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Young motherhood and consumption : an exploration of the consumer practices of a group of young mothers in Bristol

Thesis

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Young motherhood and consumption: an exploration of the consumer practices of a group of young mothers in Bristol.

Ruth Ponsford, BA, MA.

For my own babies, Elijah and Elana.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis explores the consumer practices of a group of young mothers in the city of Bristol. A staged and incremental research design was followed, which incorporated aspects of participant observation, activity based focus groups and a photo elicitation exercise. The study focuses on how a group of young mothers managing on limited incomes engaged with expansive markets for maternity and the new baby, and the meaning and emotion they attached to "baby stuff". The research describes how for the young women in this study buying for babies was a priority and part of their everyday caring work, involving the careful management of budgets and the skilful negotiation of consumer markets as well as the negation of mothers' own consumer projects and youth identities. While perhaps a financial necessity, it is suggested that the focus on meeting the 'needs' of babies over those of mothers enables these young women to locate themselves as 'good mothers', who put their children first. The thesis also explores how for the participants in the research material goods, and in particular the adornment and presentation of infants, played a crucial role in displaying maternal competence in the face of a sense of public visibility and condemnation. Appearance was everything and commodities provided protection for both mothers and children from the negative associations of poverty and an inability to consume. Further to this, the research examines the practices of giving gifts to babies and the making of maternal memory as significant aspects of the materiality of maternity for these young women. It is suggested that giving gifts to babies represents an important form of contemporary gift giving, which enables the expression and constitution of relationships between babies and their social networks. The collection and collation of "baby stuff" provides a means of *creating* childhood memories and histories which can be recalled through these objects. In this

part of the investigation the practice of giving "mum" jewellery and getting the names of babies tattooed on mothers' bodies emerge as two furthers sites where these young women make the maternal visible. The study highlights the significance and myriad roles that consumer culture plays in the lives of young mothers, providing a rich account of the experiences and struggles of young mothers through an original lens. This work fills a gap in the literature on motherhood and consumption and makes a relevant contribution to a number of additional areas of scholarship including youth and consumption; low-income consumption; and indeed young motherhood, engaging also with contemporary debates over commercialisation and commodity consumption in late modernity and discourses about 'disordered' working class consumer practice.

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Chapter One - Introduction

Introduction

This study explores young motherhood at the interface with consumption. It focuses on how a group of young mothers managing on limited incomes engaged with expansive markets for pregnancy, motherhood and the new baby, and the meaning they attached to "baby stuff". In this introductory chapter I situate this research by providing an overview of the policy and academic frameworks related to young motherhood current at the time of the research, and by providing an introduction to some popular and theoretical approaches to understanding consumer culture. My intention is to sketch a broad framework for locating the research and identifying debates that my work can 'speak back' to. I begin by exploring the intense political interest in teenage pregnancy following the election of the New Labour Government in 1997 before looking at some of the academic work around teen conception and motherhood that emerged in the following decade. I go on to outline a broad theoretical framework for understanding the role of consumer culture in contemporary late modern societies. This discussion is a necessary introduction to the overall context within which the research sits. It is however distinct from the close analysis of research relating to youth, consumption and motherhood that forms the body of Chapter Two (Literature Review). The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

Context one: Policy and academic discourses on teenage pregnancy and parenting

Changing policy discourses

Teenage pregnancy and parenting has been the subject of concern for successive governments in the UK. The political interest in the issue, however, was reinvigorated by the New Labour government, elected in 1997, who gave teenage pregnancy and parenthood an unprecedented level of attention as part of their agenda to tackle 'social exclusion'[1]. 'Social exclusion' was defined by New Labour as a form of modern social disadvantage that encompassed multiple economic and social deprivations that might include 'unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown'[2]. 'Social exclusion' was described as being *more* than poverty and as a multidimensional happening where individuals or communities were systematically blocked or excluded from the rights, opportunities and resources available to 'normal' members of society. Addressing 'social exclusion' was a key aspect of New Labour's agenda for social and economic reform as the party sought to give focus to the people and places in Britain that had been disregarded by the previous Conservative government – those who has been excluded from the benefits of national wealth and left behind by global processes of economic restructuring (Haylett 2001:352). Soon after election in 1997 the Government established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) which was tasked with providing strategic advice and

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[1] The previous Conservative government had set out a target to reduce under-16 conception rates by 50% in *The Health of the Nation* white paper (DoH 1992), but their investment in analysing and addressing the 'problem' had been far less concerted than that of New Labour. In New Labour policy we also see an extension of the age of teenage maternity from 'under 16' to 'under 18' (Macvarish and Billings 2010).

[2] This definition was taken from **www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk** in 2010.

policy analysis in the drive against social exclusion. Teenage pregnancy was identified as both a cause and consequence of social exclusion making it one of the unit's key priorities.

In 1999 the SEU published a key policy document simply entitled *Teenage Pregnancy* (1999), which 'revealed the scale of the problem' in the UK (Blair, 1999:4), describing how Britain suffered from the 'worst' rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe - a statement that subsequently reverberated, (and indeed continues to be repeated), across policy and media contexts (see Chapter Four). That other countries in Europe had seen much greater declines in teenage pregnancy rates was taken as evidence that the 'high' rates of teenage pregnancy in the UK were 'not inevitable' (Blair, 1999:4) and were amenable to a policy solution. The report laid out three reasons for the particularly 'high' rates of teenage pregnancy in the UK. The first was 'low expectations' and teenage pregnancy was strongly linked to social disadvantage. As the SEU described, teenage pregnancy is:

> 'more common amongst young people who have been disadvantaged in childhood and have poor expectations of the job market. Young people who see no prospect of a job and fear they will end up on benefit one way or the other...see no reason not to get pregnant' (SEU 1999:7).

'Vulnerable' young women who had been in care, young offenders, those experiencing sexual abuse and those who had been excluded from school were also counted as more likely to become pregnant as teenagers. A lack of knowledge and ignorance about sex and contraception and 'mixed messages' about sex from the media were given as the other main reasons for Britain's 'shameful record' on teenage pregnancy (Blair 1999:4).

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In the SEU's report teenage pregnancy was also taken to be inherently bad and the necessity to address the 'high rates' in the UK was premised on a review of a large body of mainly quantitative data that suggested teenage pregnancy inevitably had poor consequences for both mothers and children (Wilson and Huntington 2005, Graham and McDermott 2006). *Teenage Pregnancy* (1999) described a catalogue of adverse outcomes for teenage mothers including the curtailment of education, long term unemployment and reliance on state benefits. In short, teenage mothers and their children were seen to be set for a lifetime of poverty and entrapment in a 'cycle of despair' (Blair, 1999:4). In addition, children of teenage mothers were identified as suffering higher death rates, lower birth weights, increased childhood accidents and an increased likelihood of becoming a teenage mother themselves. In short, teenage parenthood was seen to have overwhelmingly negative effects, which compounded existing disadvantage and 'social exclusion', and led to 'shattered lives and blighted futures' for both young mothers and their children (Blair, 1999:4). A picture of 'diverging transitions' emerged from this New Labour discourse with some young disadvantaged women from poorer communities seen to be occupying a fast lane to adulthood and social exclusion through early maternity. Their more affluent counterparts on the other hand, embarked on prolonged transitions through education and careers, and were more likely to opt for abortion when young and to postpone parenthood until later in life (Smith 1993, SEU 1999, Lee *et al* 2004, Graham and McDermott 2006).

The SEU set out a ten year strategy – known as the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) – to address the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy in the UK,

which aimed to both prevent teenage pregnancy and to support teenage mothers. The two key objectives of the strategy were:

a) to reduce teenage conceptions – with a target of halving the number of conceptions amongst young women under the age of eighteen by 2010 and

b) to support young mothers back into education and training – with a target of 60% to be in education, employment or training by 2010 - in order to mitigate the effects caused by teenage pregnancy and parenthood, and reduce the risk of long term social exclusion.

Reflecting New Labour's approach of 'joined-up action for joined-up problems', a cross-government initiative the *Teenage Pregnancy Unit* (TPS) was established in 1999 tasked with implementing the strategy. Top tier local authorities were charged with developing individual strategies to meet targets for reduction in their own local areas. Each local strategy was led by a Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator (TPC), working with a Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board (Duncan *et al* 2010b) and a National Support Team was set up to provide guidance and advice on best practice to areas that were 'struggling' with teenage pregnancy rates. Various guidance documents were also published by the government following the 1999 report to help services in contact with young people contribute the overall aims of the strategy[3].

Teenage Pregnancy (1999), therefore, presented a comprehensive account of the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy and New Labour put an extensive public armoury together to tackle the 'high' teen birth rates in the UK. Yet their concerted intervention did not come at a time of rising teen birth

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[3] These included guidance on providing sex and relationships education (DfEE 2000, David 2001) and 'best practice examples' for areas 'failing' to reduce teenage pregnancy rates (DfES 2006). The *You're welcome quality criteria - making health service young people friendly* was also designed to improve the quality of sexual health services for young people and has been influential among those providing these services.

rates as might have been expected. While the SEU (1999) invited us to see teenage pregnancy in the UK as a 'problem' of some magnitude (Arai 2009a:6), there had in fact been an overall downward trend in teenage fertility rates for some decades prior to the publication of *Teenage Pregnancy* (Lawlor and Shaw 2004, Arai 2003a, Arai 2003b, Arai 2009a, Wilson and Huntington 2005, Duncan *et al* 2010b). For New Labour though it was comparisons with the rest of Europe[4] that were particularly significant and while their approach to teenage pregnancy appeared to be distinctly less moralising than that of previous governments - framed in terms of a politics of 'care' to improve the lot of disadvantaged young women and to prevent entrenched 'social exclusion' rather than to save the pubic purse and preserve 'family values' (Arai 2009a, Macvarish and Billings 2010, Phoenix 1996) – the 'problem' for the Government was also one of how Britain could compete economically with other nations with such an apparently inadequate workforce.

Early fertility was seen to interrupt the development of skills for work giving rise to welfare dependence thus representing a significant competitive hindrance for Britain. For the SEU, teenage pregnancy was a cost that the UK could little afford when competing with other European nations (SEU 1999:7). This thinking was consistent with New Labour's broader approach to labour market participation and gender 'equality' where an unprecedented lack of gender differentiation was adopted as both men and women alike were encouraged to develop their skills and enter paid employment (David 2001, McRobbie 2007). This prioritisation of paid employment and financial self-sufficiency replaced an 'old welfare regime which took account of women's role

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[4] Arai (2003b) provides a very convincing account of why comparisons between the UK and other European nations in terms of teenage conceptions and births were highly inappropriate.

as caregivers and the limits that role put on the possibilities for economic activity' (McRobbie 2007:9). As McRobbie (2007) has argued under New Labour young women increasingly became a 'metaphor for social-change' embodying a new meritocracy as exemplars of equality of opportunity and achievement par excellence. No longer should they aspire toward marriage, motherhood and limited economic participation, as had been an accepted part of the female trajectory for previous generations (McRobbie 2007: 4). The expectation was rather one of well planned lives where childbirth followed, and should be combined with, education and work. In this climate young motherhood on the other hand, McRobbie (2007) argues, came to carry: 'a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity' (McRobbie 2007:10).

Teenage pregnancy was, therefore, not simply problematic because rates were particularly high or because young mothers and children suffered 'poor outcomes', but also because teen parenting represented a significant cost to the productivity of the nation (Wilson and Huntington 2005). Young mothers did not take up the proper individualised, moral life trajectory of middle-class women who follow paths through education and workforce participation, and who wait until they have the appropriate economic resources to independently support their children (Wilson and Huntington 2005, McRobbie 2007). As is outlined below this path is, however, perhaps not always the most realisable or desirable for some young women from less affluent backgrounds.

To summarise, New Labour policy aligned teenage pregnancy with poverty, deprivation and 'social exclusion' and early fertility was seen to have overwhelmingly negative consequences for mothers and children. Young motherhood also represented a significant cost in terms of economic inactivity and welfare payments for the government. This association of teenage

pregnancy with cost to the nation and populations who were somehow 'cut off'
and existing at the margins of society in a state of entrenched unemployment,
welfare dependence and deprivation tended to resonate strongly with an older
'underclass' discourse (see Murray 1990) which rendered the poor, and young,
single mothers in particular, as morally as well as materially destitute. Indeed
as many scholars have noted, although the concept of 'social exclusion' had a
redistribution ethic at its heart, reflecting broader trends toward
individualisation it also rendered the poor responsible for their own failures
and fortunes (Levitas 1998, Gillies 2005a, Skeggs 2004). It was not only
structure but culture that blocked the life chances of the 'socially excluded'
and generations of deprivation and 'worklessness' were seen to have resulted
in a kind of cultural deficit among the poorest sectors of society. In this way
the 'socially excluded' were not only victims of inequality but they were also
failures in self-governance. Their form of disadvantage was one that could not
be addressed through the simple re-distribution of wealth and the traditional
methods of providing material relief to alleviate poverty were seen to be
ineffective in these circumstances. It was culture that had to be addressed
(Skeggs 2004, Gillies 2005a). New Labour thus sought to tackle 'social
exclusion' by supporting and helping citizens to change their 'problematic'
behaviour (Skeggs 2004, Gillies 2005a,b & 2007), while workforce
participation was seen as the main route to social and moral inclusion.

New Labour's approach to teenage pregnancy in the UK reflected this concern
with the individual and in practice resources were targeted at the SEU reports
second main explanation for the 'high' rates of teenage pregnancy - a lack of
knowledge or ignorance about sex and contraception. It was improving sex
and relationships education and access to contraception that became the
priority, while addressing social disadvantage or 'low expectations' and

providing support for teenage mothers tended to take a back seat (Arai 2003a, 2003b & 2009a, Duncan *et al* 2010b)[5]. This was also despite a lack of evidence to suggest that improved access to advice and contraception actually reduces unintended pregnancies (Phoenix 1991, Arai 2003a&b, Graham and McDermott 2006). Tackling a 'lack of knowledge' perhaps represented the most cost effective way for the Government to address the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy, as opposed to dealing with deep and cyclical disadvantage, but it also seemed to be consistent with New Labour's more general policy focus toward behavioural change. Some of the policy documentation on teenage pregnancy that followed the 1999 report also highlighted the 'problem' of local long standing cultures of early pregnancy (TPU & TPS 2002, DfES 2006) in some communities or teenage pregnancy 'hot-spots'[6].

The 'undoing' of the 'problem' in academic research on teenage pregnancy

The advent of New Labour's interest in teenage pregnancy signalled a significant growth in academic research on the issue in the UK, not least because of the national and local research funding opportunities the TPS made available. Much of this work was in direct dialogue with policy and while some explored the reasons young women (particularly those from deprived backgrounds) became pregnant and/or decided to continue with their pregnancies (Tabberer *et al* 2001, Lee *et al* 2004, Arai 2007, Bonnell *et al*

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[5] Nevertheless, the strategy for reduction in Teenage Pregnancy could also be read alongside other New Labour initiatives that were taking place at the time such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, New Deal for communities (see TPU & NRU 2002), Sure Start, Sure Start Plus and the Children's Fund. Indeed the DfES (2006) pointed to the work being done within these initiatives to tackle some of the "underlying causes" of teenage pregnancy. Interventions with the aim of 'raising aspirations' in deprived wards as well as national schemes being implemented to improve educational attainment like *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils*, designed to raise the achievement of BME pupils, were also highlighted.

[6] 12 areas or localities in England and Wales were identified as having the highest levels of teenage pregnancy and were deemed to be in need of prioritised funds (David 2001:11).

2005, Cater and Coleman 2006, Coleman and Cater 2006) other research focussed on the outcomes of young motherhood (Hobcraft and Kiernan 2001, Wellings *et al* 2002, Ermisch and Pavalin 2003, Hosie 2007, Hawkes 2010), relationships and attitudes to education and work (Bonnell *et al* 2005, Harris *et al* 2005, Hosie 2007, Alldred and David 2010), and sex education (Alldred and David 2007, Alldred and David 2010). Further work explored more broadly the experience of being a young mother and/or interaction with services (Arai 2003a, McDermott and Graham 2005, Graham and McDermott 2006, Hirst *et al* 2006, Higgingbottom *et al* 2006, Arai 2009b, Formby *et* al 2010, McNulty 2010, Macvarish and Billings 2010).

