that leaving her children in the car is disapproved of and that the woman who castigated her does so because of what that seems to say about her mothering. For Loveday (2015: 3) judgement is a device of 'distinction and differentiation' with the capacity to generate shame, which she argues is 'misrecognised as a classed and gendered property of individuals, rather than a symptom of inequality' (Loveday, 2015: 3). I agree, and although Jayne is a middle-class woman with relatively high volumes and compositions of capitals (social, cultural and economic), in the moment of judgement, she is cast as a 'bad' mother. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that shame is a permanent feature of Jayne's body, precisely the opposite in fact.

I'm suggesting that the somatic response (blushing, tears smarting the eyes, increased heart rate) all signal the social nature of shame which is an evaluation by others (perceived or real) internalised and felt in the body.

When Ruqsana told me of an occasion when she too argued with a stranger, the telling was quite different:

> **Ruqsana:** I've had a few in the supermarket – not a few, just once, you know, because I've had this stage where he was like spitting. This woman was like 'he needs a smack' and I couldn't believe it. It doesn't feel nice and it can't be good for him to see me, mum, arguing with other people [laughter] in the market, in the supermarket.

Where Jayne was embarrassed, Ruqsana laughed it off. These two women are very differently positioned socially, and while one might expect the middle-class mother to carry off an argument because of an over-arching sense of herself as worthy, it is, in fact, Ruqsana who appears less injured by the interference and judgement of a stranger. When I asked her later in the conversation whether she is a 'good' mother, she shook her head but didn't answer further. So changing tack I asked her to describe the 'ideal':

> **Ruqsana:** Erm, the ideal mother is one who can look after her own self. Her home has got to be perfect. Her relationship with her husband has got to be perfect, you know, her partner. Her children have to be perfect. You know, they have to do – to behave and be good in school and… Isn't that what it's supposed to be?
>
> **JC:** Perfect? Do you know anybody that's perfect at anything?
>
> **Ruqsana:** I know a lot of people that do a lot better than me.

And she laughs.

The laugh doesn't sound hollow, or cynical in any way, and yet it doesn't sound like the self-deprecating laughter of someone confident in their own skin. We had got on well, and I suspect that the laugh was more about saving me from embarrassment, a social convention that hid a more uncertain or anxious feeling (Billig, 2005), that she didn't want to share.

Similar feelings are clear in Nicola's account of an experience she had a local Sure Start that she visited when her daughter was less than six months old. I discussed Nicola in Chapter

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Four regarding her privileging of 'experiential' over 'professional' expertise. She's twenty-five, has one daughter, is living with her partner and working part-time.

> **Nicola:** I used to take her when she had the acid reflux. But I couldn't sit down or anything. I just constantly had to hold her and jump up and down. People just used to look at us and me- sometimes, I was just in that thingy of a mood, I just felt like "go away. Don't even look at us". And I just felt like I had to leave sometimes though because it was like "I'm sorry". Like, because she was screaming really bad. But they were like - the people that worked there were like "don't leave". Like, but it was just the other mothers were being, like, looking.

What is important here is not *whether* the other mothers were looking, indeed when I asked whether they judge others, all were adamant that they feel empathy. What is important is that Nicola felt that they were. Sennett and Cobb (1972: 33) refer to the 'fear of being summoned before some hidden bar of judgement'; whether the judgement is real or perceived is in that sense incidental, the effect is the same. The normalising gaze of the 'panopticon' (Foucault, 1977) works, after all, whether the gaze is focused in our direction, or not, and acts as a self-regulatory force. In this instance, Nicola chose to leave. This is not because she slavishly follows convention, but rather her leaving is a device to avoid being judged. During our conversation, for example, she told me that her Health Visitor had told her not to use the words 'naughty' or 'bad', but that she only avoids using those words in the presence of the Health Visitor. Amy, the stay-at-home mother I discussed in chapter Five, told me the same thing. For Bourdieu (1990) this is part of managing everyday life, which includes adaptation to the game of the moment; a strategy that might or might not mean adhering to the rules. Although only small, these are ways that mothers resist official discourses of what being a 'good' mother entails, they reveal that these mothers find ways to present themselves in ways that are 'acceptable', to avoid being judged.

The interconnectedness of morality, class, and emotions is key to this analysis of the kind of judgements that are made in everyday encounters.

> Class is not just about the way you talk or dress or furnish your home, it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it...Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being.   (Kuhn, 1995:117)

Reay (2005: 911) agrees that 'social class is not only etched into our culture; it is still deeply etched into our psyches'. In other words, class is not always something that is consciously considered, but that we feel. It isn't surprising that being publicly chastised for the way you, or indeed your child, has behaved has the potential to embarrass. What is interesting is the ways the women reacted. Amanda for example rationalised that 'most people' would be sympathetic, whereas Ruqsana judged herself harshly. She offered an explanation of why her daughter was screaming, and told me what she could have said, but didn't which she then reclaimed as a way to show her 'good mother' credentials.

To reiterate, class is a dynamic force that is present in the minutiae of everyday lives, and as demonstrated has real effects in dealings with health professionals, other mothers and strangers. Not all of the judgements that I have discussed were disparagement on the basis of class. Yet, all have a classed dimension. Jayne for example, although clearly embarrassed about being on the receiving end of a stranger's vocal disapproval, not only justified her children being in the car – taking them out would be unsettling and difficult – but she also easily shifted the focus from her onto society as a whole. Moreover, when asked about who would shout at their children she reaches for the familiar trope that 'they can be seen a mile away'.

In the final part of this chapter, I will explore some of the ways that mothers discuss the symbolism attached to food and feeding their children. In part, this will look at how they feed their own children, but I will devote the first part to a conversation with Donna. It was in this conversation that the making and marking of 'others' revealed most clearly the inherently comparative operation of class, including where people stand in society, what volume and configuration of capitals they hold and importantly, how it circulates in cultural and symbolic forms (Bourdieu 1998; Lawler 2000, 2005b; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Reay 1998). What becomes clear is the way that social class is linked to the value placed on people through what Skeggs and Loveday (2012) refer to as 'devices of distancing and distinction'.

6.8   Food Glorious Food

It was not my intention when beginning this research to ask about food, and indeed none of my questions refers to food at all; and yet it is a topic that in some way was mentioned in all of the interviews. In some, it was nothing more than mentioning who took responsibility for cooking at home (mostly the women), but in others, it became clear that food is laced with meaning beyond nutrition. Beginning with the child's earliest nutrition, and the decision

whether to breastfeed, (which I discussed in chapter four), particular foods themselves carry implications for women as 'good' or 'bad' mothers. It is not surprising that feeding infants is arguably one of the most 'conspicuously moralised' aspects of mothering, given the vital importance of nourishment (Bryce, 2014; Faircloth, 2010). What is more surprising however is the *extent* to which distinctions made on judgements of taste, are part of how people claim for themselves a moral self, as Bourdieu put it: 'Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu, 1984: 6). It is also worth bearing in mind that the way that power works through matters of taste is that 'what gets to count as tasteful is simply that which is claimed as their own by middle-class people' (Lawler, 2008a: 126).

As discussed in Chapter Four (4.7), teenage motherhood is viewed somewhat disparagingly and is usually figured as working class (Macvarish 2010a; Tyler 2008). When I asked Erin what she thought people imagine when they hear the words 'teenage mother' term she answered with a flat 'Not me', before pointing out that 'I only just fell into the statistics'.

As we continue she describes what she thinks is the stereotypical view of young mothers:

> **Erin:** Just, doesn't necessarily care for them as much, doesn't look after them as much. Wants to go out all the time, like … I think there are probably depicted in pretty rubbish ways and from then again going back to working with them, there's a hell of a lot of really good teenage mums. Whether they would necessarily make the same choices as I would, parent the same as I would or give even their children the same food as I would. It doesn't mean that they don't have the same love for their child and they're keeping their child warm and safe and - yeah. Feeding them, whether it's McDonalds[48] or Greggs[49] or whatever. But, erm, I feel partial to a sausage roll sometimes, so… [Laughs].