Much of the academic engagement with the topic around this time, however, painted a very different picture of teenage pregnancy and parenting to that espoused by the SEU. Firstly, it was flagged up quite prominently that, as described above, New Labour's intervention into teen pregnancy did not come at a time of rising teen birth rates. Secondly, much of the 'outcomes research' published in the UK after 1999, including some of that funded by the TPS itself, suggested that the relationship between teen childbearing and 'poor outcomes' was significantly overstated (Wellings *et al* 2002). Ermisch and Pavalin (2003), for example, who assessed the difference between women who had miscarriages and those who had carried pregnancies to term in their teens found that a teen birth had little impact on qualifications, education or employment by age 30. Hawkes' (2010) statistical review of the life experiences and circumstances of teenage mothers in the UK similarly found that being a teenage mother did not in its self lead to poorer outcomes for mothers or their children. This work mirrored much of that carried out in the US in earlier years which showed that the effects of mother's age on her social outcomes is 'often essentially zero' (Hoffman 1998:237). In this body of

work, the poor circumstances young mothers (and fathers) often found themselves in were rather more closely associated with pre-pregnancy social disadvantage than the timing of first birth.

Thirdly, in contrast to the bleak tone of policy debate about teenage pregnancy and parenthood, qualitative research into the views and experiences of young mothers suggested that young motherhood could be a positive and welcome event for the young women involved and their families. Some of this work described how youthful fertility was something that was desired and sometimes planned by young women and their partners, rather than always the result of ignorance about sex and contraception (Coleman and Cater 2006, Cater and Coleman 2006). Some, though not all young mothers, were shown to enjoy motherhood and to invest heavily in their maternal roles. Early fertility was described as bringing confidence, valued adult identities and alternative forms of 'inclusion' and connection, particularly for young women for whom routes to success through education and work might have been less secure or realisable (Harris *et al* 2005, McDermott and Graham 2005, Graham and McDermott 2006, Alldred and David 2010 see also Thomson *et al* 2003). Some of this research also revealed how early maternity could bring about positive life changes or the building of existing resources for young women through a re-engagement with education, training and employment (Tabberer 2000, McDermott and Graham 2005, Graham and McDermott 2006, Cater and Coleman 2006, Coleman and Cater 2006, Hosie 2007, Arai 2009a&b, Duncan 2007, Duncan 2007, Duncan *et al* 2010b, Alexander *et al* 2010). This further debunked notions that a teen birth necessarily marked stagnation for young women, rather suggesting that early fertility could result in improvements in terms of the social and economic outcomes for both mothers and children.

A strong belief in the moral worth of mothering was a dominant theme in these accounts of young mothering making New Labour's prioritisation of education and paid employment as the only suitable route to 'social inclusion' and success appear desperately out-of-step with the young mothers' own descriptions of their experiences. In the academic literature teen motherhood was portrayed as something with its own 'logic', a worthwhile and reasonable choice for some young women who perceived that motherhood 'would not interfere with plans for the immediate future' (Lee *et al* 2004:4). Indeed confirming the 'logic' of early fertility Walkerdine *et al* (2001) have described how historically working-class women have always had children relatively early compared to their middle-class counterparts. In the contemporary period it seems decisions about the timing of maternity continues to reflect a polarization of choice based biographical patterns between more and less affluent young women (Thomson 2000). As Thomson *et al* (2009) have recently described, while women's increased participation in higher education and employment since the Second World War has markedly changed female biographies, stagnation in social mobility and widening inequality has also heightened differences between women, which are borne out in differential patterns of family formation (197).

Something of an academic reassessment or an 'undoing' of the problem of teenage pregnancy had seemingly ensued in the decade following the publication of *Teenage Pregnancy* (1999) (Arai 2009 a&b, Duncan *et al* 2010a). In a complete turnaround of the policy framework, in academic research teenage motherhood became something of a *rosier* affair where maternal caring roles were valued and taken seriously over more individualised ideals, and maternity inspired purpose, social connection and often a transformation for the better. Nevertheless, some studies reported

how the poor economic circumstances young mothers often found themselves caring for their children in, stigma and fear of public condemnation as well as negative experiences with services deeply affected young women's experiences of mothering (McDermott and Graham 2005, Hirst *et al* 2006, Formby *et al* 2010, Alexander *et al* 2010, Alldred and David 2010). It was not teen pregnancy itself that was the 'problem', however, but pre-existing deprivation and the negative attitudes of others. Policy predicated on the basis of improving outcomes of young people it was suggested, might be better directed at addressing social disadvantage and a lack of employment opportunities for young people more generally rather than on teenage pregnancy specifically. On the back of evidence of a declining teen fertility rates and academic research that redefined teen motherhood in positive terms, serious questions were raised about why teenage pregnancy was perceived to be such a 'problem' for policy (Duncan *et al* 2007, Arai 2009a, Duncan *et al* 2010).

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy came to an end early 2010. During the period it was implemented there was a 13.3% reduction (DfES and DoH 2010) in an (already declining) teenage conception rate[7] and New Labour were a long way off their 50% reduction target. In documents published at the end of the strategy little of the 'positive trend' in academic research had been taken on board by policy makers and teenage pregnancy was still seen as a significant 'problem' that should be best addressed by improving knowledge about sex and access to contraception (DfCSF and DoH 2010). Following the election of the Coalition government in May 2010 the SEU was disbanded and all funding was removed from the TPS. A pressure on local government funding has

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[7] Baseline figures are taken from 1998 – the year before the report was produced and the subsequent strategy implemented.

meant that TPC posts are also being deleted (Williams 2011). The Coalition government do not currently have any specific policy on teenage pregnancy and policy debates seem to have moved on somewhat. Teenage pregnancy as a 'problem' has been eclipsed by concerns with youth knife and gun crime and rising youth unemployment figures, as well as the 'anti-social' behaviour of young people following the riots of summer 2011. Following the economic crisis of the late 2000s as public concern about welfare dependence intensifies, condemnation is also levied as a broader category of 'workless population' than it has been previously and the traditional Tory focus on single mothers (though not always young) as feckless and eager recipients of welfare payment seems to be less vociferous this time around (Phoenix 1996, Arai 2009a). Measures being proposed at the time of writing, for example, are focussed upon the *workless* more generally and on capping benefit entitlements to ensure that 'it pays to work'[8]. As a result of these changes in public and policy focus the academic work on teenage pregnancy and parenthood seems to be in decline. The impact that *Teenage Pregnancy* (1999) has had on the recent understanding of teenage pregnancy in the UK cannot be underestimated, however. At the time it influenced much national and local policy as well as media coverage of the issue (Arai 2009a, see also Chapter Four) and the notion that teen pregnancy is a 'problem' of some severity in the UK continues to be bounded about in media and in policy contexts. Teenage mothers are also likely to remain on the policy and public

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[8] The Government currently propose a benefit cap of £26,000. This policy is premised on the idea that people do not go to work and it does not 'pay to work' because benefit payments are too high. By cutting benefits it is assumed that the feckless workless will have *no choice* but to work like other good working people. Research indicates, however, that those living on benefits often want to work and earn an 'honest wage', feeling the stigma of claiming benefit acutely (Shildrick *et al* 2010). Research also repeatedly indicates that a life on benefits does not enable a 'normal' standard of living (Cohen *et al* 1992, Middleton *et al* 1994, Hirsch 2011). If work does not currently pay it is more likely to be because housing and childcare costs are too high and wages too low to make it 'pay to work' not because benefit entitlements are too lavish and people do not want to go to work. In a climate where the number of unemployed people is at the time of writing is at its highest rate since 1994 and youth unemployment is at it's highest since records began in 1992 (ONS 2011), this policy represents a wholly uncompassionate approach to unemployment and the 'workless'. Policy might be better directed at developing better employment opportunities, pay, affordable childcare and financial support for families while in work.

agenda in these times of austerity, albeit less prominently, forming part of a targeted group who fail to take up employment and instead have children and undeservingly use up now very scarce state resources.

Context two – The rise and rise of consumer culture

It is broadly accepted that we now live in a consumer culture (Featherstone 1990) and consuming has come to be an intrinsic part of the fabric of everyday life (Miles 1998:1). While some identify the emergence of consumer culture as dating back to the sixteenth century, Miles (1998) suggests that consumer society came into its own with the onset of industrialization. As production for subsistence came to be replaced by wage labour, people inevitably became consumers as well as producers (Miles 1998:6). It was not until after the Second World War he argues, however, that commodities became available to the average working person. It is in this second half of the twentieth century where we see an exponential growth in the availability of consumer goods and of surplus income, facilitated by Fordist principles of standardized production and keeping full employment and wages high to ensure purchasing power and prosperity. Luxury consumer goods – what one needs as well as what one wants - gradually became everyday items and commodities took on an increasingly symbolic as well a functional role for the normal working person. As capitalism expanded alongside new technologies and management practices, signifying changes to post-fordism, we see an increasing diversification of the form of commodities (Lury 1996). It is in this period where producers become more sensitive to the interests of consumers and we see a multiplicity in the aesthetics of commodities and consumption sectors. 'Types' of consumer become more specialized as consumer identities

and 'lifestyles' become the order of the day (Bourdieu 1986, Featherstone 1991).

Indeed the profound economic changes that occurred alongside the rise of consumer culture - such as the break-down in traditional industry and a diversification of employment paths – are said to have resulted in the receding of traditional class ties usually associated with employment. Under these conditions there is a move toward identities that are more loosely based around consumption. Theorists such as Beck (1992) have argued that life has become less structurally tied in late modernity and people are freer to move through life, becoming actively involved in the making their own individual biographies. Consumer culture comes to figure as an increasingly important terrain through which late modern selves are defined. In this new world traditional life paths are not guaranteed and individuals must take control of the shape of their own lives; deciding who they are, how they should act; and who they should become (Giddens 1991). In these accounts of late modernity there is an emphasis on the plasticity of contemporary life and the potential for self-fashioning (Lawler 2005a), with consumer culture providing the tools for a more flexible relationship between the individual and self-identity (Lury 1996, Miles 1998, Featherstone 1991). Bauman (1998) characterises the move into the late modern period as one in which we shift from selves that are made through our bonds to work, towards selves defined flexibly through consumption. For Bauman much is lost in this process. Yet consumption it is agreed has become central to the construction of contemporary identity and these constructions are not simply individualised but enable acts of social identification, connection, or as Bourdieu (1986) suggests, 'distinction' between others based on a shared understandings of the meaning of commodities. This kind of identity construction is a thoroughly relational

phenomenon which enables acts of collective, as well as self definition (Miles 1998 see Chapter Two).

Much work in the area of material cultural studies has also explored the significance of consuming and material culture in contemporary lives, demonstrating the breadth of our often banal relationships with the material world as well as the kind of personal, social and affective meanings invested in objects (Miller 1998b, Miller 2001b, Miller 2008, Marcoux 2001). The overriding theme in this work is that 'stuff matters' and that our social lives are deeply intertwined with 'things' (Miller 1998b). The relational aspects of commodity consumption are stressed in Miller's (1998a) *A Theory of Shopping*, where he describes how buying for others is constitutive of social relationships of love, an idea I take up in Chapter Two. Work on the modern practices of gift giving similarly emphasises how commodity presentation is an endeavour aimed at making connections with others (Godbout and Caille 1998, Layne 2000, Miller 2001a, Agnew 2003, Wozniak 2004, Hurdley 2007) – an interpretation that I consider in detail in Chapter Seven. It is important for this thesis that we understand consumption as integral to contemporary social action, interaction and experience. Consumption infiltrates everyday life 'at the level of economic processes, social activities and household structures, but also at the level of meaningful psychological experience – affecting the construction of identities, the formation of relationships, the framing of events' (Lunt and Livingstone 1992 cited in Miles 1998:9).

Yet while consumption may be an important aspect of contemporary lives and can be seen to bring freedom and choice, there is a tension deep at the core of unequal capitalist consumer societies about how the consumer participation of those with limited access to financial resources may be constrained. Despite

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assertions about the 'loosening of class ties' in late modernity income inequalities in the UK are tenacious and growing (Skeggs 2004, Lawler 2005b, Gillies 2007, Dorling *et al* 2007). Minimum Income Standard (MIS) calculations, which are based on what members of the public think is an acceptable or 'normal' standard of living consistently show that many families in the UK live below these means (Cohen *et al* 1992, Middleton *et al* 1994, Hirsch 2011[9]) meaning they are unable to participate fully in 'normal' consumer life. As Bauman (1998) describes, this kind of economic inequality sets limits on the consumer participation of some and pushes the poor (or the repressed as he frames it) to become 'flawed consumers' who are excluded from 'normal' society. For those who are unable to participate the consequences may be socially, psychologically and emotionally profound. According to Bauman (1998) the excluded will carry the stigma of an inability to consume and become 'socially defined as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient' (38). This he suggests is an intensely painful experience which incites desire for the 'things' of consumer culture – the things of a 'normal' life and the things that others seem to have ease of access to. This perhaps reflects something of what Sennett and Cobb (1977) term 'the hidden injuries of class' – feelings of hurt and inadequacy grounded in inequality and Carolyn Steedman (1986) in her part autobiographical work *Landscape for a Good Woman* has similarly drawn attention to the indignity of economic marginalisation and the politics of material desire. Steedman (1986) describes how her mother wanted the things that she materially lacked - the things like 'fine clothes, glamour, money' that were denied from her; the stuff of a middle class existence (6)[10]. In Steedman's (1986) work this desire is located squarely within the political context of struggle around dispossession

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[9] See Deeming (2005) for an explanation of MIS for UK
[10] Steedman's mother's desire is also for a particular kind of middle class femininity.

and exclusion, yet she describes how this desire it can only ever be read as merely futile and apolitical:

> 'She [her mother] wanted things. Politics and cultural criticism can only find trivial the content of her desires, and the world certainly took no notice of them. It is one of the purposes of this book to admit her desire for the things of the earth to political reality and psychological validity'. (109) ...'by allowing this envy entry into political understanding, the proper struggles of people in a state of dispossession to gain their inheritance might be seen not as sordid and mindless greed for things of the market place, but attempts to alter a world that has produced on them states of unfulfilled desire' (123).

Indeed desire for or interest in material 'things' is regularly understood to be devoid of any 'real' meaning – as petty, hedonistic or shallow and as removed from or destructive to proper social and moral values (Miller 1998a). This 'anti-materialism', Miller (1987) argues is rooted in a perceived schism between 'primitive' or 'traditional' societies and 'modern' societies. The former are romanticised and aligned with authentic forms of sociality and ways of living together that are more natural and immediate. In opposition, the latter are associated with the self-interest and the calculated exchange of commodities (Miller 1987, Miller 1998a, Miller 2001a). Mauss' (1990 [1950]) work on *The Gift* was instrumental in the making of this distinction between matter and spirit, love and money, social solidarity and market contract in academic circles at least, and he insisted that social solidarity was achieved through the continuous spirit laden exchange of objects, the principles of which could not be transferred to market economies based on the hollow, for profit exchange of goods (Rapp 1999:xi, Hall 2005, Hurdley 2007). Early Marxist based theories of consumer culture that emanated from The Frankfurt School (see for example Adorno and Horkheimer 2002) also tended to see the

development of markets as destructive and a distraction from 'real' social values. Consumption was seen to serve the interests of marketers and manufacturers who created 'false' needs that, opposed to 'real' needs like freedom, creativity or genuine happiness, were to be satisfied by capitalism and commodity consumption. Consumers were seen as passive 'cultural dopes', satisfied with commodities and guided away from 'class consciousness' and the true pleasures of life. The pursuit of commodities provided the 'golden chains to work' (Pugh 2002) keeping people contended with their lives of exploitation. More recently Bauman (1998) has reworked these themes and has described consumer culture as 'a form of control that seduces individuals with offers of a fantasy community' of freedom and security' (Nayak and Kehily 2008:63). Other recent work has also stressed how a focus on the consumption of objects is to the detriment of relationships with family, friends and community, which in turn leads to impaired social and psychological functioning (Rindfleisch *et al* 1997). In their work on criminal identities and consumer culture Hall *et al* (2008) have similarly alluded to the deleterious tendencies brought on by consumer culture and describe how 'vital aspects of traditional working-class culture...are now being jettisoned by consumerism...[where it] once constituted an anti-utilitarian buffer against the forces of augmented egoism, narcissism and competitive individualism, forces that are active in the legitimisation and normalisation of criminogenic practices in everyday economic and cultural interaction' (8).

Indeed, notions of consumer culture as captivating and corroding morality, engaging people in the trivial and uncontrollable pursuit of false desires were evident in much of the media coverage of the recent August 2011 riots that took place in various cities across the UK. Journalists, MPs and members of the public seemed quick to depoliticize these disturbances that involved the

widespread looting of mainly sports and electrical shops as a manifestation of

extreme commercialism and mindless greed. *Real* rioters it was implied had a

proper grievance; about the unexplained shooting of a man in north London,

youth unemployment, unfair stop and search practices or a lack of housing.

These riots, however, were seen to be about nothing more than the vain

acquisition of commodities - the result of excessive exposure to

commercialisation. People were not taking food to feed their starving children,

but trainers and laptops and widescreen TVs[11].

Much recent concern about the progressive commercialisation of society has

also tended to coalesce around the family and children. The innocence and

wellbeing of children as well as 'proper family values' are seen to be

compromised by interaction with the superficial world of markets that provide

only artificial and temporal pleasures and are no replacement for true love and

proper dedicated parenting (Linn 2004, Palmer 2006, Evans and Chandler

2006, Ipsos MORI and Nairn 2011). There is often a desire to return times

past when lives were simpler (Pugh 2002). Questions about the effects of

consumer culture on children have also been raised by Government and in the

UK a number of public enquiries have sought to assess the impact of the

commercial world on the lives of children and to make recommendations for

how they should best be protected from its effects[12]. Parents too may seek to

protect their own individual children from the apparently deleterious effects of

consumer culture as has been shown by Miller (1997 and 1998a) and is

explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

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[11] I do not wish to speculate on the motives of rioters here, but suffice to say that riots usually involve deeper meaning (Reicher and Stott 2011). In the context of commodity consumer culture the taking of 'stuff' could alternatively be read as an important statement about dispossession and exclusion in a world where only some are free to enjoy the success that is symbolized by the acquisition of consumer goods, or as jeer against authority that would normally protect these goods and prosecute for their theft.
[12] These have included a review of the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing (DCSF 2009), and the Bailey review; an independent assessment and a review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood (DfE 2011).

It is also often women and the working classes who have been most associated with notions of materialism and extreme forms of consumerism. Shopping has been designated as a female activity, as something that women do or something that preoccupies their lives. This both creates restrictive definitions of women as those who are concerned with trivial matters and devalues consuming as 'women's work'. The association of the working-class with a crass materialism is also pervasive in popular discourse on consumption. In contrast the middle-classes, who also tend to have more money to meet their consumer desires, are generally coded as being hardly material at all (Lawler 2000). In chapters Four and Six I explore at length how the 'taste' for branded items and forms of conspicuous consumption that is associated with working-classness can become the subject of disgust and ridicule. Following the economic crisis of later part of the 'Noughties' popular concerns about the spending of the less affluent are likely to persist as austerity measures kick in and struggles for resources intensify.

In this thesis I draw on a theoretical framework for understanding consumption that imagines consumers as agentic and creative, and regards consumer culture and commodities as having the potential to do important physical, identity and relational 'work'. I avoid adopting a moralistic position that regards consumption as necessarily 'bad', yet am interested in how certain forms of consumption are constructed as bad, tasteless and not worthy of respect within a wider popular culture. In particular I am interested in the intersection of practices of consumption that offer protection and convey love and belonging with wider social and cultural processes that portray these practices in terms of ridicule. My thesis sets out to understand how young women live these tensions, creating meanings and struggling to control how

their consumption is understood by others. My aim for this research is to stage an encounter that allows the practices of a group of low income consumers to 'speak back' to popular and academic accounts of the working class as both consumerist and as irresponsible with their cash.

Thesis outline

In Chapter Two, the literature review, I highlight three areas of research which are relevant to this study and draw more specifically on the consumption literature in relation to motherhood and young people to suggest that a study that focuses on the consumer practices of young mothers would be a productive area of social enquiry. Chapter Three, Methodology, provides an overview of the study research questions, the research design and the sample of participants who took part. A detailed reflexive account of the experience of carrying out the research is also provided. Chapter Four describes the findings of a review of recent popular representation of young mothers in the press, webspace and TV. This work formed an initial stage of research that was carried out in order to help situate young mothers' consumer practices in their broader social mileu (Chin 2001). Chapter Five, the first of three data chapters that present original data from my fieldwork, looks at the economic resources the young mothers in the study had available to them and engages with issues around consumer culture and economic exclusion. The chapter describes how buying for children was a crucial aspect of mothering for participants and suggests that although the young mothers in this study were managing on limited incomes they struggled and strived to act as 'good mothers' and to provide well for their children. I describe how participants

employed a range of budgeting strategies in order to achieve this, which also involved a focus on consuming for and meeting the needs of their infants at the expense of the own maternal and youth identity projects. In this chapter I show how a focus on the needs of the infant enables participants to locate themselves as 'good mothers' who put their infants first. Chapter Six on being a 'good mother' explores the significance of the focus on consuming for the infant further and describes how the appearance of babies forms an important resource for the display of 'good mothering' in the face of a felt sense of public visibility and condemnation. The chapter also suggests that where youth identity is abandoned as young mothers embark on motherhood the youth styles of mothers are expressed in the way in which they dress their children. Chapter Seven looks at two further areas of maternal material practice which were prevalent in young mothers' accounts. These were the practices of gift giving (to and from babies) and the preservation of baby objects for posterity. The chapter focuses on the intimate social meaning attributed to particular objects and reflects back on the points at which the young women in the study engaged with forms of maternal material consumption and display, arguing that their consumer identities are articulated in a relational rather than an individualised way. Chapter Seven provides an overview of the key study findings and reflects on how the original research questions were addressed. The contribution the study makes to academic knowledge and policy agendas is also explored and some suggestions for further research are made.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter explores three key areas of the social research literature that inform this study. The first relates to motherhood and consumption, with work in this area indicating that consumption plays an important role in the lives of contemporary mothers in terms of identity construction, the enactment of 'caring projects' and the making of familial relationships. In this chapter I suggest, however, that little work in this area has so far engaged specifically with the consumer practices of younger mothers and I describe why a focus on young motherhood and consumption would make a productive area of social enquiry. The second body of literature explored in this chapter relates to young people and consumption. The research in this area indicates that 'youth' is also a particular time of interaction with consumer culture and I suggest that this literature raises some important points of interest for a study of mothers who are also young people. As was indicated in Chapter One the policy and research on young motherhood suggests that young mothers often come from less affluent backgrounds and may be bringing up their children on low incomes. The final part of this chapter, therefore, focuses on the social research literature that relates to mothering on a low income and I consider the implications that limited access to financial resources might have on the consumer practices of young mothers. I conclude the chapter by summarising the main points and suggest that a study that explores the consumer practices of younger mothers will make a valuable contribution to a number of

contemporary areas of research interest including motherhood and consumption; youth and consumption; low-income consumption; and indeed work on young motherhood.

Motherhood and Consumption

A difficult harmony

The research on motherhood and consumption is limited and, as Taylor (2004) notes, 'writings on motherhood have rarely centrally engaged questions of consumption and vice versa' (10). This may be related to the way in which motherhood is conceived as being a special kind of pure, uncontaminated human relationship, uniquely important because uniquely free of the kind of calculating instrumentality associated with the consumption of objects (Taylor 2004:3, Baraitser 2009a). Mothering, it is posited, should involve '"attentive love" and is a noisy exhausting joyous business that uses up a chunk of one's best energy and taps into prime time' (Pugh 2002:3). It is not about buying. Indeed, as touched upon in Chapter One, the consumption of material goods can be seen to compromise 'real' care or to be an artificial and inadequate replacement for proper parenting. The experience of childhood is regularly seen to be hampered or sometimes even harmed by the increased commoditisation of society. Yet in late capitalist consumer societies distinctions between persons and objects, bodies and commodities, mothers and consumers can not be so easily made, with recent scholarship arguing convincingly that the contemporary condition of maternity is deeply intertwined with material culture and the business of commodity consumption (Layne, Taylor and Wozniak 2004, Casey and Martens 2007, Martens 2008, Thomson *et al* 2011). At the most basic level caring for children in the Global

North involves some form of buying and cost whether it is in terms of providing food, clothing, warmth or stimulation. Contemporary motherhood is thus always already embedded in consumerism (Seiter 1993) and much of the recent work on motherhood and consumption describes how mothering in present times is typified by a proliferation of objects and equipment, as consumer markets extend into areas previously untouched by the commercial sphere (Kehily 2002:9 see also Brusdal 2008). This 'stuff' plays a key role in the lives of modern mothers and by drawing on the social research literature on motherhood and the consumption of objects[13] I now go on to explore how the construction of maternal identity, the practices of care giving and the making of familial relationships are steeped in the consumption of commodities.

Motherhood, consumption and identity

Becoming a mother is often understood as an important transitional phase of identity formation; frequently described as a period where female selves are fundamentally changed, transformed, ruptured or refracted (Oakley 1979, Baker 1989, Bailey 1999, Lawler 2000a, Miller 2005, Baraitser 2009a, Thomson *et al* 2009, Thomson *et al* 2011). In late modernity the consumer world represents an important interface where transitions to these new roles are facilitated as mothers decipher what kind of mother they will be(come) (Thomsen and Sorensen 2006, The VOICE Group 2010). Indeed recent academic commentary suggests the expanding consumer markets for pregnancy and the new mother signal to women the need to engage with a 'new maternity' as a part of a personal 'lifestyle project'. In her work on

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[13] The purchase of domestic labour, childcare, education and health care and the increase in reproductive technologies and surrogacy arrangements add further dimensions to the ways in which mothering and birthing has become increasingly embedded in consumption in late capitalism (Katz Rothman 2004). In this work I am, however, primarily concerned with the purchase and use of consumer objects by mothers.

pregnancy and parenting magazines Mary Jane Kehily (2009), for example, has described how a burgeoning maternity clothing market provides a site for maternal self-fashioning, appealing to women to be stylishly and individually pregnant; to celebrate their bulging bellies where in previous generations they would have remained hidden under maternity frocks. Further Kehily (2009) outlines how the marketing of maternity goods encourages expectant mothers to ensure that they don't forget themselves and to engage in care of the self activities such as being pampered and having their hair done during pregnancy. Pregnancy is celebrated as a time for self-indulgence during a special period of life and this is reflected in terms of the products available on shop shelves that provide for every stage of the maternal experience. As Kehily (2009) puts it there is a certain 'me-meness' associated with pregnancy that appears inconsistent with dominant notions of selfless maternity (Lawler 2000a, see Chapter Five). In pregnancy magazines '...the swollen pregnant body appears to licence an expansive version of self; unashamedly me-centred, mothers to be are subjects to be pampered and indulged' (13). The institutions of consumer culture also increasingly encroach upon pregnant embodiment 'demanding' that pregnant women engage in body work pre and postpartum, in order that they may better manage their pregnancies, produce healthy offspring, avoid many of the deleterious 'symptoms' of gestation and reclaim their pre-pregnancy bodies as rapidly as possible (O'Malley 2009). The public visibility of young, white and tight pregnant and post-partum celebrity bodies (Tyler 2001and 2011) perhaps reinforces the expectation that mothers should maintain their selves post-birth and 'not let themselves go', despite the social, financial, psychological and embodied complexities new motherhood brings for many. Pregnant and newly parenting women are thus no longer released, however briefly, from the relentless pursuit of beauty (O'Malley 2009, Tyler 2011) and are encouraged to continue to engage in

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technologies of the body (Bartky 1988) and the high level of personal consumption this entails (McRobbie 2001).

These particular commercial markets aimed at mothers, however, seem to beckon to and hail only a particular group of pregnant women and mothers-to-be: those who have the requisite financial and social resources to be able to exercise choice in their lives (Kehily 2009). They are perhaps the privileged subjects and female figures of neo-liberalism (Tyler 2011); the late modern women implicated in what McRobbie (2007) calls the 'new sexual contract', who have achieved in education and the labour market, accrued sufficient financial resources, have planned their fertility 'well' and desire and are able to continue their aesthetic lifestyle projects through pregnancy and motherhood. They are a shining embodiment of the post-feminist ideology of 'having it all' also reflected in policy (see Chapter One), that, in a cruel contradiction, offers confinement for women through the realization of the maternal 'body project'. The pursuit for the 'perfectable feminine self' (McRobbie 2007) it seems continues through pregnancy and into motherhood as these incitements to perfection permeate the popular where the successful svelte-figured, high-income yummy mummy is held up against the young poorly dressed 'pramface' girl (McRobbie 2004 & 2006) as 'normal' maternity becomes reconfigured as neo-liberal maternity (Tyler 2011). Contemporary popular and consumer culture thus sets norms and expectations around pregnancy and maternal ways of being. Younger mothers and others who parent outside of the 'ideal' (like those who manage on limited finances, those who are in same sex relationships, those who are lone, those who give birth to and must care for children with disabilities, those who foster and those who suffer pregnancy loss) appear, however, invisible and abject in this vision of maternity.

While expansive pregnancy and maternity markets invite mothers to engage in a maternal identity project through the consumption of items for the self, products bought for children are also identity forming and carry symbolic value which is expressive of the personal style and status of both mother and baby (Miller 1997, Clarke 2004, Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). The choice of pram, car seat, baby bag, nappy, toy, clothing and blanket may, therefore, not only be based on its practical functionality but also on 'what it says' about a mother and how it enables her to position herself and her family vis-à-vis others. Knowing the 'right' items to choose is reliant on the development of knowledge about the shared cultural meaning attached to a before un-encountered set of consumer objects, while getting it 'wrong' can result in the communication of the 'wrong' message on the stage of motherhood (Tomsen and Sorensen 2006). As Alison Clarke (2004) writes 'provisioning requires choices and expertise in an unfamiliar arena where the stakes could not be higher-for every object and every style has attached to it some notion of 'type' of mothering...(61).'

In his detailed ethnographic research on how North London mothers consume for their children Daniel Miller(1997, 1998a) provides an example of how maternal identities are articulated around the purchase (and indeed the non-purchase) of clothing and toys for children. He outlines how a particular middle-class faction of the mothers he studied invested heavily in and defined themselves through a form of 'natural' parenting associated with membership of the local National Childbirth Trust group. This form of parenting relied on an understanding of everything the infant does – sleeping, feeding, crying – as natural and not to be interfered with, usually at the expense of the mother. The maintenance of the nature and purity of the child was extended to making

efforts to avoid the ingestion of deleterious artificial additives and sugar in food and prioritised providing organic vegetables and breast milk. These mothers also attempted to avoid the purchase of toys, like Barbie, that they associated with artifice, materialism and commercialisation. They thus constructed themselves through notions of nature, natural parenting and non-materialism through the consumption, and the non-consumption, of particular items for their children. In his (1997) paper Miller also describes how the dressing of infants proved to be an important conduit to mothers' own style and taste, at least in the early period after birth. The style and the appearance of the infant is important to the mother and Miller (1997) explains that 'there is a considerable concern that the material culture associated with the infant should represent the stylistic aspirations of the parent' (36). The mothers in the study transferred their own consumer projects to the buying of clothes for their infants and while as young women they had invested in projects of individualisation and had been established consumers, cultivating themselves as people with 'taste', after having children their consumer knowledge is rather passed on to and expressed through their children. There was a disavowal of self that seemed consistent with their general approach to parenting and focus on meeting the needs of their infants. As Miller (op cit) suggests 'while in other communities mothers are concerned to get back their figures and clothing style lost in pregnancy, these mothers tend to channel all their knowledge and ability as consumers into the task of shopping for the baby' (36). Infants and their adornment therefore, seem to represent something of a projection and continuation of the mother, forming part of her extended self (Belk 1988). As children grow older, however, Miller (op cit) suggests that battles may ensue around the style, taste and consumer preferences of the child and mothers may concede to let children obtain access to forbidden and feared commodities. In a tongue in cheek reversal of

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psychoanalytic theory, he suggests that this plays an important role in the mothers' reconciliation of the child as both a 'good' and 'bad' object and the separation of the mother from her infant. As such consumption 'becomes the instrument by which the child develops its autonomy in the teeth of any narcissistic attempt to retain the infant as the mere continuation of the identity of its parents' (Miller 1998a: 125).