In defending the younger mothers who she works with, Erin is also defending herself against the stereotype that she is aware could be applied to her. Examining the way that mothers speak about food, and the symbolism with which some foods are imbued, it is clear that this is a strategy grounded in a knowledge of the distinctions that are made. To illustrate this, I am going to explore what Donna had to say in a relatively long part of our conversation; I have quoted it at length because of how revealing it is of a wider discourse. Throughout this

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[48] McDonalds is a fast food restaurant http://www.mcdonalds.co.uk/ukhome.html/
[49] Greggs is a bakery and take-away food shop https://www.greggs.co.uk/

part of our conversation, class is circulated 'socially while being unnamed' (Lawler 2008: 126). Just as when Jayne tells me 'you know them a mile off' so it is when Donna talks to me about 'Greggs mams'.[50] I was unaware of this particular epithet, however, it does illustrate that class is forever made and re-made in the everyday. It is quite clearly a pejorative term and signals the unequal power between those who have attributed the name and those who have not.

Donna is married, self-employed in the licensed trade, has one daughter, and is thirty-eight. She tells me that her age is a barrier to enjoying the local Sure Start centre:

> **Donna:** Sometimes I feel really ancient when they're all, like, sixteen and bouncing around with their Greggs' sausage rolls. I think it just - because they all kind of like group together, though, don't they? So, like, the younger ones are always sitting on the chairs outside of Greggs and you go to like the leisure centre down the bottom and they're all sort of like, my age group, having a coffee.
>
> **JC:** Right. So bags of Greggs, what does that signify?
>
> **Donna:** That just horrifies us.

At the same time as Donna is aligning herself with a group of women who are older, and prefer a coffee and are collectively 'horrified', she also confers a sense of unruliness on the younger mothers who 'all kind of group together'. It is a subtle difference, but an important one that constitutes them as a mass. People do not claim to belong to a mass, but rather they are ascribed to one and 'being constituted as a mass they become the antithesis of individuality' (Lawler, 2005: 441). By definition, then the mass are not individuals; and while individuals are able to accrue value for themselves, the mass is an imaginary group constituted in terms of lack, or negative capital, which cannot (Bourdieu 1984, 2000; Skeggs, 2004). All of this speaks to the notion that identities are social; having a sense of who others are allows us to form a sense of ourselves. In the process, we draw boundaries that designate 'us' and 'them', so when Donna talks about 'we' go to the coffee shop, she is organising herself and her friends into a discrete category that excludes 'them'. Middle-class

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[50] In conversation with a friend who lives locally I was told about a 'Greggs dummy', which is a sausage roll. Urbandictionary online gives the definition: a cheap sausage roll given to babies by teenage mothers to shut them up while in the pram. http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=gregs+dummy

identities are produced in this process of boundary making and vilification of the 'other'; they stand in relation to one another so that, what one *is*, the other *is not*.

She continued:

> **Donna:** But you just know full well that they're going to get up in the morning, feed their kid Greggs, take it to school and then go home and watch Jeremy Kyle all day, you know? I think, well, you see them all, like, parcelling their kids off first thing in the morning and you know full well they're not going to work. Which annoys me quite a bit because they're the ones that get the free nursery spaces. And they're not using the free nursery time to go to work. They're using it to, well, come to the pub a lot of the time. We get quite a lot of them that drop the kids off at school and then come and sit in the pub and drink Jack Daniels and Coke all day until three o'clock and then go and pick the kids up from school and you just ... But no, I think it's an age thing. I don't think it's a….

The sentence is allowed to trail off, showing a reluctance to even mention the word 'class.' Greggs is discursively emblematic of 'bad' mothering. It isn't alone, of course, McDonalds, as mentioned by Erin, performs the same work, as do 'Fruit Shoots' the drink I mentioned in Chapter Four (4.7), that Melanie became quite exasperated about. As I discussed there, the drink is explicitly marked as working-class and indicative of 'bad' mothering. It is not simply that these foods and drinks are understood as unhealthy, or that mothers are socialising their children to enjoy less culturally valued food, (although that is precisely how they are read); it is rather that the traits that Donna has outlined are all negative, and depressingly familiar deficits attributed freely. It is clear that what begins as a moral judgement of behaviour slips with ease into national and economic concerns. So that what began as being coded as 'bad' mothering is understood as a drain on society.

Politically we are in the midst of a programme of economic 'austerity', and an emerging body of work suggests that this is not simply an economic position, but also a discursive and disciplinary form of neoliberal governance (Jensen and Tyler, 2012; Bramall, 2013; Allen *et al*, 2015). Biressi and Nunn (2013) argue that austerity enters the cultural realm discursively where its aims and values are 'deployed to marshal, harness and legitimise certain kinds of conduct and attitudes and to marginalise others' (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 12). Donna's description of the non-working, welfare claimant mother is a well-rehearsed trope that

narrates citizens as workers or shirkers; strivers or skivers. I discussed austerity as a form of governmentality in Chapter Two, which I linked to the political project announced in Cameron's (2016) *Life Chances* speech. This, I argued placed undue burden on mothers as both the cause of, and the solution to, society's ills, which is built on a merry-go-round of evidence which on closer scrutiny is badly flawed. 'Greggs mam' is clearly a shorthand that is in circulation. It carries class signifiers but doesn't explicitly reference class. Instead, it relies on those 'in the know' to interpret it and make the connection (Reay 2005). It represents a knowledge of class and classed relations and yet a refusal to use 'class' explicitly. As I set out in the introduction workers/shirkers are the descendants (through many iterations) of the deserving and undeserving poor. 'Greggs mam', is a localised version of the once ubiquitous 'chav'. The stigma attached to the female 'chavette', and the perception that she has a degenerate character can be traced back through a long line of women cast as morally depraved, lower class, and unrespectable (Nye, 1999; Weeks, 2012), and I have no doubt others will follow.

Expressions of disgust and outrage distance Donna from the mothers she is speaking about. Yet she is reticent to suggest that it is a classed disgust, rather she puts it down to age, and by implication a lack of knowledge. When asked whether at the same age she would have acted in the same way she says not, which suggests that perhaps age and class are intersecting here.

> **JC:** So if you had done it at sixteen, would you have been - if you were sixteen now, would you be the Greggs mam?
>
> **Donna:** No, I don't think so. No. I don't know. I think maybe it's - because my mum was twenty-five when she had me so I think it kind of - it's how you're brought up as well, isn't it? Because my mum gave up work until I went to … Well, until my brother went to school and then she went back to work. So she just totally - she's like, if you can't afford to have children then you shouldn't have them. As opposed to 'I'll just keep popping them out and get the taxpayer to pay for them'.

The idea that women are having children because they will receive welfare benefits is not borne out by research and yet has circulated for decades under various iterations, (Jensen, 2012: 3) value systems are consciously and unconsciously reproduced and circulated, attaching moral worth to specific lives and subjects through the pathologising of others

(Sayer 2005; Skeggs 1997, 2004; Haylett 2001). While the preferred term for the 'undeserving poor' changes over time, the categorisation itself does not disappear; so while the 'underclass' debates led by Herrnstein and Murray (1995) was replaced by 'social exclusion' (Lister, 1999), and the populist 'chav' appears to be slipping out of favour, there remains an understanding of a group of people who are 'deficient, delinquent, or a combination of the two, as are their dysfunctional families and communities' (Colley and Hodkinson 2001: 340). This rhetoric is important when taken alongside the faith put in 'good' mothering as the key to a fairer society (Lexmond *et al*, 2011)

References to Greggs, drinking, not working and leaving their children with other people build a picture of the mothers as lacking value in the field of motherhood; these codes mean that it is unnecessary to mention class by name and it is instead 'spoken euphemistically' (Skeggs 2004: 44). The effect of this rhetorical shift, coupled with a highly condensed image of the 'chav mum' (Tyler, 2008), who Donna doesn't name as such, produces a distorted yet highly recognisable caricature of the working class. Lawler's (2005) observation that neoliberalism places the blame for social immobility on the 'undeserving poor' and the absence of any nuance in debates about class beyond this supposed group 'works to *drive out* the notion of 'respectable' from the poor altogether' (Lawler, 2005: 435, emphasis in original). It is clear that Donna's description of these 'other' mothers leaves little space for respectability; indeed, she describes them as the very epitome of lack, with nothing of value to offer (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989).