As was touched upon in Chapter One the practices of identity construction are, however, not simply individualistic about 'who I am' or 'who I am in relation to others' but are also about identifying and connecting with others. Clarke (2004) illustrates this point clearly in relation to the mothers in her own ethnographic work on family provisioning carried out in the same area of North London. She describes how the mothers in her research adopted a distinct culture of 'normative middle-class mothering' primarily through the way in which they set up their homes and provided for their infants[14]. Every artefact chosen formed something of a (classed) aesthetic as well as a practical mapping of motherhood and having the 'right' consumer items was key to being and being seen to be a certain kind of mother. Importantly Clarke's (2004) work emphasises that these practices are aimed at making group identifications with others and she goes on to demonstrate how in a quite literal way, having the right brands, goods and gadgets enable conversations and social encounters between mothers to develop and that these might result in a child's attendance at certain birthday parties and assist in the formation of peer group affiliations. The practice and performance of particular parenting styles thus resulted in particular identifications with others and the

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[14] Class cultural differences in terms of parenting are well documented (see for example Walkerdine and Lucey 1989 and Gillies 2007). Yet most accounts attach parenting style to class in terms of material circumstances. In Clarke (2004) classed cultures of parenting are rather constructed through practice and while mothers may not be middle-class in terms of education or income they adopted middle-class ways of being in the 'doing' of motherhood.

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development of social groups and networks of mothers was based on, at least in part, a classed aesthetic. In a later article Clarke (2007) also discusses how these localised cultures of mothering continue to be enacted around the consumption of children's birthday parties. The enactment of certain parenting styles can therefore be read as a highly social practice, one aimed at making connections and relationships with others.

Consumption, care and the making of familial relationships

While the previous section described how commodities provide an important resource for the construction and expression of maternal identities, further social research in the area of motherhood and consumption has revealed how material culture is also implicated in the caring and nurturing work that mothers engage in. As Lisa Baraitser (2009a) has insightfully shown, at the most banal level material objects help mothers with the everyday work of caring for children. She describes how 'maternal objects' have an ethical capacity and assist mothers in meeting the needs of infants and carrying out the child rearing work of feeding, soothing, cosying, entertaining and developing children (see also Seiter 1993). Marketers are attentive to what mothers need out of objects and current markets abound with all manner of sophisticated objects and inventions to assist and make 'easier' the caring work of mothers (Carrigan and Szmigin 2004, Thomson *et al* 2011). Indeed in her work on *The Baby Show*, a commercial exhibition of parenting and baby products, Martens (2008) describes how today's new parents have a great deal to learn about the array of products available for parenting and child care. She suggests that while 'parents-in-the-making are established consumers before they enter parenthood...the advent of a baby requires familiarisation with a new product world and a new set of everyday practices'

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(12). Encountering these new parenting apparatus, as Baraitser (2009a) describes, also involves the development and experience of new modes of bodily comportment that extend forms of maternal embodiment post birth as the corporeal comes in contact with all manner of unfamiliar mechanisms, which also impact on maternal spatial and kinetic experience.

While marketers provide an endless range of products and solutions to help mothers in their caring work they also decree the objects necessary to provide an appropriate level of care for children. The diverse set of products on offer draw on a number of emotive narratives coming from a range of knowledge communities who are 'experts' in medical, scientific, health, safety, environment and education fields. Marketing messages feed into individual parental anxieties about whether one is or will be a 'good enough' parent and having the right 'stuff' matters. Shopping for and choosing 'stuff' for babies and children thus becomes very much an affective practice for parents as they negotiate a product world where a multitude of items purport to be necessary for appropriate infant and child care (Martens 2008). What must I have and buy in order to properly love, value, educate, nurture, provide for, raise – in a word *mother* – my children? may be vital matters with which mothers struggle on a daily basis (Taylor 2004:12). As appropriate childrearing becomes embedded in the market place, being a (good) mother and providing the right kind of environment for a child's safety and development necessarily relies on some form (and usually a great deal) of consumption (Seiter 1993, Pugh 2001:1, Pugh 2002, Lustig 2004). While there may be parents who seek to avoid the 'the trap' of consumer culture and care for their children more 'simply' (See in Schiller 2011, for example) the product world for the baby, child and indeed parent informs a broader culture of parenting about what it means to (be a good) mother in contemporary society (Thomson *et al* 2009,

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Kehily and Thomson 2011). Ensuring that one acquires the culturally appropriate items to care for a child and provide them with a 'good enough' childhood is, therefore, important part of modern mothering.

In a climate where 'good' mothering and appropriate care giving is reliant on having the right 'stuff' to parent, mothers may also use objects to display and validate their mothering. As Tina Miller (2009) describes, the first-time mothers in her study used baby equipment as 'props' to perform public acts of competent mothering and manage subjective experiences of anxiety in early maternity. Giving a convincing performance and being recognised as a 'good' mother was tied to having the correct mother products such as pram, baby bag, bottle as well as 'knowing' how to mother. Similarly Lustig (2004) has described how the young, working class African American mothers in her study used consumer goods to *display* their ability to provide and to care for their children in a context where their mothering was maligned. Indeed, it is for marginalised mothers where the project of 'displaying motherhood' may come to be particularly urgent (Lustig 2004, Kehily and Thomson 2011)

Though providing and displaying the right 'stuff' may be important for mothers, drawing on her empirical research Pugh (2002) further expands the notion of caring consumption to provide a broader understanding of the *act* of consuming for children as part of 'taking care of' and making meaningful relationships with children. She identifies five different types of caring consumption among her middle-class participants, which express varying forms of care and connection. The first is provisioning pertaining to daily sustenance; the second is family-making - consuming for the unit; third, consuming as replacement - for a parent who is not there for example; fourth, compensation - to make up for some form of deprivation; and fifth a conduit

to childhood wonder - to enable joy or delight. She argues that in buying consumer goods parents seek to forge connections with their children and items are bought and given in a certain spirit and with a certain message: one about care and relationships (17).

Pugh (2002) draws on Daniel Miller's (1998a) highly original work which made the very convincing argument that shopping and in particular the more mundane everyday acts of provisioning carried out by mothers were primarily acts of love. 'Shopping...' he argues is 'one of the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice. That is to say, shopping does not merely reflect love, but is a major form in which this love is manifested and reproduced' (18). He goes on to suggest that shopping forms part of the mundane, everyday domestic tasks that are rarely valorised in our society but are carried out by women unproblematically as a means of loving and caring for their families[15]. This form of household consumption is therefore associated not only with usual domestic drudgery, but also with joy and pleasure. Miller (1998a) describes shopping as a form of devotional ritual sacrifice oriented toward 'desiring subjects', which for his post-feminist North London mothers, for whom the husband is no longer an object of devotion, are usually their infants[16]. Shopping and the 'daily conscientiousness' of considering individual preferences and attempting to fulfil the wants, needs and desires of another - is a highly emotional practice and as Miller points out 'the purpose of shopping is not so much to buy the things people want, but to strive to be in a relationship with subjects that want these things (148)'. Shopping, thus forms part of how mothers develop and imagine their

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[15] Miller's (1998) theory is based on his ethnographic work of routine provisioning in North London which was carried out primarily by housewives and mothers. His work thus focuses particularly on the practices of these women. His argument, however, could also extend more widely to other consumers.
[16] Miller (1998) draws on the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) to suggest that the infant takes the place of the husband as the subject of devotion in post feminist late modernity, where individualisation permeates intimate relationships.

relationships with their children and 'mere expenditure' is transformed into relationships of love and care. In this sense, consumption is objectified love (Pugh 2004:232).

Danielle Wozniak's work (2004) on foster mothers consuming for foster children in the US draws similar conclusions to those of Pugh (2002) and Miller (1998a) above, further demonstrating how consuming for children is part of care giving and is implicated in the construction of familial relations. She describes how both the foster mothers and children in her study were made 'real' through maternal acts of consumption. It is by buying for and providing foster children with possessions they become recognisable as cared-for family members. 'Thus the toys, clothes, books, school supplies, or behavioural reward treats women provided foster children signified both a kin relationship between the giver and the receiver and the social transformation of "foster" to "true" children, and it simultaneously signified their own [the mothers] transformation from worker to mother' (81). Wozniak (2004) further describes how the work foster mothers carried out sifting and shopping for goods for foster children at thrift stores alongside other mothers similarly confirmed their roles as 'real' mothers through their participation in 'real' maternal work. Through their enactment of these consumer practices, foster mothers confirmed and legitimated the status of their foster children as their 'real' children with kinship ties to themselves and their extended family network. After foster children had moved onto more permanent residences, foster mothers also often continued to send gifts for children, which were equated with the maintenance of the kinship relationship over time and space.

Layne (1999b, 2000) has also provided comment on the way in which buying for a child is a relational act of nurturing. She argues that 'shopping for one's

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children is clearly one of the most important acts of parenting in contemporary North American culture (Layne, 2000: 326) – which might equally be applied to a UK context. In her work on pregnancy loss (miscarriage, still birth and early infant death) she describes how consumption is one of the main things mothers lament the loss of following an infant death. The lack of ability to consume for children constitutes a painful deprivation for many and is a parenting act they mourn (Layne 1999b: 259). Layne's work is slightly different to that outlined above in that it concerns babies who are yet to be born. She insightfully reveals how acts of acquiring commodities and giving gifts to incipient babies during pregnancy brings into existence the personhood of infants making them 'real' babies and so too begins the transition of the pregnant women (and her social network) to their new selves – as mothers, fathers, grandparents etc. Layne goes on to suggest, in a similar way to the work outlined above, that it is by buying items for the baby that these family members begin to practice their new roles and the work of caring for a 'real' baby. After the event of pregnancy loss some mothers and family members continued to enact these roles by buying items for the baby. As Layne explains 'the woman who bought a jar of baby food [to see what it felt like] and the women and men who buy balloons for their dead baby, or buy children's toys or books as memorial gifts, or those who buy and wear memorial jewellery or put up a Christmas stocking for their missing child, are engaging in the enactment of parenthood' (272). These acts are constitutive of the incipient mother and the child's gift giving network of incipient fathers, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, friends of the family as they carry out the caring work of consuming for and giving to a 'real' child.

In this section I have drawn on some of the literature on motherhood and consumption to suggest that although it may often be bracketed off from

consumption of objects contemporary motherhood is rather embedded in markets and intertwined with 'things'. Consumer culture is omnipresent in the lives of mothers and plays an important role in the creation and practice of maternal identities, enabling mothers to position themselves and others in relation to contemporary cultures of parenting (Thomson *et al* 2009). These are profoundly social as well as individual acts aimed at making affiliation, connection and interaction with others. Consumption has also been shown to be implicated in the caring work that mothers engage in, the display of 'good motherhood' and the forging of familial relationships between carers and children. The findings of much of the research described here, therefore, seem to be somewhat anachronistic, given the popular and theoretical conceptions of consumer culture which, as outlined in Chapter One, hold that consumer culture is necessarily self-interested, trivial and destructive to relationships and family. To the contrary, the research on maternal consumption outlined here indicates that consuming is both an intrinsic and productive part of everyday maternal and family life implicated in the work of both 'doing' and 'displaying' of family (Finch 2007, Kehily and Thomson 2011).

Yet little research has thus far engaged specifically with the consumer practices of younger mothers in the UK. This provides an opening for research on young motherhood and as Taylor (2004) notes there is still much to be learnt about the relationships of motherhood and consumption in a far broader range of specific circumstances. Young mothers undoubtedly enact their 'caring projects' through the practices of consumption, yet they do so from a position of non-normative motherhood (see Chapters One and Four), often on limited budgets and while living with parents/or in temporary accommodation. This might have profound implications in terms of the way they consume for their children, display themselves as parents and how they might engage with

certain maternity markets that do not seem to acknowledge them. A study of the consumer practices of younger mothers, I would suggest, can, therefore, provide important insights to research in the area of motherhood and consumption. Moreover, much youth research has also explored the role of consumption in the lives of young people, defining 'youth' as a period that comes the freedom of disposable income and interaction with youth culture. This body of work presents interesting opportunities for a study of the consumer practices of mothers who are also young people. I now go on to explore some of the relevant literature in this area and draw out some of the pertinent points that this work brings to the present study.

Young people and consumption

Contemporary youth identities

Young people are often associated with a particular closeness to consumer culture and their consumer and leisure lifestyles have been the subject of much social research and theoretical interest. Young people's relationship with consumer culture is seen to have grown up in the post-war years amongst a climate of extended youth transitions, increased prosperity and the increased availability of commodities. This period saw the emergence of distinct youth 'subcultures' who could be distinguished on the basis of clearly defined characteristics of taste in music, film or clothes (Lury 1996). Sociological interpretations of these groups suggested that they were also rooted in social class and economic struggle, and were a response to the anxieties and changes facing society at the time (see Hall and Jefferson 1975 for example). Influenced by theories of late modernity (See Chapter One), as young people's lives have become less proscribed and consumer markets have intensified,

many youth researchers have tended to understand contemporary youth groupings as less structurally bound and more 'mainstream' and ephemeral than before (Kehily and Nayak 2009). Alongside these shifts there has been a continued growth in the disposable incomes of children and young people in the West and they make up a significant market segment (Bragg 2010). The contemporary youth experience is now seen to be characterised by a more widespread and intense participation in (often globally indexed) *youth culture* and the choosing and playing with identities through the realms of popular and consumer culture. This has meant that some of the more recent empirical work in the area of youth studies has tended to shift focus to exploring a broader participation in the construction and meaning of youth identities and style groupings, rather than distinct youth subcultures.

Research by Miles *et al* (1998) carried out in the North of England, for example, takes an empirical look at how young people use commodities to construct their identities in peer group settings. They demonstrate the significance of the visibility of consumer goods like clothing and footwear and the element of display for the young people in their study as a means of constructing and projecting their individual identities - who they were and how they wanted to be seen by others. Miles *et al* go on to suggest that the purchase and display of certain items also enabled young people in their study to 'fit in' to style groupings. Thus while their participants felt they exercised their agency and expressed their individual identities in terms of the consumer items they purchased they were also concerned with the fashion *currency* of clothing and how it enabled them to be accepted by peers. There was in effect something of a paradox that defined the consumer behaviour of participants whereby clothing was 'imbued with both communal and individualistic meaning despite the contradictions inherent in both types of meaning operating

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simultaneously' (90). In a similar vein to Clarke (2004) described above Miles *et al* conclude, therefore, that while consumer culture played an important role in the construction of individual youth identities, commodities were primarily used as a means of communicating solidarity, commonalities and group identity, thus providing some semblance in an otherwise unstable post-modern world. Their work, therefore, illuminates the relationship between young people's identities and consumption, how this was lived and negotiated in peer group settings and the way in which commodities enabled young people to communicate with peers.

More recent work by Croghan *et al* (2006) has also described how commodities provide an important marker of individual identity and enable group membership for young people. In their study among young people in Oxford, Birmingham and Milton Keynes Croghan *et al,* however, stress how the participation in the construction of contemporary youth identities and group membership often relies on the purchase of expensive name brand items. They explore the notions of 'style success' and 'style failure' among the participants in their study and argue that expensive name branded items acted as important tropes of inclusion - denoting 'style success' - and enabling the establishment of group membership and providing protection from bullying (see also Evans and Chandler 2006 and Evans and Miles 2008 for a similar example with younger children). The purchase of 'fake', cheaper, or worse still charity shop clothing was conversely associated with an inability to afford the right style markers and resulted in 'style failure', the attraction of negative attention and exclusion. Style group membership was therefore costly and having the right markers of style was not only about style display but the conspicuous ability to spend and the status associated with having the means to finance that kind of purchase (470). Croghan *et al* point out that in the

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accounts of young people 'money, style and social worth were inextricably linked, so that the ability to buy desirable consumer items became a moral ability, an indication of intrinsic worth' and having a lack of money was viewed as a personal failure (473). They note that ascriptions such as 'tramp' that were readily used to describe 'style failures' by their participants came with a ready made identity that was not only related to lack of money but failure, low moral worth and marginalisation (473). This research tends to echo earlier work carried out by Middleton *et al* (1994). In their research with children they describe how the need to fit with peers and desire not to be identified as 'different' was of paramount importance. Clothing again provided the most obvious and visible means through which young people attempted to fit in with peers. Middleton *et al's* participants spoke about the risks of bullying from 'standing out' and the possibility of exclusion from peer groups. As with Croghan *et al's* (2006) research, not having the correct clothing and markers of style was associated with lack of money and an inability to afford the appropriate dress. By not keeping up with fashions and failing to conform children and young people were again in danger of being subjected to the stigmatising effects and lack of moral worth that comes with being seen to be poor, something that less affluent children were at greater risk of. It is suggested that poverty and limited access to financial resources, therefore, greatly limit the identities young people are able to take up and their ability to participate in the practices of style display and group membership. The emphasis on expensive designer goods inevitably results in the exclusion and marginalisation of poorer young people and puts a great deal of pressure on parents (Croghan *et al* ibid). How low-income parents manage consuming for children is explored in more detail below.

While class may impact on the ability to participate in the construction of youth identity, much recent work in the area of youth studies has also stressed that despite assertions about the less structurally based nature of youth culture, youth style is often bordered around and expressive of a particular class location. Work on young people's style and identity carried out by Archer *et al* (2007), for example, describes how social class was clearly embodied in the adornment and style of the working class young people in their study. They suggest that their participants from 'ostensibly working-class backgrounds' actively took up and constructed collective class identities through their consumption of particular sportswear brands[17]. These brands were aligned with working-class identities and young people used them to position themselves and draw distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. In this way social difference is 'made, read and known through tastes, practices and embodied 'styles' of individuals and groups' of young people (Archer *et al* 2007:223). Similarly, McCulloch *et al*'s (2006) fieldwork carried out in Edinburgh and Newcastle, shows how style and group membership among the young people in their study was largely determined by social class and place. McCulloch *et al* identify three main 'subcultural' style groups in their sample of young people; 'Goth', 'Skater' and 'Chav/Charver/Ned', as well as a group they defined as 'others'. They argue that boundaries were drawn between these groups based on clothing, musical taste and in some cases an activity, like skateboarding for skaters. Both Goths and Skaters valued looking what they considered to be individual or different and music also formed an important focus for the 'goth' group. The 'Chav/Charver/Ned' group was associated with the conspicuous consumption of expensive name brand goods (see also Chapter Four) and group membership was particularly embedded in locality – usually working-class housing estates. Yet while the young people themselves

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[17] 'Nike' is given as the predominant brand and the researchers describe this form of adornment as 'Nike style'.

did not explicitly refer to these stylized youth groupings as classed, those described as Chavs/Charver or Neds[18] commonly came from the lower social classes while Goths and skaters 'showed a wider range of social class but were more likely to belong to higher social classes' (552). Young people's styles thus mapped onto and were expressive of a particular social class location.

Hollingworth and Williams (2009) found very similar classed stylized youth groupings to McCulloch *et al* (2006) in their interviews with young people in three inner-city areas of the UK. Again, while few young people mentioned class explicitly, groups were drawn across such lines. For example, 'poshies' had clear associations with middle or upper classness and 'hippies' were associated with middle-class radicalism (470). 'Chavs' or 'charvers' on the other hand were associated with the white working class or were seen as coming from 'deprived backgrounds' and were identified by their expensive designer brands, tracksuits and 'lots of' or 'big' jewellery. Hollingworth and Williams argue, therefore, that class was read into these fashion styles even though it was not spoken. Moreover, while 'Chavs' or 'Charvers' were invariably described by their external appearance and fashion style, they were also associated with particular behaviours like aggression and violence and a disengagement with education. There was, therefore, also considerable moral judgement attached to their character (see also Chapter Four).

These findings tend to echo those of Nayak's (2003 and 2006) earlier research carried out in the North-East of England, which again described distinct youth 'subcultures' rooted in class location. Nayak's work, however, also draws attention to youth intra class cultural and style differences rather than just

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[18] It is worth noting that participants themselves did not self identify with these terms due to their negative connotations (see Chapter Four). The authors, however, still refer to the young people they perceive to be members of these 'subcultures' using this pejorative language.

those between middle and working class youth. Nayak in both his 2003 and 2006 publications describes the leisure lifestyles of three distinct 'subcultural' groups of young males in the North East of England, where he carried out his ethnographic fieldwork. He names these the *Real Geordies'* - with backgrounds in skilled labour; the *'Charvers'* - largely from unemployed communities; and the B-Boyz – who comprised a more diverse group of males including members from various middle- and working – class backgrounds. These groups were marked out distinctly through the corporeal. The *Real Geordies* sported immaculate hairstyles and dressed in expensively tailored designer shirts. The *Charvers* on the other hand adopted a distinct dress style – baseball caps, tracksuits and heavy gold jewellery – which excluded them from many bars and clubs. The B-Boyz were more influenced by global hip-hop and basketball cultures, stylistically investing in items such as baggy jeans and cutting patterns into their hair. Nayak (2003) concludes that 'while social class may rarely be discussed directly by young people it continues to be threaded through the daily fabric of their lives: it is stitched into codes of respect, accent, dress, music, bodily adornment and comportment' (828).

The literature explored in this section indicates that youth is an important time of interaction with consumer culture which enables the construction of youth identities, interaction with peers and group membership. Stylized youth groupings it seems are also often constituted around and expressive of particular class locations. This work points toward further areas of interest for a study on the consumer practices of mothers who are also young people. What might becoming a mother at this time mean for youth consumer practice and the practice of (classed) youth identities? Moreover, what might identification with certain youth groups mean in terms of maternal consumer practice?

In this chapter I have so far drawn on the literature in relation to both motherhood and consumption and youth and consumption to suggest that material culture plays an important role in the lives of both mothers and young people. Yet as was touched on in Chapter One and above, participation in consumer culture is reliant on access to material resources. Understanding the implications of limited resources on consumer practice of mothers is an important area of interest for this study given that (as was indicated in Chapter One) young mothers may often be raising children on low incomes. This may have ramifications for younger mothers in terms of how they are able to consume for both their children and themselves as mothers and as young people. I now explore some of the literature related to mothering on a low income, which forms the third body of work I consider to be pertinent to my research area.

Families, material exclusion and classed love

Economic resources may set limits on the ability to be able to participate in consumer culture (Bauman 1998). In a climate where buying for children is an integral part of maternal care giving and expressing relations of love, for mothers managing on a low income anxiety and insecurity is often aroused around their (in)ability to be able to provide adequately for their children. Indeed for these mothers it may be painfully obvious that mothering is not and cannot be divorced from consumption. Worries about buying for children (or rather not being able to buy for children) may arise persistently for these women (Miller 1998a, Power 2005, Harris *et al* 2005) and pressures to provide are felt acutely (Ipsos MORI and Nairn 2011). Studies of mothers who manage on limited incomes suggest that they strive hard and will go to

inordinate lengths to ensure that their children 'do not go without' and have the correct items to 'fit in' with peers. As was described above having the 'right' items is important for young people to be able participate in style group membership and to prevent exclusion and bullying. For many parents providing these items may be precisely the kind of love that cannot be denied (Miller 1998a: 26/27). As one of the participants in Edin and Lein's (1997) study remarked 'you gotta do what you gotta do to make your kids feel normal' (30). Indeed this quote from Gillies' (2007) research on working-class mothers' experiences of parenting perhaps demonstrates the intensity of the desire parents have and lengths to which less affluent mothers will go to obtain a much coveted item for a child:

> VG ' But what happens if the children really want something but you don't have the money, say like a new pair of trainers or something like that?'
> Participant: By hook or by crook I'll get it. Yeah, by hook or by crook I'll get it and I don't mean, like, going out there and steal it, I just mean, like, just if it means, like me not paying a bill, I'd just not pay a bill and do it that way' (129)

For low-income families buying for children often drives family finance and the shuffling and reorganising of finances (or 'robbing Peter to pay Paul') in order to manage household expenditure as well as make purchases for children is well documented in the literature on low income consumers. Buying for children in these circumstances regularly involves the employment of strict budgeting strategies and although these consumers may be less able to take advantage of the widest range of offerings and savings available on the market[19], they often follow careful shopping strategies which involve shopping around for the best bargains or spreading the cost of items over a period of

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[19] This might be due to lack of storage space or funds to bulk buy or lack of access to suitable transport to visit larger, cheaper stores.

time. Gifts (of money and goods) from family and friends are often cited as an important means of easing the strain on family budgets and acquiring much needed or desired items for children in low-income families. Indeed the reciprocal relations of support from familial and local social networks in the form of free childcare, hand-ons, small loans and the purchasing of groceries, though not without obligation, often enable less well-off mothers to make ends meet (Middleton *et* al 1994, Edin and Lein 1997, Lareau 2003, Gillies 2007). As Middleton *et al* comment, 'wider family and community support, far from being a long-dead historical ideal, remains crucial to the financial survival of many families in Britain' (120)[20].

For mothers managing on limited resources finding cash to spend on children also frequently results in much personal sacrifice and the displacement of their own consumer needs and desires, sometimes to the extent of missing meals and going without warm clothing (Middleton *et al* 1994, Edin and Lein 1997, Cohen *et al* 1992, Pugh 2004, Hamilton and Catterall 2005, Hamilton and Catterall 2007, Evans and Miles 2008). Yet this sacrifice and the need for tight budgeting are often seen as much a part of mothering as early morning feeds and toilet training (Middleton *et al* 1994, Edin and Lein 1997, Hamilton and Catterall 2007 & 2008). Moreover, the ability to manage on meagre finances successfully and provide 'things' for children may also provide an important source of pride and self-esteem for mothers managing on low incomes. Thus although exclusion from consumer culture may result in marginalization for mothers they can also be empowered through their ability to manage in such circumstances (Hamilton and Catterall 2008, Hamilton 2009).

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[20] This is something that is likely to continue to be important in the current climate of rising inflation, stagnating salaries and a squeeze on benefits.

Mothers managing on low incomes then struggle not to become excluded 'flawed consumers' and, as a consequence of their inability to buy for children, 'flawed mothers' (Bauman 1998, Power 2005). For them meeting the requirements of good mothering requires a degree of consumer resourcefulness for less affluent families (Hamilton and Catterall 2008:553). Their hard work it seems, however, may often pay off and some researchers have described how although access to resources and methods of acquisition may vary, children from different socioeconomic backgrounds often end up with the same commodities, meaning that their material worlds may in fact appear very similar (Pugh 2004, Evans and Chandler 2006, Evans and Miles 2008). This perhaps complicates the notion that having fewer financial resources necessarily leads to exclusion from consumer culture and some work further reveals that children from less affluent backgrounds may even end up with *more* in the way of money and 'stuff' as children (Pugh 2004, West *et al* 2006).

In their study of the disposable income and consumer attitudes of young people aged 11-15 in West Scotland, for example, West *et al* (2006) found evidence of a 'material paradox' in that children from lower social classes had more disposable income than their peers in higher classes; an inverse relationship between young people's personal income and economic status. Moreover while respondents from all classes were equally consumerist in that they desired the same goods, ownership of particular commodities - like TVs and games consoles - increased with falling social class. West *et al* explain this pattern as the result of a mixture of class-based parental values, parental sacrifice and the pressures of consumer culture. They go on to suggest that working-class consumption for children may be more focussed on increasing the immediate self-worth of children through the purchase of these smaller

commodities, while the more affluent who have greater financial resources to invest in any case, may rather be oriented toward more long term future goals which secure their social and economic capital in later life (West *et al* 2006)[21].

In her work on parenting and the emotional capital mothers invest in their children Val Gillies (2006 and 2007) noted similar priorities in terms of the consumption of goods for children and her work goes some way to understanding these different classed consumer practices. Gillies (2006 and 2007) defines emotional capital as emotional investments made by parents as part of their desire to promote their children's wellbeing and prospects. She explains how for the working class families in her study *giving* to children was often invested with emotional meaning and was aimed at improving the self-esteem of children. Acquiring a high status or much desired item for a child could, for example, communicate the extent to which they are valued, particularly where financial resources are scarce and there is a struggle to provide 'high end' goods. Where money is limited, Gillies argues, treats and gifts can be highly meaningful and providing things that entail real struggle communicates the extent to which children are valued (2007:130). For the more affluent, however, spending money is a less significant act and there may, therefore, be less meaning attached to the purchase of consumer items for children. For these groups emotional capital was more likely to be channelled through activities that were consistent with the acquisition of middle-class capital and educational success, like helping with homework. Gillies goes on to describe how as there was less invested in *giving* to children for the middle-class parents in her sample they were much more likely to try

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[21] This kind of middle-class investment in long term future goals is also reflected in Lareau's (2003) US research where the more affluent parents in her study deployed great sums of money (and time and emotion) to a process of 'concerted cultivation' whereby middle-class children were encouraged to participate in endless extra-curricular activities which would ultimately ensure their status in social institutions and later life.

and curb their children's materialism and apply codes and norms in relation to buying things for them, like helping a child save for an item or investing in something needed for an after school activity or in educational toys or computer games. The middle-class parents in the sample also spent vast amounts of money on boosting children's educational prospects by paying for private tuition or moving into the catchment area of a good school, for example. Gillies suggests that for those without the resources money may be directed at that which is more achievable and meaningful and she highlights a lucid rationale for more short term working-class consumer practices, implying that spending small amounts on material goods 'makes sense' in the context of the lives of her working-class participants:

> 'When money is scarce treats and gifts can be highly meaningful and arguably more effective than spending small amounts on educationally oriented goods. Much desired items like name brand clothing or a favourite junk food for tea might make a difficult day at school more bearable for a child, while also communicating a strong message of love and care' (2006:288).

Further research on low-income families and consuming for children has also described how lower-income families may make particular investments in acquiring commodities like expensive brand name items for children as a means of deflecting the appearance of poverty and ensuring the prestige of children among peers (Hamilton 2011). Indeed, as was noted above, an inability to finance the right style markers may come with a negative identity and the ascription of a lack of worth. There may be much shame attached to not having the requisite resources to finance the right clothing and any exposure of a lack of material resources can be a deeply painful experience for children and young people - one that can stay with them well into adulthood

(Nenga 2003). While all parents may seek to ensure that their children 'fit in' (Middleton *et al* 1994, Evans and Chandler 2006, Evans and Miles 2008) this may be something that is particularly urgent for families from less affluent backgrounds given their proximity to poverty (Archer *et al* 2007, Evans and Miles 2008, Hamilton 2012). As Evans and Miles (2008) note the pressures to conform are arguably more acute for those on the margins of society as their sense of inadequacy is easily awakened (5). Illustrating this point Middleton *et al* (1994) have described how the less affluent children in their study attached increased significance to the cost of items of clothing and where they were acquired, while the children from more affluent backgrounds tended to speak more broadly about keeping up with the fashions. Moreover, while middle-class children tended to like wearing second hand clothing this was much reviled by poorer children because of its association with poverty. For the less affluent conspicuously displaying the ability to consume may therefore be particularly important while shopping second hand may be considered more 'risky' given their relationships to material resources (McRobbie 1989, Skeggs 1997). Indeed Hamilton (2011) has described how low-income parents invest in conspicuously branded items for their children to ensure that they avoid negative stigmatisation. This is crucially not a simply an act of 'emulation' or a 'matter of keeping up', however, but a matter of ensuring the status of children among peers and protecting them from bullying and exclusion. Moreover, (Archer *et* al 2007) have further described how having expensive brand named items may enable disadvantaged young people to generate status and worth around the self where other routes to gaining value, like through education, may be less realisable.

Different practices and priorities, therefore, operate around the consumption of goods for children, which are rooted in the reality of social class

circumstances. Less affluent families may invest in the purchase of certain commodities which take on particular meaning and do particular work in their local contexts in terms of increasing the self worth of children and their value among peers. While less affluent children may seemingly receive more in the way of 'stuff' than their more affluent counterparts, the more affluent, who have the greater financial capacity to do so, tend to invest large amounts of money in things that will ensure the success of their children in the future. The material worlds of children may, therefore, in fact not only look very different, but profoundly unequal. Moreover, although commodities may take on a certain role in the lives of less affluent families and investing in these items often 'makes sense' given their material circumstances, these investments may often be the subject of wider criticism and ridicule. Indeed as was commented in Chapter One, an investment in consumer culture can be seen as trivial, damaging to children and a poor replacement for a better form of parenting. The styles of conspicuous consumption are also often denigrated and although they may be used as a means of generating local value they are often not recognised or legitimated across boundaries (Skeggs 2004). Conversely and cruelly they may rather be used as a form of representational violence to devalue the working-class subjects who invest in them (this is explored in more detail in Chapter Four).