6.9   You are What you Eat

While my conversation with Donna illustrates the way that classed difference constitutes some mothers as lacking value, condensed into the simple shorthand of a baked good, I will now show that mothers also use food as a way to consolidate and pass on class privilege. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that tastes are significant symbols of the difference between classes; furthermore, that capitals are exchangeable for one another. Concerns around eating habits have been shown to still be strongly linked to social class (Bryce, 2014) and in particular the middle-class, who are also 'display a wider gastronomic knowledge, consumption of 'exotic' food, and prioritise self-discipline' (Harman and Cappellini, 2015: 767).

Anna who is in her early thirties was on maternity leave when we met. She plans to return to her role in a local university when her son is a year old. She tells me about her sister-in-law whose child is a little older:

> **Anna:** Yeah, there's a pressure from somewhere that we're getting it. And it's making us judge ourselves. As an example, my sister-in-law, she's always justifying what she's feeding her little boy. Like, 'oh- oh you know, he's- he's eating this today but tonight I'm going to give him vegetables. Like, purely vegetables'. And I always think 'who's judging you? Nobody's judging'. And I'm like, "it's okay" and she says, "oh, you know, I don't worry about it" when she clearly she does. She feels a pressure to have him only having home cooked organic foods.

Anna's assessment is that nobody else is judging and she points instead to the self-surveillance that mothers do. The government healthy eating message of five-a-day has reached a wide audience and relies on the self-responsible citizen to act appropriately. The pressure that Anna's sister-in-law feels is the result of the reinforcement across multiple channels of the healthy eating message to which she is clearly responding. Not only are there advertisements, television programmes and government messages about healthy eating, fitness and the 'obesity crisis', but it also passes between people who, simply put, talk to one another. I discussed the powerful impact of the word 'crisis' as a driver of change in my discussion of neoliberalism in Chapter two, and would argue that it can be seen in action here. Fears about the negative future possibilities attached to eating habits are mobilised in such a way that government can operate 'at a distance' by regulating what, and how much, people eat. Importantly also in the context of my research, is that discussions of 'healthy food' speak to mothers' desire to do the best for their children. However, there is something else at play here, Littler (2013) notes that organic food has a culturally ambiguous status in the novels that are part of her examination of the 'Yummy Mummy' genre of literature. Here Littler finds the 'profoundly privileged' (Littler, 2013: 240) yummy mummy coded as 'normal' against the dull, figure of an environmentalist signalled frequently as the consumer of organic food – 'the consumer choice of cranks and weirdos' (Littler, 2013: 239). The 'normal' here is practically the prototype of neoliberal ideal who 'endorses consumerism, narcissism, individualism' (Littler, 2013: 243). Littler notes however that the 'yummy mummy' may have had her time and is now giving way to a new ideal, the

'mumtrepreneur'. I would argue that this shift is revealing of a subtle, but important capital resource: the power to define what 'counts'.

Stay-at-home mother Amy has two sons, and as I discussed in Chapter Five, she positions herself in line with the middle-class 'austerity mum' (Bramall, 2013; Jensen, 2012; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015). This has emerged as a new way to class and categorise mothers who are not in paid employment, in contradistinction to poor or working-class mothers who are categorised as 'unemployed'. Amy made it clear that she is very frugal, and although she didn't mention whether she buys organic, she does cook fresh food from scratch which is also coded as good. When I asked about whether mothers judge one another, she responded by telling me about her feeding success. In what seem to be nothing more than passing remarks, she is setting out her 'good' mother credentials.

> **Amy:** We still sort of judge other mums by that and we...even my close friends, like we all openly admit that we struggle at some of the things that others are good at, that, so my eldest is really good at eating fruit and, not particularly vegetables, but fruit, he'll always choose that over chocolate, and I know that a lot of mums really struggle with that, whose kids won't touch anything like that, I haven't found that difficult, you know.

Amy is able to demonstrate that she is a 'good' mother through the provisioning of 'healthy' food and her son's enjoyment of it (Bryce, 2014), and I would argue that her assessment that mothers are judging one another on this aspect of raising their children is more accurate than Anna's claim that 'nobody's judging'. I would suggest however, that both of these mothers are correct, which is to say that this is a continuation of the scrutiny attached to breastfeeding (as discussed in section 4.5), which I argue exemplifies the power of (self) surveillance on mothers.

Danielle is the person who spoke to me most directly about food. She is in her early thirties and has two sons. Both she and her husband are in well-paid jobs she tells me but had working class childhoods. This is part of the conversation when she tells me about feeling left out and that she doesn't know the other mothers who she thinks wonder why her son is always with his Granny. When I asked her what she thought they might think about that she told me 'that his parents must work long hours'.

Danielle: I want them to have a- taste a variety of stuff and that's probably where I get the most anxious, like, and frustrated with them when they won't try things. I'm, like, a bit of a- a foodie.

JC: Is it about getting them to widen their horizons?

Danielle: It is, definitely. And I think going to university, that's - you have your eyes wide open to so many other … Just different experiences. Meeting different people from different countries even, you know?

For Danielle food is representative of wider cultural knowledge that she aspires to for her sons. The mention of university came somewhat out of the blue, and she also mentioned that her husband thinks her 'obsession with food is ridiculous', before telling me he didn't go to university. This shows a future orientation that middle-class parents tend toward (Bryce, 2014; Vincent and Ball, 2007), both directly in this case to promote health and nutrition in the present and inculcated for the future, but also in a wider sense to imagined (middle-class) lives ahead. Wills *et al* (2011) argue that working class families have a much more functional relationship with food, as fuel; middle-class taste on the other hand, argues Donner (2006) is partly a conscious disregard for, and avoiding of, food associated with lower social classes. Bourdieu's (1984) study of the 1960s eating habits in France, showed that working-class meals were 'abundant', and their tastes shaped by the nearness to necessity, whereas the bourgeoisie ate quality over quantity, and aimed for 'refinement'. These differences may well be of their place and time, however as Bryce (2014) found classed difference in attitudes are still prevalent. For example, middle-class mothers in her research were stricter about which foods are 'acceptable' and working-class mothers more likely to value 'enjoyment'. While such distinctions did not emerge in my research, access to social, cultural and economic resources has a bearing on the range of foods available to people (Wills *et al,* 2011). Furthermore, as Harman and Cappellini (2015) shows, public displays of knowledge and taste by way of children's school lunchboxes is a site of class-making and marking, work which they conclude is never complete.

Danielle talked about cultivating an enjoyment of food in her sons, but also said that she sees the family evening meal as an opportunity to talk to her sons about their day. Conversations around the dinner table are not only part of an idealised version of family life, but also are a way to consolidate in her sons, through socialisation, middle-class tastes,

culture and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984). Despite saying little about gender, Bourdieu did posit that women are 'the predominant markers of taste. It is women's role to convert economic capital into symbolic capital through the display of tastes' (Skeggs, 2004: 142; see also Byrne, 2006; Gunn, 2005; Vincent and Ball, 2007). Mothers in my research all took primary responsibility for food, with Suzanne, whom I discuss in Chapter Five perhaps the most disparaging about the division of duties between her and her husband. After running through all her chores and errands on a typical day she finished off by saying, 'I'm then in; sort her dinner out; sort my dinner out. Do some more work. He comes back, has his dinner, sits on the sofa'. I will not rehearse the arguments again here from Chapter Five, except to note that all the women had hectic schedules of activities with their children many of which were discussed in terms of what their children would learn from the experience. In other words, 'it is part of a process in which the mother acts as an invisible pedagogue' (Skeggs, 1997: 43).