In this section I have outlined some of the social research literature that relates to low income consumers and buying for children. This work indicates that a lack of material resources may compromise the position of low income mothers making it more difficult for them to meet the requirements of good mothering. Mothers managing on limited incomes nevertheless struggle and strive to provide well for their children and employ a range of clever budgeting and shopping strategies to ensure their children are well provided for. Indeed

some of the work outlined here indicates that less money does not necessarily always mean less 'stuff'. In some instances children from lower socioeconomic groups may even receive more and while this may reflect the intense efforts of mothers to ensure children do not go without it may also reflect different class priorities and meanings that operate around consumption of goods for children. This work brings important insights to bear on a study of young mothers who are often managing on limited incomes. How might the consumer practices of young mothers be affected and constrained by a lack of material resources? What might a lack of material resources mean for the construction of their youth identities? How might they manage to balance forms of maternal and youth consumption on limited resources? What local cultural investments do they make in material culture and the items bought for children? And how are these reflective of and related to their material circumstances? These are some of the considerations this study takes up.

Conclusion – Young Motherhood and Consumption

In this chapter I have explored three areas of social research literature that I consider to be pertinent to this study. The first was related to motherhood and consumption and the research in this area suggested that while motherhood is often construed as being something that *is* and *should* be *separated* out from the material world, contemporary motherhood is always already embedded in markets and the practices of consumption. Commodities perform important functions in terms of the construction of maternal identity, taking care of children and the enactment of familial relationships. This literature suggests, therefore, that far from being trivial, corrosive and antithetical to the family and relationships it is often held to be, consumer culture can rather be understood as an important aspect of contemporary

family life implicated in the 'doing' and 'displaying' of family. In this chapter I suggested, however, that little work has explored the consumer practices of young mothers and I argued that exploring the consumer behaviour of younger mothers would make an important contribution to work in this area given that young mothers occupy and approach motherhood from a particular location and often with limited financial resources. I outlined some of the work related to youth and consumption to demonstrate how 'youth' can be understood as an important time of interaction with consumer culture and involvement in the construction and display of stylized youth identities. This work, I suggested, provides a significant starting point for a study on the consumer practices of mothers who are also young people. As young mothers may be living on limited incomes I further explored some of the literature related to mothering on a low income, which indicated that access to economic resources can impact significantly on consumer participation and practice. This study draws on and brings together work in all of these areas and explores the consumer practices of mothers who are also young and are often managing on limited incomes. I believe that this makes for an original and generative area of study which will not only fill a gap in the literature on motherhood and consumption but will also make a contribution to work on youth and consumption, low income consumers as well as to work on young motherhood.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Introduction

This study involved a staged and incremental multi-method approach across two sites in the city of Bristol, UK, and incorporated aspects of participant observation, focus groups and photo-elicitation. This chapter outlines how the fieldwork design was arrived at and reflects on how the chosen methods worked in practice as well as the experience of carrying out the fieldwork. I begin by providing a brief outline of the methodological and epistemological context for the research design before describing how the research questions were formulated and the methods chosen to approach them. Following on from this I describe how the research was operationalised and detail the two research sites, the sample of participants and the implementation of ethical procedures. I then describe the fieldwork process in more detail by exploring and reflecting on the experience and outcomes of employing each method in practice, and I also outline the process of analysing and synthesising the data from the study. This part of the chapter highlights the emotionally charged nature of the research process and I relate this to an emergent literature on the emotive character of fieldwork and the significance of this for the generation of knowledge. The chapter ends with a consideration of the efficacy of the overall research design.

Methodological and epistemological underpinnings

In recent years there has been an increasing recognition in legal, political and academic fields that children and young people are active social agents who

are able to participate in decision making processes and have valuable knowledge and distinct opinions to contribute to policy and research (James and Prout 1997, Bragg 2010, Morrow 2008, Heath *et al* 2009). Child and youth researchers working within this paradigm have often tended to favour research methods that are focussed on eliciting the distinct 'voices' of children and young people in ways that are thought to be more 'in tune' with the particular competencies and interests of respondents. Children and young people are to be respected as active and valued contributors in the research process and contemporary child and youth researchers often attempt to limit the power and influence of the researcher wherever possible. This has resulted in the development of a plethora of 'interactive' and 'creative' methods for researching with children and young people, which are intended to open up avenues for dialogue between adults and children and make the research process more comfortable, engaging and fair for participants. Methods have included such things as using visual material as stimuli for discussion, photography, art, multi-media and audio approaches, video diaries, drama, vignettes, logs and scrap books, games and, more often, a mixture of these. Many of these methods adopt a multi-sensory or visual element thought to provide children and young people with ways of expressing themselves that are more suited to their style of communication than adult centred methods such as interviews, which involve dialogue with a researcher who occupies a position of relative power. These methods also potentially allow for a wider range of young people (i.e. not only the most literate) to participate in research (Bragg 2010) and some researchers advocate using a range of methods so that participants can choose the ones that are best suited to their abilities and interests (Punch 2002). Youth researchers are also generally keen to ensure that research subjects 'get something' out of their

involvement in fieldwork whether in the form of enjoyment, skills development or appropriate remuneration for their time (Bragg 2010).

My research design is broadly consistent with these trends in child and youth research and I have attempted to adopt an approach to researching with young mothers that aims to elicit their views and experiences using a range of engaging research activities, which place them at the centre of data collection and allow them to choose to articulate themselves in a number of different ways. The research design is also sensitive to the power relations between researcher and researched and is directed toward ensuring the comfort and awareness of participants about the research process and outcomes. I am aware, however, that there are inherent problems with attempting to elicit the 'voices' and experiences of research participants as if we can access them as some form of 'authentic truth'. Indeed the idea that the use visual creative methods will necessarily provide some kind of privileged data has been the subject of some discussion among social researchers (see Buckingham 2009 for example). Regardless of method participant responses are inevitably tempered by what is asked, who asks the questions, who else is present and the message participants wish to convey, which may often be played out in relation to wider narratives and discourses about social action. The interpretation of responses by the researcher and the application of theory also impacts on what can be 'heard' and written about research subjects. In my analysis of how my chosen methods worked in practice I have attempted to draw out some of these issues and to pick up on points in the research process where matters of context, self representation and broader social discourse may have mediated participant responses. I am also attentive here to how my location as an older (in comparison to participants) white, middle-class and for a lot of the time pregnant, woman impacted on the data I was

able to generate and my interpretation of my participants' experiences. As is described in more detail below, emotions formed a significant aspect of the research encounter and I consider the feelings involved in the process of carrying out research as well as what my emotions brought to my understanding of the experiences of my participants. Indeed there is an emerging literature in the social sciences that has begun to explore the emotionally charged nature of fieldwork and some researchers describe how the emotion experienced in fieldwork can be used as an important form of data that can enrich analytical interpretations (Hubbard *et al* 2001, Walkerdine *et al* 2001, Holland 2007, Weller and Cabellero 2009, Elliot 2011). This work reveals how feeling is endemic to the fieldwork process and describes how research is inevitably a job that involves 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983). It also points to the way in which exploring the emotions experienced in fieldwork can be used as an important tool for reflexive practice, enabling acknowledgement of the affective modes through which knowledge is produced about research subjects.

I therefore apply a 'degree of reflexivity' (Mauthner and Doucet 2003) to understanding the process of data collection and analysis, yet my intention is not one of simply writing myself into the research, but to demonstrate how my location and experience impacted on the production of data and what I was able to know about my participants (Back 2007). Being pregnant in the field in particular helped me to 'see' and 'feel' aspects of my participants' experience that would otherwise have gone unnoticed and it also highlighted some of the ways in which I was implicated as the producer of knowledge. My experience of being pregnant while researching young mothers is, therefore, something that I have drawn on in my present analysis. Yet I am sure that there are many other aspects of my ontology that have come to bear on

different moments in the research encounter that remain unacknowledged (Mauthner and Doucet 2003). As Mauthner and Doucet have suggested it is often not until we achieve some distance from our work that these other influences become apparent. Before exploring the research experience in detail and some of the personal and practical elements that impacted on the data and knowledge I was able to produce, I now describe how the research questions and design were formulated and how the research was put into operation.

Research Questions and Design

My research questions were generated following an exploration of the literature related to motherhood and consumption, young people and consumption and mothering on a low income (as is outlined in Chapter Two). Consumption was taken to be an important site of social action and meaning making for mothers and the study aimed to explore the form that maternal consumption might take for mothers who were young and often living on limited financial resources. I set out to provide a broad and in-depth account of the consumer practices of young mothers covering how and what they consumed as well as the meaning they attributed to 'baby stuff' and the role it took on in their lives.

My first substantive area of investigation was to explore **what and to what extent do young mothers buy for their babies and their maternal selves?** I then wanted to delve deeper and explore *why* they invested in buying the items they did and the kind of maternal 'work' that these 'things' did for them. **What meanings, emotions and values do young mothers**

attach to the consumer goods they buy? And what role do they play in their lives? was, therefore, set out as a further broad area of investigation.

The focus on *younger* mothers also beckoned specific questions about their maternal material practice. My reading of the academic literature related to young motherhood had, for example, suggested that young mothers are the subject of much negative media attention and that the stigma associated with early fertility is felt intimately by young mothers themselves, having real impact on their maternal experience and practice. Some researchers, for example, describe how young mothers actively try to resist their designation as 'bad mothers' by creating alternative narratives about their parenting and investing in their maternal relationships (Kirkman *et al* 2001, McDermott and Graham 2005). As part of this study I was particularly interested in exploring how the experience of stigma might also impact on participants' maternal material practice, the investments they made in buying for their children and how they constructed particular versions of maternity through consumer culture. Might consumer culture also be a site where maternal resistance takes place? As Chin (2001) and Miles (2003) have argued consumption does not occur in isolation but is embedded in broader social and psychological experience (Chin 2001, Miles 2003).

This area of investigation was supported by a review of current media representations of teenage mothers, which was carried out prior to fieldwork. This work attempted to map the media tone around teenage pregnancy at the time of the research in order to understand something of the climate through which young mothers live their lives and the discourses that might impact on the experience and indeed the consumer practice of participants. This piece of work, therefore, set out to provide something of a framework to help

situate and understand the consumer practices of the young mothers who took part in the study. **How young mothers experienced these representations and how they impacted on their consumer practice** became an important area of focus for this study. The findings from this media analysis are outlined in more detail in Chapter Four.

Given that young mothers are also often described as living in deprived circumstances and are bringing up their children in poverty (see Chapter One), a further research question sought to explore **what kind of financial resources young mothers have available to enact their caring and youth and maternal identity projects? What effect (if any) does this have on their consumer practice? What struggles do they face in consuming for their children and themselves? How do they experience and manage these constraints?**

In addition, my literature review had also led me to understand 'youth' as a particular time of interaction with consumer culture and the making of stylized youth identities. As part of this study I wanted to understand **what becoming a mother at this time might mean for youth consumer practice and what it might mean for maternal consumer practice.** How might having to provide for a child put pressure on youth consumption? How might youth consumer practice be affected by a period of profound identity transformation and transition to adulthood?

Further to this, as there has been much political and academic focus on teenage pregnancy and parenting in recent years, but little work on young motherhood has engaged with the practices of consumption, I wanted to pose a further question in this research about **what a study that looks at young**

motherhood through the lens of consumption might bring to policy and practice.

In order to address these questions I designed a programme of fieldwork that drew on the recent methodological approaches to researching young people (touched upon above) and took a staged and incremental, qualitative mixed methods approach, incorporating participant observation, activity based focus groups and a photo-elicitation exercise. It was hoped that this design would enable me to build up a detailed picture of the consumer practices of young mothers in the study over a period of time and it was consistent with my desire to involve participants in the research process and to successfully access their experiences in a way that was engaging, comfortable and rewarding for them. I was also conscious that many young mothers may have had unsuccessful experiences in the school system and they might have low levels of literacy (Bonnell *et al* 2005, Hosie 2007). I was therefore particularly keen to a) distinguish my research activities from a more traditional pedagogy and b) to ensure that my methods were suitable for young people who may not have had extensive formal education.

The fieldwork was planned to take place between October 2007 and July 2008 and Table 1. illustrates how the research activity was designed to be spread over this period.

Oct-Dec 2007	Jan-March 2008	April-June 2008
Observation		
	Focus Groups	
		Auto Photography and Interviews
		Shopping Trip

Table 1.

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The initial stage of participant observation was expected to allow participants to become familiar and comfortable with me as a researcher, to ease the research encounter and encourage informed participation in later research activity. This is a popular way of using participant observation among youth researchers (Heath *et al* 2009). During this stage of the research programme I also hoped to begin getting a feel of participants' consumer practices and aspects of their lives that might inform later focus groups, interviews and analysis. The focus groups were intended to begin to centre the research and to drill down into my particular area of interest, but I also employed activities to help situate participants' consumer practices in the broader context of their lives. Following the staged research design focus groups were expected to make use of some of the observations I had made during the early phase of fieldwork and to further generate information that would frame later photo-elicitation interviews. I was also keen to use focus groups as a method because they are thought to provide a relatively comfortable and more power balanced space for young people to speak in (Eder and Fingerson 2003, Punch 2002 and 2007). It was intended that focus groups would include various activities and visual stimuli to provide prompts for discussion and opportunities for participants to articulate themselves in a variety of ways. It was thought that the photo-elicitation exercise would prompt more detailed individual accounts of the meaning of material culture for participants and, as it was one of the later activities, would reflect the increased familiarity and comfort between researcher and researched. In photo-elicitation the impact of the presence of the researcher is also said to be greatly reduced as participants have more freedom to collect data that is important to them, albeit around a pre-defined topic (Barker and Weller 2003). This method fitted well with my desire to allow participants to be active in the data collection and lessen the influence of the researcher (Croghan *et al* 2006, Woodley-Baker 2009).

Further, this method required no writing at all and so it seemed to be particularly fitting for those who had low levels of literacy and also, as the activity was also carried out individually and shared with only the researcher, I hoped that it might appeal to those who were less confident talking in a group. The final activity in the programme of research was observation of an organised shopping trip. This exercise was intended to deepen and enrich analytical interpretations by further observing the desires, contradictions and constraints involved in the shopping experience (Chin 2001, Pugh 2002). Table 2. at Appendix One lists the methods and the reasoning for using each one. Overall I hoped that my approach would elicit detailed accounts of the consumer practices of young mothers and the meaning they attached to material objects. Employing a range of activities that incorporated the use of language, writing, making and a field trip was also hoped to provide a programme of research that was engaging, enjoyable and accessible to participants and was different to the kind of pedagogy they were used to. In the fourth part of this chapter I will describe how these methods worked in practice and the kind of data they generated. Before this I introduce the research sites and sample, showing how the proposed research was operationalised.

Operationalising the design

The research sites

The fieldwork took place in two sites in the city of Bristol. Bristol was selected initially due to my familiarity with the city and knowledge of several initiatives that I thought would fit well with my research design. In light of other researchers' experiences of finding it difficult to recruit young mothers to

research studies (Allen and Bourke Dowling 1998, Arai 2003a[22]), I initially contacted two sites – a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU hereafter) for the education and support of school-aged mothers and a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU hereafter) in the south of the city. I was pleasantly surprised to find, however, that I was able to secure good access to both sites relatively easily. I decided to carry out the fieldwork at both as I felt this would provide me with the best opportunity to gather 'enough data' for the study. The two sites also seemed to offer different potentials in terms of the implementation of my research design.

The MBU is a supported housing facility located in a traditional white working-class area in the south of the city where several of the wards are counted among the most deprived in the country (Raphael Reed *et al* 2007). The MBU houses up to fifteen young women aged 16-22 who are either expecting their first baby or who have recently given birth. The set-up consists of one large residential building containing five bed-sits and an additional adjoining block of ten independent flats. At the time the MBU was funded by the local authority via a local housing association. Young women were generally referred here by social services or the housing department (homeless persons unit) and were expected to be in desperate need of re-housing. This might include no longer being able to stay with parents, living in overcrowded conditions or living in care and no longer being able to stay on at a place of residence. Young women could also be referred on the basis that their children were registered as 'at risk' and needed to be observed by social services. Though young women could have been housed here from across the city, at the time of study most tenants were drawn from the local and surrounding area. Tenancies ran

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[22] This was contradicted in Sharpe (1987), however, who found that many young mothers wanted their voices to be heard in her writing.

for six months to two years and some young women were required to stay for the full two years based on legal instruction via social services.