For Danielle, in common with all of the middle-class mothers in the research, when I asked about future success for her sons, she took for granted that they will attend university, indeed she'd 'be disappointed if they didn't'. As middle-class young men, their composition of social, cultural and economic capital, and the dispositions they are being socialised into will set them up with clear advantages in Higher Education (Archer *et al*, 2003; Reay, 2009).

It bothers Danielle that when she tries to talk to her sons about their day, the stock response is 'I already told Granny'. She also tells me that she doesn't approve of the food her mother feeds the children:

> **Danielle:** But she gets, you know, things out and I go - she'll go 'but you used to eat this' and I was like 'but mum, but it's still not good for you'. Like, tinned ravioli or something like - you know? Like, that's not a proper meal. She's like "it's alright as a snack". I'm like "no mum. Make something a bit more nutritionally balanced"

Danielle's desires to have her sons experience a wide range of experiences can be seen as a way to consolidate her own social mobility. Dismissing the foods of her own childhood as not nutritious is a way to disown her working-class background in a way that is not unkind to her mother. What Danielle seems to be concerned about is that her mother may undo some of her hard work to bring up middle-class children. They spend a lot of time with their granny (so much so that Danielle thinks the other mothers may wonder why), they talk to her and

eat with her. Lawler (2000) has shown the complexity of social mobility for women in resolving their class position by understanding themselves as being always already middle class, despite a working class childhood, and yet fearful that time spent with their mother will 'out' them (Lawler, 2000: 111-112). Danielle suggests that, even if not always-already middle-class, she acquired some of their knowledge and dispositions, when she tells me about going to the grammar school, and 'mixing with different types of people'. Her sister, by contrast, attended the local comprehensive school, and her ambition as a teenager was to work in the local sweet shop. I would argue that Danielle is marking out a boundary between her old, and new class position. More importantly for her, perhaps, she is sustaining and reproducing her new class position in her children.

6.10 Concluding Remarks

I have 'appropriated Bourdieu' (Moi 1991), for this chapter, in order to explore some of the issues mothers feel they are judged on. This has entailed considering how class privilege can be produced, reproduced and sustained in sometimes quite small and mundane ways. Across all of the conversations, the women spoke of the pain of being judged wanting. As I have shown, this is not equally distributed across social groups and although middle-class mothers are not immune, the judgement they face appears to be less violent. This is not to suggest that it is not painful, but rather that they are already positioned favourably in mothering cultures as the aspirational norm. In considering the affective dimensions of shame and embarrassment, I have been able to show that emotions are not simply subjective but are entirely social, with effects that extend beyond the moment and can have lasting impacts on how women negotiate an identity as a 'good' mother.

The dynamic and relational framework that I use here does not mean that economic measures are ignored. Economic resources are a key signifier on which people base their judgements. However, by stressing the comparative and relational ways that class operates, I have been able to think about 'how multiple forms of advantage are reproduced by some groups *at the expense of others*, that is, through practices of exclusion' (Loveday, 2015: 2). I have argued that 'judgement' is a way to determine the value the women place on themselves and others.

I explored the way that place has a bearing on how people are perceived, and judged in accordance with what is already 'known' about them. What is clear is that despite showing that judgements are being made that pathologise working-class mothers on the basis of how

they look, the foods they eat, and the places they live, class itself is rarely named. This is true of the places they live, the homes they reside in, and the places they socialise. There is no explicit reference to social class, rather it is spoken euphemistically, which is perhaps one of the effects of neoliberalism; which is to say, the very language of class is unstable when the over-arching discourse is individualised. A Bourdieusian analysis allows for an understanding of class as 'something to be done' (Bourdieu 1998: 12) so that in the observations the women make it is possible to interpret how they 'make' themselves and others in classed ways.

The judgements outlined here reveal that for some women the possibility of being known by others as a 'good' mother is delimited and that this has real material effects. This is especially pronounced at times of economic austerity and the vocal demands that state benefits should be cut. One of the central demands of mothers is that they raise middle-class children, coded as good neoliberal citizens of the future. Although the making of middle-class children is founded on a reverse logic that in effect recruits a consequence as a cause: middle-class people were brought up in a particular way, therefore their upbringing must result in a middle-class person. The seemingly simple logic applied in this argument both ignores the unequal distribution of capitals and assumes axiomatically that middle class is better than working class.

7   CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions

7.1   Introduction

I began this thesis by examining the most recent attempt to formulate a policy that, it is claimed, explains 'how the government intends to transform the lives of the poorest in Britain' (Cameron, 2016). As I discussed, the government's *Life Chances Strategy* is based on flawed evidence that largely turns on how mothers raise their children, and what that means for wider society. This, I argue means that our gaze is directed away from structural causes of disadvantage towards the individual lives and subjectivities of mothers.

My central argument is that neoliberalism is primarily a governmentality concerned with the production of self-regulating, self-responsible, and active choice-making subjects. By exploring the everyday lives of mothers it becomes possible to illustrate what that means for subjects who are a key target of its policies. I argue that far from improving the lives of individual mothers, neoliberalism together with intensive mothering exact a high price in terms of time, money and emotion. Furthermore, I argue that the rhetorical shift to 'parenting', which denotes a skill-set rather than a relationship, obscures the fact that raising children remains resolutely classed and gendered. In this chapter I will draw together the main insights and arguments of the thesis, beginning with a reminder of the aims of the research, which are built around the exploratory question:

> What does it mean to be a mother at a time when the welfare state is in retreat when inequality is on the rise, and (dis)advantage is framed as an individual achievement?

To be clear, this thesis is concerned with mothering and maternal identity, however, it is also more broadly a study of neoliberalism as a governmentality. While this has proved a particularly useful lens through which to examine neoliberalism, I would argue that it does not sufficiently recognise the nuance of class and gender in the formation of maternal identity. Accordingly, I have incorporated key insights from both feminist theories and the conceptual toolkit of Bourdieu. This framework allowed me to consider the everyday practices of mothering and link them to larger more abstract concepts and political processes.

The political interest in mothers and the raising of children that I critiqued at the start of this thesis is not new; politicians and governments of all stripes have long held faith that 'good

parenting' can overcome the effects of social and economic disadvantage (Lawler, 2000; Gillies, 2007; Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015). What my analysis has shown is that despite a lack of evidence to underpin such faith, familiar assessments of mothers as the cause of and solution to inequality remain high on the political agenda. What emerged very clearly in my analysis of Cameron's (2016) speech was the extent to which 'parenting' as a rational and teachable skill set has become taken-for-granted. Given what I have termed the merry-go-round of 'evidence', which circulates uncritically, and serves to reinforce itself, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, it is a particularly neoliberal approach to resolving social ills as diverse as poverty, drug addiction and alcoholism. The solutions to which, it is suggested, rest on brain development, character training, and for older children, social mentors.

I have argued that a central tenet of neoliberalism is the application of a market logic to human and institutional life. What this means in more concrete terms, is a retreat from the principles of a social welfare state in favour of a model of social investment. I have shown that the hardest hit by 'austerity' measure are women, and particularly lone mothers (Reed and Portes, 2014). Furthermore, that mothers, above all others are held to hold the key to unlocking their children's potential and secure better outcomes for themselves, and society as a whole. This argument is structured on the (debunked by Bruer, 1999) claims regarding building babies' brains; the (debunked by Jensen, 2010) analysis of parenting style regarding children's character traits; and the adoption of an economic model (untested empirically), of the relationship between long-term advantage and early-learning. I am not arguing that Cameron deliberately used misleading 'evidence'. I am however drawing attention to the detail to highlight that these claims have circulated uncritically politically and culturally to the extent that they are now taken-for-granted 'truths'.

The ideas contained within Cameron's (2016) speech have, as I have shown, been building for a long time. Hays (1996) for example argues that 'intensive parenting' can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951) is the basis for much of the advice that still circulates, and the neuroscientific base for advancing the call upon mothers to work on their child's cognitive development entered the field in the 1990s. In other words, it is not new. However, I will argue that there has been a steady intensification over time, and the demands on mothers are more than ever before. To reiterate, although some of the literature, and certainly the cultural and political rhetoric, refers to intensive 'parenting' I argue that this is a sleight of hand that is not as innocent as it

may appear. Firstly, it obscures the gendered reality of child-care responsibilities; secondly, it technicalises mothering as a skill-set in a way that a) changes how we think about the mother-child relationship, and b) bureaucratises mothering so that it can be standardised and measured by state agents such as health visitors, social workers and so forth.

Having laid the foundations of my research in chapter one, I turned my attention in chapter two, to an in-depth review of the literature. I provided a summary of the theoretical framework and literatures about mothering (2.11), so rather than rehearse those insights and arguments again, I will now turn my attention to how they informed my analysis of the accounts of the women who took part in this study. I have very loosely organised this analysis under the overarching themes of Knowing, Doing and Being. As my analysis chapters show however, there are similarities in my findings across these themes, including the part that gender and class play in constraining the production of neoliberal selves.

7.2   Knowing

This chapter is concerned with how mothers access, prioritise and privilege different forms of knowledge about mothering and motherhood. I opened this chapter with a quotation from one of the participants, Amanda, who was railing against a particular television expert. Unbeknownst to her she raised some of the very questions I wanted to find some answers to: What counts as knowledge? Who gets to decide? What kind of mother does it produce?

The first part of this chapter is concerned with the purchase of child-care advice books. For Foucault (1993) 'systems of knowledge and classes of experts […] induce citizens to regulate themselves through the 'conduct of conduct' (Kapitzke, 2006: 433). I began by arguing that the books are an invitation to a new relationship of the self to itself. There exist many hundreds of books, with various different emphases or presentation styles, but many are marketed as standing apart from all of the others. I contend that the very act of deciding that there may be a need for a guidebook positions the mother as always-already a neoliberal subject. The books are effectively self-help guides, the first part of the process of purchasing one is deciding that such a thing as good mothering exists, that there is an expert who holds the 'truth' and that she, the mother, will be improved by it. This I suggest is the basis for understanding a neoliberal self, she is reflexive, choice-making, and willing to work on the self to transform herself. I argued in chapter two that identity formation is morally loaded, and that working on the self has assumed greater significance as neoliberalism advances (Brown, 2015). There is no doubt that the women in my study felt obligated to buy

at least one guidebook; the interviews were peppered with 'ought' and 'should' when I asked about them. What is interesting is that while most did not resist the injunction to access expert knowledge, their level of engagement was often piecemeal.

Melanie and Laura both told me that they simply refused to buy books when they had their second child and preferred to go without. Clearly, they both were more experienced and I suggest that this is partly the reason, but it is also possible to read their decision differently. Laura described how she became anxious and distressed when her first child was born and she blames the pressure of the books. I would tentatively suggest, following Millar (2005), that what may happen is that people discover that real life and the books don't match. The perfect expectation before the baby, bolstered by shiny clean happy babies in books, doesn't turn out that way. They don't know that before the first, but they do by the time she's a few months old, which was when one of the women gave up on the guidebooks. The third possibility I consider is that there could be what Ricoeur refers to a 'spiral movement' at play in the narrative. A less than positive experience is reinterpreted through the lens of the present; at some distance and with considerably less anxiety, in the telling of the experience, the book is understood as faulty.

While this can certainly tell us something about resistance, and where women stand in relation to power/knowledge, I would suggest that it provides important insights into the ways mothers are positioned as in need of expert knowledge. For both Melanie and Laura, experience brought a confidence in their own judgement and ability, however for Laura at least, the pressure to conform to the expectation to become 'expert' herself was emotionally and mentally damaging. As a piece of qualitative research, I make no claims of generalisability, however, I would suggest that this is an area that might usefully be incorporated into future research.

Four of the women didn't buy a book as first-time mothers, which given that I've argued there is a moral dimension can be seen as an act of resistance. I certainly consider that a possibility. However, these four women are all working class, a little younger than the average in the research, and none have high paying jobs. The books cost money, which may simply not be available. Furthermore, I have argued that the books address middle-class mothers, and so for those women who were raised in working-class households provide a less familiar set of practices. By thinking through using Bourdieu's concepts, it is possible to argue that the books may simply feel like they don't address what these women know, want,

and make sense of. Nonetheless, the majority of the mothers did buy books, which suggests that there is a classed exclusion; as young working-class mothers, this is, at least potentially, an issue on which they are open to being judged negatively.

Most of the women mentioned their partner during our conversations (all of the participants are heterosexual, so these are male partners). It became very clear that buying advice books, and reading them, is a gendered practice. I argue that the work of deciding to buy, selecting, making the purchase, reading the book, passing on information to the partner is all mental work, that is not recognised as work. I discussed both Leanne and Amy, as illustrative of the gendered engagement with expert guidebooks. There clearly is not the same pressure to become 'expert' placed on fathers, but rather, is an extension of mothers' invisible labour. One of the contributions I would like to make with this research is a demonstration of the myriad small, but important labours of being a mother. Each of these women is doing similar work, but it is managed privately, and often unnoticed by the women themselves. Making it public may be the first step to making it political.

In the next section of the chapter, I discussed face-to-face meetings with experts, mostly breastfeeding nurses and midwives, but also some doctors. Such encounters are clearly highly moralised and pressured according to the women's accounts. The main source of pressure appears to be breastfeeding advisors, who Heather told me repeatedly 'badgered' a friend of hers. This, she was reportedly told, was because of the postcode her address shares with a 'poor neighbourhood'. Erin works with young teenage mothers, and we spoke about their breastfeeding, which has a very low take-up. They seemed much more likely to resist the pressure than the women in my study. This information came to me via a third party and clearly I was unable to probe for more details, so I tentatively suggest that these young women have little expectation of the freedoms of an ideal neoliberal subject (McRobbie, 2013) with a capacity for endless transformation. What is interesting is how this compares with the pressure felt by the mothers who took part in the research. The two women who did not breastfeed, Michelle and Eleanor, spoke at length about their reasons for bottle-feeding. Even in the re-telling, they were careful to justify the decision. For Eleanor the decision was 'really scary' and she described being fearful of letting the breastfeeding nurse know. Our discussions happened because the women all wanted to speak about it, I never raised the issue before they did. The discussions revealed some classed differences and some of the ways mothers 'tell' themselves. It is also instructive of

how the women internalised the gaze, feeling watched, and acting accordingly. I posit that there is some difference in how middle-class and working-class women privilege expert against experiential knowledge, particularly that of their family, with the working-class women in my study much more reliant on their female relatives, especially their own mother. Indeed, although Eleanor intensely felt the pressure to breastfeed, her mother's advice to bottle-feed made the decision easier.

The pressure to breastfeed is about more than simply nutrition, it operates as a signal that the mother is 'doing the right thing'. Intensive mothering, which is increasingly understood as 'good' and 'normal' mothering is not only child-centred but expert-guided (Hays, 1996; Wall, 2010). There is an added dimension in that breastfeeding is seen as the 'natural', and therefore 'better' option. It speaks to the biologically derived argument that responsibility for child-care rests with the mother. Despite a wealth of feminist scholarship that argues that this is a limiting construction for women, it is nonetheless enduring.

In the last part of the chapter, I discuss women's use of social media as a source of advice or support. It is not immune from judgemental comments and Melanie, in particular, was infuriated by the 'judgeyness' especially the class-based judgements. The topic did open up an unexpected discussion with Rebecca and provided some very rich insights into the obstacles she faces in claiming an identity of value. As a young-looking single mother of a 'mixed race' child, she described the sort of judgements she feels 'in real life' from professionals and other mothers. I compared her description of dealing with her son if he misbehaves in public with that of Amanda, an older middle-class mother. What is clear from their descriptions is that class is written on the body, although not in isolation. It is the particular combination of her diminutive size, youthful appearance and being a mother of a 'mixed race' child that marks Rebecca out. I argue that her perception of how she is judged is painful and a real material effect of being positioned outside of the middle-class norm. Rebecca reports her experience of using an internet forum as positive and it is a space where she feels anonymous, however, as the remainder of my discussion of internet forums shows, they are also fraught with classed judgements. The potential to break down divisions between what counts as knowledge is interesting, with expertise perhaps being more democratised. That said, the evidence of my research suggests that sites are not as anonymous as people suppose and identities not entirely erased.