The Bristol Unit for the Education and Support of Young Parents is a Pupil Referral Unit located near the centre of Bristol and is funded by the Local Education Authority. At the time of research it provided education, advice and support to more than 50 young mothers and mothers-to-be each year. The school took students aged thirteen to nineteen from across the city and offered full-time national curriculum and vocational education to under-sixteen pregnant and school-aged mums, as well as a wide variety of part-time courses to post-sixteen students. Crèche facilities were provided on site, paid for via the Care to Learn programme[23]. Students could be referred here by their existing schools, local Connexions[24] worker or other welfare professionals. The length of stay at the school varied and many attend for a year to eighteen months, depending on the age at which they gave birth and the stage they were at in their educational careers. As it turned out a number of the young women I spoke to had attended the school for much longer periods - in one case I came across for over four years. The school is subject to Office for Standards in Education[25] inspections and in 2007 and 2009 Ofsted regarded the unit as 'outstanding'. Facilities offering this level of educational, social and personal support for young mothers are few and far between in the UK.

Access to the MBU was negotiated via a YWCA youth worker who ran a once weekly informal education session at the unit. Two members of staff, one the

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[23] Government funding to help pay for childcare and learning related travel costs while in education, if under twenty.

[24] Locally funded free information, advice and support for young people aged thirteen to nineteen.

[25] Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills - The official body for inspecting schools in the UK.

Service Manager of the unit, were also informed about the research in a meeting early at the beginning of field work. My access, however, was guaranteed on the basis of my association with the YWCA youth worker. As I would be contacting research participants via her group, the staff at the MBU did not seem to perceive that their permission was explicitly required. Access to the PRU was negotiated directly with the Head Teacher who maintained control over whom and which organisations were able to access the school. There were no requirements to notify the Local Education Authority that I was carrying out research at the school (see Morrow 2001 & 2008) and I did not experience the difficulty in securing access to this educational facility in the same way that Kehily (2002) has described. An initial meeting with both sites was held in the spring of 2007 where the research and proposed methods were outlined and loose arrangements were made for me to return in the autumn to begin fieldwork. Prior to commencing fieldwork a research plan was forwarded to each research site. I was also invited to the summer barbeque at the PRU and met several members of staff and some of the students.

Gaining ethical approval and developing methods for ethical practice

The proposed research design was subject to approval by the Open University Ethics Committee and prior to going into the research sites it was necessary for me to consider how I would ensure that my research would be conducted with due care and regard towards those who participated in the study. A key component of ethical practice is gaining informed consent from participants, which is often a particular concern in youth research where young people may be perceived to be less comfortable in asserting their agency with adults and vulnerable to coercion into research. When considering how my own work

would be carried out I consulted The British Sociological Association (2002) statement on ethical practice. This states that gaining informed consent involves 'explaining as fully as possible, in terms that are meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing the research, why it is being undertaken and how it will be disseminated' (3). I therefore developed a 'young person friendly' information leaflet to distribute at both the PRU and MBU that explained the project in terms that I felt would be accessible to participants. The leaflet used clear language, not too much text and images of consumer items that I thought would be appealing to my audience (see Appendix Two). Initial consent to observe at each site was granted by the Head Teacher at the PRU and the youth worker at the YWCA. I planned to introduce myself and the research in the classes at the PRU and the group sessions at MBU by talking through the leaflet and give the young women a chance to ask questions. Ensuring that the young women knew that there was no obligation to take part in the research, that they could withdraw the information they had contributed to the study at any time and that they could view any of my notes or transcripts of the focus groups and interviews whenever they wanted was to be a priority.

Consent forms were designed for all participants who took part in focus groups, the photo-elicitation exercise and the organized shopping trip (Appendix Three). These confirmed that they had read and understood the project information leaflet, agreed to participate in the research, understood how their data would be used, had had the opportunity to ask questions and understood that their contribution could be withdrawn at any point in the research process. A separate form was designed for the visual data (Appendix Four). This provided space to list the photos and asked for permission to reproduce each image individually, giving participants the opportunity to omit

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photos they did not want to be referred to or published in research outputs. While there are additional ethical concerns and procedures regarding the participation of under-16 year olds in research and parental consent is sometimes sought, given that the young women were all mothers themselves and regularly made serious and complex decisions on behalf of their own children, I reasoned that they had sufficient competence to make up their own minds about whether to participate in my (relatively less significant) research project. The Head Teacher who was responsible for their care while in school had also cleared the research design and had deemed that the young women were capable of making their own decisions about whether to take part.

Some researchers have suggested adopting a practice of negotiating 'process consent' on an ongoing basis where there is more than one research encounter (Morrow 2008, Wiles *et al* 2007). This approach acknowledges that young people's consent should not be assumed because they initially agree to take part in research. It ensures that participants are given the opportunity to exercise their agency and reverse their consent at a later point, before the research activity takes place. I therefore negotiated consent at the beginning of each research activity, thus confirming participants' understanding and giving them the opportunity to dissent if they wished. Participants were also granted full anonymity in research outputs and in the interests of including them in the research process I also planned for participants to select their own pseudonyms as Morrow (2008) also did in her research with children. Visual data comes with its own difficulties of anonymity (Wiles *et al* 2008) and photos that contained any identifiable artefacts and/or people were omitted on the visual data consent form from the list of photos to be used in research outputs. All visual, voice and written data was to be stored on a password protected Open University computer and all consent forms and printed copies

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of written and transcribed data were to be stored in secure files in my office. Ethical approval was granted in September 2007 on the basis the approach outlined here.

Sample

While I had initially hoped that each participant would take part in the full programme of research, in practice some young women did not take part in both focus groups and some were not present when cameras were issued. Other participants who were not present at either of the earlier focus groups also received cameras. In total thirty-three young women took part in the research programme. A table detailing who took part in each activity is provided at Appendix Five. The young women were aged between 13 and 20 at the time of research, most were white, all were living on a low-income and all but one were expecting, or had recently given birth to, their first child. Detailed demographic data and information about participants' circumstances was not gathered until the elicitation interview stage. For this reason accurate demographic data about a number of the focus group participants is not available. Those I collected data for at the MBU had grown up in traditionally white working-class areas and all bar one had parents who were unemployed or were employed in low-skilled, casual, insecure employment or 'poor work' (Shildrick *et al* 2010). Several of the young women who took part in interviews had spent periods of time in care. At the time all were not in education or employment, though several were intending to start college courses the following academic year. At the time of contact all were dependent on Income Support or Maternity Allowance (£112 per week at the time of the research) along with Child Tax Credit, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit as well as some support from partners, ex partners and family and friends. All

were living as single people, were receiving in the region of £130 per week - though most seemed unclear about what money they received and where it came from - and were required to contribute to rent and utilities at the MBU. All participants from this site were white and between the ages of 16 and 20.

Almost all the participants from the Pupil Referral Unit who took part in the photo-elicitation exercise were from working-class backgrounds and had at least one parent in employment at the time of the research. One participant's mother was employed as a nurse and she was unsure what her father did for a living. Her parents' joint income prevented the young woman accessing the £500 Sure Start Maternity Grant that was available to those on a low-income at the time of research. she was the only young woman I encountered at either site who was not entitled to this benefit. Three of the young women who took part in the photo-elicitation exercise were living with partners, one was living independently in social housing and the other four were living with parents. Only one participant was employed on a part-time basis and all were completing compulsory education or taking further education courses at the unit. Those living away from family were financially reliant on a mixture of Income Support, Child Tax and Working Tax Credit, Child Benefit and partners' income from employment. As is explored in more detail in Chapter Five, those living at home with parents were heavily reliant on them and other family members for financial support and those under sixteen were unable to independently claim any benefit in the UK other than Child Benefit - £18.80 per week for the eldest child at the time research was carried out. For the younger women financial contributions from the fathers of their children appeared to be particularly ad hoc and infrequent. The PRU had a small black and minority ethnic intake and four of the students who took part in focus groups were black Caribbean, black African or of mixed heritage. Only two

interview participants from this site were black and all others were white. The ages of participants at this site ranged from thirteen to eighteen years old at the time of contact. All participants were pregnant or parenting very young children below the age of two at the time of contact and a detailed description of the participants who took part in the research and their current circumstances where known is provided at Appendix Five.

In the next and final part of this chapter I describe how each of my chosen methods worked in practice. I review the experience of carrying out the fieldwork, reflecting critically on the gap between research design and the reality of a mixed method incremental study. This involves a discussion of the challenge of analysing and synthesising the data produced.

Methods in practice

Participant Observation

Observation at the MBU took place during a once weekly informal education session run by YWCA youth worker in the common room of the house between October 2007 and June 2008. In the latter part of the research, my time spent at this site extended to the bedrooms and flats of participants as we became more familiar with each other. Observation at the PRU took place largely in class time though it also extended into break and lunchtimes. As planned, I introduced myself to the young women in class time (at the PRU) and group sessions (at the MBU) and talked through the leaflet I had designed, giving the young women the opportunity to ask questions. I was initially very disappointed by the lack of interest they showed in the project and that my 'all singing, all dancing' research design did not inspire their engagement. After

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one class I was particularly disheartened to find several of my leaflets scrunched up and disregarded on a side bench in the corridor of the PRU. The young women's lack of interest may have been due to their lack of familiarity with me and while some may have positioned me as a potentially threatening professional or teacher asking them for more work. The young women were also very familiar with the presence of youth workers, social workers, contract teachers, midwives, artists and/or other professionals passing through their doors and may have simply been uninterested in me and my research. Both sites adopted a rather progressive and creative form of pedagogy which meant that the methods I intended to use with the young women were also perhaps less 'innovative' than I had initially thought (see also David *et al* 2001). As time went on many participants became more interested in the research, which was undoubtedly a result of the development of familiarity and strong research relationships over time. This process is outlined in more detail below. Some young women, however, never engaged with me or the research process in any way. Those who engaged most were perhaps those who stood to gain something from the research process like Taylor and Cara, for example, who enjoyed the space to talk or those like Simone who were keen to get their hands on a gift voucher. It is also possible that those with more 'disordered' consumer habits might have been more guarded about the research topic.

When attending the sessions at the PRU early on I felt compelled to take up the role of 'learning support', helping the youth worker with the activities she had planned and supporting young women with their work during the group. I felt that this was the only feasible role for me. I felt uncomfortable simply observing the group and I perceived that I could not ethically or practically disguise myself as a young woman completing portfolio work. The YWCA

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worker was always inclusive toward me and she regularly introduced me to participants and gave some direction in terms of how I might be involved in each session. When carrying out observation at the much larger PRU, however, it quickly became clear that I was not going to be 'hosted' and no one was going to escort me around, 'look after' me or explicitly direct me to where I should be or what I should be doing – why should they? I had to be pro-active about getting involved in this setting, be prepared to 'fit in' and 'muck in' where possible. Access to observe lessons or activities was often negotiated by me directly with individual teachers. In this setting the role of 'learning support' again felt the only comfortable one I could take up in order not to feel superfluous in the setting. Fortunately, the teachers and learning mentors were very receptive and accommodating toward me and in a very short period of time I had developed productive working relationships with many of them. After a time, the arrangements about when I would be coming in became looser and I was able to drop in regularly and often at short notice[26]. The PRU, however, operated spontaneously at times and could change a plan for the day with very short (or no) notice. On one occasion, for example, I arrived to observe a Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) lesson only to discover that the young women were doing flower arranging instead. It was therefore essential for me to be flexible and fit in with the school's activities as best I could.

Although the role of 'learning support' was accessible for me, at points in the research process I struggled with how far I could take the role and what my responsibilities as a researcher were. In one instance, for example, I became very unsure as to whether I should have challenged the racist views of

[26] On one occasion, for example, I arrived unannounced with another pupil who resided at the Mother and Baby Unit who had invited me into the taxi the PRU had chartered to pick her up.

participants I was observing. While in a budgeting lesson with three white participants, two of whom were pregnant with mixed race children, the young women began speaking about the difficulties they associated with birthing and bringing up non-white children in their predominantly white working-class community. On a number of occasions they referred to their unborn children using the pejorative term 'half-caste'. They also discussed in some detail the anticipated 'shade' of their infants by comparing them to images of the babies in the catalogues we were looking through - their preference being that their children should be born lighter (and whiter) in order to avoid antagonism in their local communities and racist bullying at school. The girls' comments were uncomfortable for me and I was unsure how to deal with their disavowal of blackness[27]. I was neither their teacher nor their learning mentor and what place as a researcher did I have to challenge their comments and attempt to 'correct' their attitudes given that having a child of colour presented very real challenges in their local communities? Should I have adopted the role of 'educator' in this instance or person of authority correcting or disallowing their inappropriate language and comments? Griffin (1991) has argued that the researcher should always 'talk back' when confronted with participants who are reproducing damaging racist ideas. She argues more for caring about inequalities than caring for the researched (cited in Skeggs 2001) and on reflection I felt, and still feel, as if I failed to fulfil my responsibility as a researcher by not challenging racism and inequality and remaining passive in this encounter. I was consoled to some extent, however, by the action of the teacher who was present in the classroom and who made every effort to correct the young women's language, suggested more acceptable ways to

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[27] My horror was undoubtedly intensified by the fact that I myself was also carrying a mixed-race child whose blackness would present as a problem in the context of these young women's lives. I chose not to mention this at the time as I was unsure of what vantage point or authority this allowed me to speak from. I was also perhaps reluctant to discuss and face what it meant to birth a mixed-race child in a racist society and how this might affect the experiences of my own family. These are matters I have, however, had to address following the birth of my children.

describe the ethnicity of their expectant infants and challenged the young women's desire to conceal the blackness of their children. She also intended to raise the issue with the Head which may have resulted in some classroom work to challenge their views.

As this example illustrates my position as 'learning support' was often ambiguous and at points in the fieldwork period I could also slip into a student oriented role completing class work like flower arranging or cushion making and sitting and chatting along with the young women. At times I felt like a trusted peer to participants as they included me in jokes about other staff members or talked to me about problems with their boyfriends or 'baby-fathers'. Gillies and Robinson (2009) have described a similar sense of gaining the trust of their participants when they were given 'my-space' addresses by the young people in their study and asked not to share them with other members of staff in the research setting. I also showed (and indeed felt) some vulnerability at times and presented myself as a 'student like them' in need of some help, rendering myself as an object of pity in a way similar to that described by Emond (2003). I was in other instances quick to refuse my positioning as 'like another' student. When asked if I wanted to take the items I had made in class home, for example, I felt compelled to refuse as it seemed to highlight the falsity and implausibility of my student status, making me feel like an impostor, at the same time stripping me of my value and authority as a researcher.

While at times I was 'included' by the young women I was nevertheless also frequently very conscious that these instances were only temporary and my existence as an older, middle-class woman regularly set me aside from and distanced me from my participants. Our difference in age was particularly

apparent to me and I was aware that my age made me more akin to a professional in the setting than a young person - an uncomfortable realisation for me. As others have pointed out, our knowledge of once being young often fails to go far enough in bridging the gulf between youth and adulthood. I was conscious that I could not 'fit in' in terms of references to my own youth culture and that references to current youth culture could be unconvincing (Nayak 2003, Raby 2007, Emond 2003). My level of education and rather un-locatable English accent also separated me from the mostly working-class young women I encountered, who carried strong Bristolian accents and often used local dialect. These differences inevitably blocked 'ways in' to building relationships with participants, but most notably for me it was my status as 'non-mother' that created the most felt juncture between us. My early field notes indicate that this caused me a great deal of anxiety as most of the other professionals in the setting were mothers and were able to provide advice or draw on personal experience to contribute to discussions about pregnancy and parenting, which understandably occupied a considerable amount of the young women's attention, both in and out of lesson time. I also recorded intense feelings of insecurity about touching children, holding babies 'correctly', being left alone with them and being asked questions about baby care. I was fearful of being 'found out' to not have any first-hand experience in this area.