The women's accounts of how they access knowledge about mothering and the privileging of different forms provide some very interesting insights into the everyday experience of mothering. It is, as I have argued, a way for discourses of intensive mothering to be produced and reproduced, whether from 'professional' or 'lay' experts. I contend that it is not without cost though, in terms of time, money and emotion. Furthermore, I suggest both gender and class are important constraints not only on access to expert knowledge but also on whether the accrual of that knowledge 'counts' in the construction of particular selves as 'good'. I argued that the work of mothering is often rendered invisible; this disrupts the concept of 'parenting' as a substitute for mothering, a theme I develop further in my discussion of 'doing', which I now turn to.

7.3 Doing

I begin by discussing the political underpinning of 'needs-talk' (Fraser, 1989), and argue that most 'needs' are constructed socially and that this reflects the prevailing social and political situation. As children's needs expand, mothers' own needs are allowed to (or indeed must) recede; the added work is just expected to be absorbed as if mothers have unlimited resources of time at their disposal. Time is a large problem for many mothers and a lack of it can be very problematic. If mothering is to be ever more intensive, then something has got to give. Helen told me she gets stressed; finds the constant activity almost obligatory, even though she would prefer to slow down sometimes; finds being away from her son even for one night worrisome; and is bothered by her lack of time for family members. When asked what could be let go, her response was that she could possibly cut down on her paid work; it seems that demands from other people are always ahead of her own. I repeat the point that mothers' time is not recognised, but is instead folded into what is expected of her. I add to the list of mental work with both 'mother worry', and mothers organising. All of the activities I go on to speak about have to be arranged and children's transport organised. I would argue that feeling stressed is an indication that fulfilling all her multiple commitments is important to Helen. Her response that if anything were to give it would be her job is a luxury many mothers can ill-afford, but what is not surprising is that there is no indication that any of her son's activities would be disrupted. The prioritising of children's needs is simply non-negotiable in the discourse of intensive mothering. The structuring of time and activity is Foucault (1977) argues a disciplinary mechanism, and as I discuss in this chapter, some mothers are extremely busy for a good deal of the day. I talked to the women about

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their own social life and for the most part, they told me they don't tend to socialise. For the mothers with infants, this seemed to me to me more understandable, than someone like Helen, who had been out with friends only once since he was born. Understandable or not, it does point to the tendency for mothers to set their own needs aside. I would argue that this has very strong echoes of the idealisation of mothers as self-sacrificing. Indeed, as Hays (1996) points out, to be considered selfish is beyond the pale. This is a contradictory position for mothers within an individualised society and speaks to Brown's (2015) claim that neoliberalism is gendered by design.

That notwithstanding, the classed figure of the stay-at-home-mother stands out as one of the clearest indicators that women who make the choice to mother full-time cannot rely on the value associated with intensive motherhood alone. Amy entirely fits with the stereotype identified by Orgad and De Benedictis (2015) of thrifty domesticity tied with entrepreneurialism, and which has been identified as a neoliberal ideal (Bramall, 2013; Jensen, 2012). This is a classed configuration and relies on independent wealth or mothers with a partner who is prepared to share his/her paid salary. Accordingly, value for poorer women does not attach to their full-time motherhood, and if she's in receipt of state welfare payments, she remains vilified. I argued at the outset that one of the features of neoliberalism is a retreat from the welfare state, and that coupled with the political rhetoric around workers and shirkers, divisions are hardening. This is, I reiterate, the effect of austerity, which I understand as a technology of governance, designed to incite people to become self-responsible. The discussion I had with Suzanne bears this out. While initially she warmed to an idea she had about the need for motherhood to be better valued and rewarded financially, she quickly retreated from that position when I asked about women who are unemployed. She did not see the justification for a 'single mum should feel that they ought to get benefits'.

My discussion turns to Sure Start centres, which I suggest are a key site for the expansion of needs to take hold. All of the mothers used the centres at some point, some on a daily basis consisting of various child development classes. I argue that middle-class families, who would normally have nothing to do with children's services, effectively volunteer to put themselves in the hands of the state. Some of the mothers attend multiple classes at multiple sites, in addition to other events and activities. This is the 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003) of mothers gaining and sustaining advantage for their children through the

accumulation of capitals. I suggest that this is beyond even the expansion of needs I have already discussed and that the multiple classes, activities and cultural visits that some of the mothers attend with their children is a further intensification of motherhood. This is in part due to the assumption that satisfaction of 'needs' is the bare minimum required of mothers and therefore attracts no value to themselves. Going beyond needs is a way to claim the identity of a 'good' mother. This is an option only available to those with sufficient volumes and compositions of capitals, and ensures the reproduction of privilege for middle-class children. Only one of the mothers in my research took no part in organised classes or enrichment activities – Eleanor, who told me she preferred to spend time either alone with her son or with family members. It is a small act of resistance against the intensification of mothering. All other mothers in the research took part in some activities, however, there was a marked difference in how many, and what type, ranging from private music classes at the Sage (a very prestigious venue), to a single weekly, free SureStart session. What should also be noted is that the cost in terms of time and money in getting to and from classes can be prohibitive for some mothers. I would add that the time spent organising and transporting is another task that mothers undertake and is unnoticed as labour.

7.4   Being

In my final analysis chapter, I have turned my focus more pointedly on class relations to explore what difference class makes to mothers. I began this chapter by restating how class is theorised using Bourdieusian concepts, before giving brief background information about Health Visitors, who are discussed in the first section. I argue that Health Visitors are steeped, uncritically, in the discourse of intensive mothering and more specifically in attachment theory. The first thing to note is there were absences in the women's accounts about Health Visitors insofar as most did not mention them at all. Those who spoke most about them were working-class women, which is not unrelated. I discuss in this chapter the spatialisation of class and the damaging effects judgements have on selves deemed to be lacking. Kelly recognised the impact of where she lives on how people perceive her, and I suggest it explains her reticence when we arranged to meet. My point is that the damaging effects of judgement endure. The relationship between people and spaces has a long history that ties women, hygiene, morality and class together to produce subjects in need of intervention. Further, I draw on Skeggs' (1997) work about respectability to argue that women who are potentially susceptible to harsh criticism, (or believe themselves to be), cut

themselves off from what could be useful services. It became clear that circulating among some groups of mothers is a fear of being watched, and some are unwilling to ask for help they may be entitled to even if there is not an imagined risk of their child being removed. This emerged in my conversation with Natalie for example, who appeared to be in need of some support related to her son's health and behaviour issues, but who was fearful that admitting she can't cope would mean the removal of her child.

I discussed the affective dimensions of being on the receiving end of judgmental comments. I argued that shame is a social emotion, which is, in line with Loveday (2015), a symptom of inequality misrecognised as the property of individuals. Being middle-class does not mean there is no sense of embarrassment or a visceral reaction of course, but rather there is a difference in 'recovery time', coping strategies or alternative causes are attributed to deflect attention before happily forgetting. There is a very clear difference between Natalie's expression of, and response to, embarrassment and Jayne's. When Jayne tells me of two occasions when strangers have castigated her, once verbally, it is clear that she was upset by the encounter, but unlike Natalie's imagination that her child could be at risk, Jayne merely dismissed the interference as misplaced.

It became clear when talking to some of the younger working-class mothers that for them there was a heavy emotional cost to 'feeling judged', Whether any judgement was made explicit, or imagined to be probable, the impact was the same, and mothers would remove themselves from situations to avoid the possibility. This points to the regulatory force of demands on selves to be certain (valuable) subjects. I would argue that class is so deeply ingrained in the self that judgements become internalised so that we begin to know ourselves in relation to how others 'know' us. It is not impossible to believe that some of the women who took part in the research might be judged, not because of anything they said or did, but because class is relational. This was very clear in the discussion I had with Donna and her description of, and evident disgust at a group of young local mothers she referred to as 'Greggs mams'. I contend that the making of class is entirely clear in the conversation we had, and I draw connections to the construction of these women as understood by Donna as entirely 'lacking'. Furthermore, that in doing so, she is drawing very clear boundaries between herself and them, comparing for example the places they meet, or the drinks they consume. Many of the tropes she draws upon are well-worn and there is little space for the

women to be understood as anything other than 'bad' mothers, bad citizens, and bad consumers.

In the final part of my analysis, I discuss the symbolic value attached to foods as a marker of taste and judgement. Children's eating habits are a way that mothers can attach value to themselves, furthermore that the introduction of more adventurous foods is one way that others can pass on cultural capital. While Amy drew on 'healthy eating' messages to demonstrate her 'good mother' credentials, the terrain is uneven and shifting. Accordingly, Anna remained unimpressed by her sister-in-law's insistence on organic produce. I would argue that read together the differing positions illustrate that what 'counts' and what 'sticks' in claiming a middle-class identity is a complex (and exclusionary) process. Food is, however, a subject that is laden with moral possibilities as briefly discussed in relation to breastfeeding earlier in my analysis. For the purposes of my argument, I have merely scratched the surface of the topic to illustrate the work that goes into gaining, sustaining, and reproducing class.

7.5   Limitations, Contributions and Possibilities

In my discussion of the methodology that has shaped this thesis in chapter three, I stated that the research has been formulated on a series of decisions, interpretations and selections. The originality of this thesis rests on that formulation. The questions I asked, the accounts of the women who took part, and the themes that emerged and were analysed, could all have been different than they are. This, I would argue is one of the strengths of sociological research – its endless possibilities. All research must, however, have limitations in order to be focused and to reach some conclusions, moreover, the limitations in this study are also possibilities for future research.

The inability to generalise from this research could be considered a limitation, however, generalisability was never one of my intentions. As a qualitative study, based on the accounts of twenty-five mothers, this research is not, nor is it intended to be, representative of all women. Instead, I prioritised a contribution that provides depth of understanding and to building theory. To be clear, I would argue that the research contributes to knowledge largely because of the richness of the women's accounts and how they can illuminate broader concerns. That notwithstanding, the thesis is my interpretation of those accounts and is clearly shaped by my concerns.

I have argued that attitudes towards people who claim welfare benefits have hardened and that this is particularly concerning given that mothers have been hit disproportionately by cuts imposed as part of current 'austerity' measures. As the effects of this on-going retreat from the welfare state hit home, critical engagement with how social, political and cultural representations of mothers add to social divisions will demand closer attention. The way this has played out in my research is that working-class mothers are discussed in extremely pejorative terms. One of the most important limitations to my study has been that I have not addressed in any depth how other axes of identity such as disability, 'race', sexuality, ethnicity and so forth impact on the experience of motherhood. This is primarily a decision based on the need to remain focused and to arrive at meaningful conclusions, and in no way reflects a dismissal or denial of their importance. Future research that focuses more closely on these axes and the complexity of how they interact will, I suggest, be ever more urgent.

My review of the existing literature reveals the breadth of research that has informed my study, and it is to many of these debates that my research contributes in return. For example, I add to discussions that question the way intensive mothering has come to stand as a proxy for 'good' mothering. What my research shows is that most mothers practice intensive mothering, the difference is in degree. However, as discussed in chapter three (3.4), although there are many differences between the women who took part there are none who could reasonably be described as either very privileged or very disadvantaged. Extending the research to mothers in those positions would add weight to challenges to policy makers for example who argue that the minutiae of everyday practices are making a difference to long-term outcomes. In other words, if my finding that there are only small differences in what mothers do, then perhaps government focus can be re-directed to something that actually addresses injustice inequality and disadvantage.

I have shown that mothers are devoting a great deal of time and money to fulfil what I have argued is an intensification of mothering and expansion of what are understood to be children's needs. The cost however, extends further than time and money, and as I have argued exacts a high emotional price. The pressure to conform to these demands is evident in the women's accounts and acts of resistance are not only few, but are enacted privately. This thesis contributes to the growing body of work that problematises the divisiveness of postfeminist/neoliberal discourses that are inherently hierarchical. One possibility that arises from this and similar research is that these private issues are made public; and when they

are made public, they become political. There is a large degree of scrutiny and feeling judged between mothers who could otherwise be supportive of one another, and so I would like this thesis to make a call for the reclaiming of collectivity based on common experience.

7.6   Concluding Remarks

In this final chapter I have drawn together the arguments made throughout this thesis. Arguably, some of the issues I have discussed are small and localised, for example, it could be said that whether a young mother stays or leaves the community centre when her baby is crying is, in the greater scheme of things, insignificant. Perhaps so, but as this thesis shows the mundane and everyday do not start and stop in the moment. I have drawn together social, political and cultural understandings of mothering; historical constructions, spatialisation, food, and expertise; neuroscience and economics. The point is, nothing exists in a vacuum. All are implicated in what we 'know' about mothering, and all contribute to the lived experience of being a mother in contemporary Britain. And so, I finish this thesis where I began:

> Today we are witnessing what Angela McRobbie has described as a 'neoliberal intensification of mothering': perfectly turned out middle-class, mainly white mothers, with their perfect jobs, perfect husbands and marriages, whose permanent glow of self-satisfaction is intended to make all the women who don't conform to that image – because they are poorer or black or their lives are just more humanly complicated – feel like total failures.

> (Jacqueline Rose, 2014: 20)

To which she adds:

> This has the added advantage of letting a government whose austerity policy has disproportionately targeted women and mothers completely off the hook.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Recruitment Poster

MOTHERS INVITED TO BE PART OF RESEARCH STUDY

- ARE YOU THE MOTHER OF A CHILD UNDER 5?
- DO YOU LIVE IN OR AROUND NEWCASTLE OR GATESHEAD?
- CAN YOU SPARE SOME TIME TO TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I am a postgraduate researcher at Newcastle University and would like to invite you to take part in my study into motherhood.

I would love to hear about your experience of being a mother, your hopes for the future, and your opinions about what it means to be a good mother.

This would involve a face-to-face conversation, lasting about an hour, with me, Jacqui, at a time and place convenient for you.

If you agree to take part your contribution will be treated in strictest confidence, and you will remain anonymous in all data and documents.

If you would like to hear more and think you would like to take part in this research please contact me by phone, text or email and I'll call you back. Telephone: 07879241820

Email: Jacqueline.close@ncl.ac.uk

Jacqui Close, PhD Student. School of Geography, Politics, and Sociology. Newcastle University. Newcastle upon Tyne. NE1 7RU.

Newcastle University

Appendix Two: Participant Information

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PhD Researcher	**Research Supervisors**
Jacqui Close	Dr Steph Lawler
Newcastle University	Professor Jackie Leach Scully
Telephone: 077123456789	
Email: Jacqueline.close@ncl.ac.uk	

My name is Jacqui Close. I am a PhD candidate at Newcastle University and I am inviting you to take part in my research into motherhood. Before you decide whether to be involved, please read this information carefully. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like further information, please contact me and I will do my best to answer your questions. You should only sign the form when you are happy that you want to take part.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**

There is a huge amount of information available about how to bring up children. How people learn to be mothers; the challenges they face day-to-day; and their hopes and dreams for their children matter because that shapes the kind of advice available. This research is designed to find out what mothers think about the information available to them, how they use it, and what it means for their child's future adulthood.

2. **What happens if you agree to take part?**

Because I hope we can talk about a lot of different aspects of being a mother, I would like to meet you face-to-face for about an hour. I realise this is a big commitment of your time and want to make it as easy as possible, so we will meet where you prefer, at a time most convenient for you. This might be at the University, your home, or in any public place.

I hope to meet with approximately forty mothers in the next six months. Once that is complete, I will contact you to ask whether you would be willing to meet me again. This would allow us to talk you about some of the issues raised by other mothers and anything you might have thought about or changed your opinion about since the first meeting.

With your permission I will be recording our conversations using a digital voice recorder. Afterwards I will make a written copy, which if you would like, I will send to you.

3. **What happens to what you say?**

Firstly, it is very important that I can assure you of your privacy. All the information you give me **will be confidential** and will be used in a way that will not allow you to be identified. When the study is complete it will be written up and may be published or presented. Some of what you have said may appear in those documents, but your name will not; neither will there be any personal information that could identify you or where the research has taken place. I will never disclose your participation to anyone else who takes part.

Because the research is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, my data will be lodged with them when the project is complete. Your personal information will not be included and will be deleted from my files at that time.

4. **What happens if you change your mind?**

If for any reason you decide that you no longer wish to take part in the research you should simply tell me. You do not have to give a reason and I will not ask for one. The choice about what happens with interview material is yours. If you want your interview to be deleted and removed from the research, then up until completion of the project, which is planned for September 2015, I will fully comply with your wishes.

5. **What is the next step?**

If you would like any further information, have any questions or would like to express your willingness to take part, please contact me. When you are happy to proceed we can arrange to meet at your convenience.

Informed Consent Form
Ideals and Expectations:

Representations, Practices and Governance of Contemporary Motherhood

Statement by the Participant

I have been invited to take part in research by Jacqueline Close into motherhood and child-rearing. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about it. I am satisfied that my questions have been answered fully and I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant   _____

Signature of Participant   _____

Date   _____

Statement by the researcher

I confirm that:
- [name of participant] has read the Participant Information Sheet.
- I have answered any questions raised.
- Consent has been given freely and voluntarily.
- Copies of the Participant Information Sheet and this Consent Form have been given to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher   _____

Signature of Researcher   _____

Date   _____

Appendix Four: Interview Guide

Background information

- Name

- Age

- Marital Status: Married/living with partner/divorced/single/living apart together

- Home Owner/renter private or social/ with family:

- Children: name/gender/age

- Paid employment status pre and post motherhood: full/part-time; occupation

- Partner employment status

- Highest qualification self/partner

Interview Schedule

Transition to motherhood:

When do you think you first knew that you wanted to be a mother?

What did you think it would be like?

Is it anything like that?

Do you think you've changed as a person since becoming a mother? In what ways?

Did you expect that?

Is there anything you miss about your life before becoming a mother?

Do you think being a mother is something we, as a society, value?

Advice, Practice and Comparison:

How would you say you learned how to be a mother?

Where do you get advice from? What sort of things is the advice about? How do you decide whether it's right for you and x?

Have you ever attended anything like a parenting class, either at the clinic or somewhere like a surestart centre? Was that by choice?

Do you think those sorts of classes are helpful? In what way?

Interview Guide Continued

What about babycare literature, (magazines, books or websites), are they useful? Is there anything you can think of that you've decided to do as a result of what you've read? What kinds of things?

Have you noticed any differences between bringing up a child now and when you had your other children?

Did you have a mother or mother figure in the home when you were growing up? How does what you do compare with her?

When you meet or see other mothers, do you notice differences in what they do from what you do?

What do you think about those differences?

Do you chat with other mothers about how they and you are bringing up your children?

Do you think that any of the things we've talked about; classes, baby literature, chatting with your own and other mothers, have changed any ideas you had about child care?

Do you ever feel like other people judge women and the way they bring up their children?

Is that something you've ever experienced yourself?

Skills, Traits and Imagined Futures:

When do you think x first started to show her/his own personality?

When you think about the future, what kind of person do you hope x will be?

How important do you think that what you do now, while x is still very little, makes a difference to whether that happens?

If you were to think about x having a successful life, what sorts of things would it include?

What about the things you don't want for x? Is there anything you're fearful about when s/he's older?

Do you ever worry about whether you're a good mother?

What sort of things do you do that would show that?

Do you think those who know you best would agree?

Interview Guide Continued

Responsibility and Intervention:

I want to turn away from you and your family now to ask about wider society. Specifically, to what you think about a term that we sometimes hear from politicians and in the media: 'Broken Britain'.

Can you tell me what sort of things you think about when you hear that phrase?

Do you think that's what other people imagine too?

Because we've been talking about motherhood, can you tell me if you think it has anything to do with how people are brought up?

Does that mean that mothers could do something about it?

What sort of things could they do?

Do you think the government could be involved, through social workers, health visitors or teachers for example? Should they be?

Closing Questions:

Thinking about what you've told me about how you are bringing up x, is there any advice you would pass on to other mothers?

Is there anything you would like to tell me that we haven't already spoken about?

Would you recommend being a mother?

Was everything okay? Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix Five: Participants

NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILD(REN)	EMPLOYMENT	HOME	HIGHEST QUALIFICATION
Amy	27	married	2 sons, 3year & 1 year	Stay-at-home Mother (FT)	private rent	BA
Heather	31	married	1 Daughter, 6 months	Ward Sister, maternity leave (FT)	home owner	BA
Vanessa	28	married	1 Daughter, 4 months	Paediatrician, maternity leave (PT)	home owner	MEDIC
Michelle	32	married	1 son. 3 years	NHS senior administrator (FT)	home owner	BA
Anna	31	living with	1 son, 8 months	University Careers Officer, maternity leave (FT)	home owner	MA
Amanda	38	married	2 sons, 6 years & 3 Years	Self-employed Psychologist (FT)	home owner	MA
Erin	22	living with	1 son, 2 years	Young Mothers Support Worker (PT)	private rent	NVQ
Laura	40	married	1 daughter 8 years, 1 son, 4 years	PhD Student, Speech Therapist (FT)	home owner	MA
Sarah	35	married	1 son, 8 months	Marine Engineer, maternity leave (FT)	home owner	HND
Melanie	34	married	2 daughters, 6 & 3, 1 son 5 years	Teacher (FT)	home owner	BA
Rebecca	26	single	1 son, 11 months	International Aid Worker (FT)	House Share	MA
Lina	26	married	1 daughter, 3 years	Admininstrator (PT)	social rent	A' LEVELS
Eleanor	27	living with	1 son, 11 months	Charity Support Worker	social rent	BA
Kelly	26	married	1 son, 2 years	Self-employed Beautician (FT)	home owner	FE, NVQ

Appendix Five, continued

NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILD(REN)	EMPLOYMENT	HOME	HIGHEST QUALIFICATION
Ruqsana	33	separated	2 sons, 6 years & 4 years	Mental Health Nurse (PT)	home owner	BA
Natalie	29	living with	1 son, 4 years	Buyer Export Company (FT)	home owner	GCSE
Leanne	36	married	1 daughter, 5 years, 1 son, 4 years	Gym Instructor & Family Business Administrator (PT)	home owner	BA
Nicola	25	living with	1 daughter, 1 year	Fitness Instructor (PT)	private rent	GCSE
Donna	38	living with	1 daughter, 2 years	Pub Landlady (FT)	tied	GCSE
Hannah	32	married	1 daughter, 2 years, 1 son 8 months	Arts Officer (PT)	tied	BA
Jayne	33	married	2 daughters, 4 years & 2 years, 1 son, 3 years	Managing Director Web Design (PT)	private rent	PGCE
Claire	39	married	1 daughter 2 years, 1 son, 3 months	Stay-at-home Mother (FT)	home owner	GCSE
Suzanne	35	married	1 daughter, 4 years	H.E. student (FT)	home owner	BA
Helen	41	married	1 son, 4 years	Teacher (FT)	home owner	PGCE
Danielle	30	married	2 sons, 4 years & 2 years	NHS senior administrator (FT)	home owner	BA