I worked hard to stretch across our difference and to make connections with the young women by drawing on our commonalities and my knowledge of contemporary popular culture and fashion. Using my knowledge of the city of Bristol, I was able to make reference to and demonstrate understanding of the places young women frequented, some of which I had also frequented as a young person, and show understanding of the dialect and slang they used (see also Chin 2001). My ability to participate with the young women was the

result of the work I put into building up relationships with them over a period of time and it was through my regular attendance at both research sites that I became able to chat comfortably and freely with many participants, spending time with them at break times and lunchtimes at the PRU and in the rooms of young mothers after the YWCA session. A few months into the fieldwork period I also found that I was expecting my first child and this profoundly changed, supported and facilitated the development of research relationships by providing a mutual point of interest, conversation and comparison. I was, for example, able to consult with other pregnant young women who were going through the same bodily experience and we were able to discuss and compare our respective bodily changes at various gestational stages. Many young women became more interested in me as I was sharing something that was at the forefront of their lives at that time. My role thus shifted again and as I became 'a pregnant woman' like them and at times became 'the listener and the learner' as the young women were the authority on pregnancy, childbirth and looking after small children. Yet the relationships I built up with the young women were not always linear in progression and could sometimes be unpredictable and require careful negotiation from visit to visit.

While my pregnancy greatly supported the development of some research relationships, being pregnant in the field also generated intense feelings of shame, anxiety and incompetence for me. Thomson *et al* (2009) have described how 'telling others' is a crucial social aspect of being pregnant and for me the 'others' were also my participants. The first disclosure came when I was asked in an early focus group if I had any children and explaining that I was pregnant with my first child proved to be an intensely embarrassing moment for, I believe, a number of reasons. It showed that I had sex, well at least once anyway. My pregnancy was 'unplanned', I was also unmarried, a

student and living in a flat with friends. My own circumstances, like the women I studied, therefore did not fit with the dominant notion of the 'right' time to have children. This was a sensitive issue for me, reflected in the fact that I did not tell my own parents about my pregnancy for some time, in fact the night before I made the disclosure to the young women in the focus group. On finding out about my pregnancy the young women bombarded me with questions, asking if I was still with the 'baby father', was my pregnancy planned, what would I do about my course and where I would live. These were questions that had been asked of them and that they asked each other. In one memorable exchange after telling a young woman that my pregnancy was unplanned she replied that 'there is such a thing as contraception you know'. At my obvious embarrassment she explained that 'that was what people said to us'. This young woman thus exposes the similarity in our conception situations and perhaps that of many older women. In these exchanges I am placed squarely in the shoes of my participants as they ask me what others want to know of them and they subject me to the judgement they are subjected to themselves. My own experience of hiding and the shame of exposing my pregnancy also seemed to resonate with many of their own narratives of telling their pregnancies (Thomson *et al* 2009).

I believe that my pregnancy and experience of becoming a mother at this time also had a profound impact on my understanding of other aspects of my participants' experience and my particular research area. It sensitised me to the cultural, popular, political, medical, and consumer contours through which contemporary pregnancy and motherhood are lived. My fieldwork and data analysis coincided with my own immersion in consumer markets for pregnancy and parenting which enhanced my understanding of the contemporary product range, the meaning of goods and of common cultures of parenting (ibid).

After having my son I was also able to draw on my own sense of the competition involved in 'dressing' babies, how children act as a conduit to mothers' own styles as well as knowing the pride, unadulterated joy, sometimes without motive, of dressing a child 'well' - something I had previously found difficult to understand when participants explained to me how they simply liked their children to 'look good'. Moreover, I was able to relate to and draw upon my own recent experience of becoming a mother in my analysis of gift giving to babies and understanding of the financial support that the extended family provides in the form of presents. I can now also empathise with the complexities involved in managing the wardrobe of a small child who grows so quickly and my own purchases have helped me to see the nuances in classed styles of dressing children. On several occasions my pregnancy enabled me to become part of the systems for the exchange of used baby goods that participants themselves were involved in. One, for example, donated a bag of used baby boy's clothing to me and I was involved in some rather uncomfortable discussions with another young woman about buying her son's used Moses basket.

Participants sometimes also placed me in the position of research subject as they turned my own questions back on me, asking *me* what I had bought for my impending arrival, whether I would buy all pinks or blues and if I would take second-hand clothing. Answering these questions proved to be uneasy for me as I left preparations for my own baby until very late on in my pregnancy. As was explored in Chapter Two (see also Chapter Five), having the 'right' items for a baby is an important part of performing 'good motherhood' and their questions often made me feel that I had failed as a mother before I had even started. This made me wonder how my own questions made them feel and attuned me to how their responses may have

been geared to showing me that they had not failed as mothers. I also feared that my disclosures would allow them to locate my 'taste' and position me as a 'type' of mother. This made me very conscious of how mothers can be distinguished and indeed set apart by the commodities they buy for their children, but also of my role in the production of knowledge about them and the ways in which I would reproduce them and their consumer practice as a 'type' in my own writing. As part of my effort to make connections with participants I tended to speak more freely about items that seemed to demonstrate similarity in our 'taste' rather than our distinction, like the tiny Timberland boots I had purchased for my son and that I knew many of the young women also acquired for their babies. In retrospect I feel that I was to some extent disingenuous as my desire to 'fit in' with participants became a distinct priority. 'Fitting in' (Miles *et al* 1998), however, was something that was impossible for me to do and though my pregnancy brought me closer to my participants it also highlighted our differences in terms of age, taste, access to housing, parenting, financial capacity to consume and the experience of judgement, confirming the finding of Thomson *et al* (2011) the motherhood simultaneously brings women together around a common experiences while also remaking social divisions of class and culture in emotionally heightened ways.

This description of my time as a participant captures something of the anxiety and emotion that characterised this time for me as a researcher in the field. My role was often undefined and the process of 'making my way' in each site was both enjoyable and terrifying. As the following chapters indicate my research produced data that was emotionally charged and participants expressed feelings of discomfort, shame and pride in our conversations about money and shopping. My exposition of the emotional nature of my fieldwork

resonates with the literature in this area which illustrates that feelings are an integral part of the research process that can enrich and be analysed alongside data (Walkerdine *et al* 2001, Holland 2007, Weller and Cabellero 2009, Elliot 2011). In terms of my own work it is the emotions I experienced around my own pregnancy during fieldwork that I use as data to enrich my understanding of the experiences of my participants. The shame I experienced in disclosing my pregnancy and the questions they asked me about it, for example, allowed me to 'feel' and 'know' something of my participants' experience. My pregnancy and becoming a mother at the same time as my participants also further worked to enhance research relationships and to sensitise me to other aspects of my participants' experience in terms of my area of research as well as my role in reproducing knowledge about them. My own pregnancy thus became something of a research tool that enabled me to see, know and experience things that perhaps would have remained under-explored had I not become pregnant at this time. This is consistent with the way in which a number of other researchers have drawn on their own experience of maternity in their research on motherhood (Jensen 2008, Martens 2008, Baraitser 2009a, Elliot 2011). Like me they have described and explored how their own pregnancies and experiences of motherhood were entangled with their research and have sought to understand how this shaped their research.

Focus Groups

The second key method that I employed in the research was focus groups. Two consecutive activity-based focus groups were designed to be carried out at both sites starting just before the Christmas break. A pilot activity conducted with the young women at the MBU early on in the fieldwork period helped me to understand what level of commitment I could expect from

participants in terms of the completion of research activities. I was aware that consumption diaries had been used successfully in other research (Evans and Chandler 2006) and I initially hoped that this would be an activity participants would be willing to complete in their own time and bring to focus groups for discussion. I provided a group of young women at the MBU with carefully selected notebooks and pens, which I had painstakingly written the days and dates of the week in. I asked them to keep a record of their spending for two weeks and then bring the books back in for discussion. I also suggested that just keeping the receipts from their shopping and attaching them to the pages would suffice to make the task less time consuming and more attractive to those who had poor literacy. Though all the young women were enthusiastic about taking the note books and pens, not one consumption diary was returned to me. On my return to the MBU to collect the diaries I was approached by one of the young woman who volunteered to let me know that she had been unable to fill in her diary. She explained that she had been involved in a violent domestic dispute with her partner the previous week and that this had occupied a considerable amount of her time physically and emotionally. Most of the other women failed to mention the diaries without my prompting at which point many explained that they had lost or misplaced them or forgotten to do the exercise. It became clear that I could not expect the level of long-term detail and time I had read about participants giving to research activities in Latham (2003) and Thomson and Holland's (2005) work, for example. Following this experience I decided that all task-based activity should take place within the structured focus group session without the participants in the groups being required to prepare material in advance.

The first focus group - 'becoming a mother' - was to centre on the young women's experiences and understandings of motherhood and was expected to

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help me situate their maternal consumer practice in the wider context of their experience as mothers. As Miles (2003) has described consumer practice does not occur in isolation from other social and structural factors and is rather embedded in broader social experience. Chin (2001) has similarly argued that 'consumer lives cannot be understood apart from the political and economic context and the productive milieu' (12). This first group thus sought to help locate participants' consumer practice in the wider context of their lives as mothers and it drew on some of the work (outlined in Chapter Four) on the popular representation of young mothers as well as things I had observed the young women speaking about while on site. Activities included discussing and listing the best, worst and most important things about becoming a mother, exploring responses to public perceptions of young mothers using media images of various celebrity mothers and vignettes taken from interviews with other young mothers[28] and employing images of celebrity mothers to explore the meanings of mothering.

Images used in the 'becoming a mother' focus group

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[28] These were taken from the YWCA Respect Young Mothers Website.
http://old.ywca.org.uk/youngmums/campaign.asp

The second focus group – 'consuming for babies' - centred more specifically on the consumption of goods for mothers and for babies and used a range of baby and department store catalogues to explore what kind of purchases were made, which items were preferred for mothers and babies, the reasons why and how items were acquired. Vignettes representing extreme patterns of consumption (for example, someone who only shopped at charity shops and made clothes and toys for their children) were also used to prompt discussion about consumer preferences. In both groups the research activities and visual artefacts were expected to provide the stimuli for talk, but I also pre-prepared a list of open-ended questions which would help encourage as well as focus the discussion.

Catalogues used in the 'consuming for babies' focus group.

At the MBU the focus groups took place in the two-hour YWCA sessions, which included time for cigarette, toilet and tea breaks and pauses to allow checks on infants. At the PRU focus groups took place in fifty-minute classes by prior arrangement with a particular teacher. The Head provided some direction toward groups where what was currently being studied in class time fitted with my research interest. For example, one year eleven art class was working on a project about representation, which fitted particularly well with the session I had planned on motherhood. I was fortunate enough to be able to get the work I completed with these young women to form part of their assessment and I also managed to get the work I completed with the other groups of young women at the PRU and the MBU acknowledged as part of the modules they were working towards. This allowed participants to get some real value from their involvement in the research and is a tool that other researchers have used to ensure some kind of reciprocity in the research process (Woodley-Baker 2009).

Though I had carefully planned what I thought would be a series of stimulating activities to involve participants in focus groups, I found the early sessions I carried out at the MBU difficult to manage and it was hard work to keep the discussion going. Following the structure of the session, watching time and running the activities took up a great deal of my concentration and I was often unable to listen and to probe my participants effectively. I became immediately concerned about whether I was collecting enough good quality data and desperately tried to keep talk flowing as best I could and maintain focus around my area of interest. While my own lack of experience and insecurity inevitably impacted upon how these early sessions ran I would also suggest that participants' talk was affected by their lack of familiarity with me. Moreover, some young women may also have been uninterested since their

attendance at these groups was not entirely voluntary and was a condition of their tenancy agreement. This also constituted some ethical dilemmas as outlined in more detail below. The space where these early focus groups took place at the MBU also had an impact on how successful they were: the first group was run in a room that adjoined the space where the young women's children were being looked after. This meant that participants were often distracted by what was going on in the other room and frequently left the group to talk to or comfort their infants. This resulted in a lot of broken-off conversations and repetition of what had been said to try and re-start discussion. After leaving these early sessions I had an overwhelming sense that the focus groups had 'failed' (Nairn, Munroe and Smith 2005).

I learnt a great deal from these initial experiences, however, and as time went on the focus groups became more successful. For subsequent focus groups at the MBU another room was used which was separate from the area where babies were being cared for. I learnt to be flexible and was prepared to let some activities that worked well go on for longer than anticipated and allow others that did not work so well to be cut short. As my confidence with participants and the running of the sessions grew I began to worry less about sticking to the structure and allowed conversations to flow more freely into areas that the young women wanted to talk about. I was able to listen more intently and respond more effectively to what participants were saying and I came to understand the activities I had devised as props to talk around rather than tools that would elicit the 'right' responses. Participants responded to my more relaxed approach and their increased level of familiarity with me as time went on also helped with the flow of these sessions. From the outset the focus groups seemed to work better at the PRU than the MBU and this may have been due to the fact that they began at a slightly later point in the research

programme, when I was more comfortable with the format and participants were more comfortable with me. But I feel the more formal nature of the classroom set up and the students' greater familiarity with structured classroom activity and group discussion perhaps also helped.

Ultimately the focus groups generated a large volume of data that provided a strong basis to start identifying themes within the groups' consumer practices and relationships with material culture. There was, however, little room to understand individual motives or elaborate on personal narratives within the confines of the focus group. While some activities were more successful than others, having 'something to do' seemed to ease the atmosphere and provided a valuable common focus for the discussion, filling some of the space between participants and myself and drawing them into the research activity. While the idea that participants might be swayed by more dominant members of a group or might 'put on' a front for others is a reason for some researchers to reject focus groups, the interactive aspect of the focus groups can also enable the observation of shared meaning and the operation of 'peer culture' and identity work in action, where the focus is on what is publicly presentable and sayable (Heath *et al* 2009). In this case the group situation enabled me to see some of the consensus among participants about what items were needed for appropriate baby care and the brands they preferred to buy for children as well as those that were disparaged and were associated with poverty and an inability to provide financially for children. It also allowed insight into the ways in which participants presented themselves to others and some of the public discourses they were in dialogue with. The young women in this research, for example, while expressing preferences for certain brand-named items could also suggest in the same focus group that they purchased less expensive items on a more regular basis. In front of peers (and indeed me)

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participants at points in the research may thus have wished to stress their ability to purchase the appropriate equipment and brands for their children. Yet at other points in their talk they seemed to expose and imply that they adopted more modest forms of consumption. There appeared to exist a kind of 'consuming paradox' in the talk of participants (Miles *et al* 1998) whereby they claimed to consume the branded items acceptable within their peer groups but also desired to assert their independence from consumer forces and peers and demonstrate their sensibility in terms of their consumer practice and as mothers (see also Chapter Six). These latter revelations may not have been any more 'real' than the suggestion that they could finance the 'right' brands and participants may rather have sought to appeal to other forms of cultural validation for their consumer practice. Indeed many young women were well aware of the association between excessive consumption and frivolity. They were perhaps also keen to demonstrate their capacity as responsible consumers and mothers in front of me and their peers. As Miller (1998a) has pointed out there is status to be gained from being 'thrifty' and I would suggest that the focus groups represented a space where particular consumer identities - the 'good provider', the 'thrifty consumer' and underlying both of these the 'good mother' - were displayed and played out in front of both the researcher and the other young mothers. Far from compromising the validity of the data, however, these displays provide important insights for understanding the meaning and role of material culture for participants.[29]

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[29] See also Allen 2005 for a description of how she uses the performances of masculinity in the young men who took part in her focus groups as data.

Photo-elicitation

In this phase of the research participants were provided with a single use, disposable camera and asked to take up to ten pictures of consumer objects that were important to them. The photos could be used to record items belonging to participants' or to their children and the young women were advised that they could use the rest of the 27- exposure film to take pictures of what they wished, which, in the interests of reciprocity, they would be able to keep. This 'auto-photography' exercise (Woodley-Baker 2009) was then followed by an individual interview based around the photographs[30]. Brief written instructions were given with each camera and I explained the exercise verbally. All participants were very enthusiastic about receiving cameras and all promised to return them one week later to myself or a member of staff. Retrieving the cameras, however, turned out to be a logistical nightmare. As young women's attendance could be sporadic and I was only in each site once or twice a week, I regularly missed participants to collect their cameras or remind them about returning them. Some women I issued with cameras were never seen again as they moved on from the housing unit or didn't return to the school. When I did meet young women and asked how they were getting on with their cameras they would often tell me they had lost the camera, forgotten to do the exercise or had forgotten the camera. I was sometimes unsure whether this was their way of saying they did not want to take part in the exercise - this may well have been a sign of the young women withdrawing their consent to participate. Ultimately I had to make intuitive decisions about when to stop asking young women about their cameras (Barker and Weller 2003). In some cases where I felt their desire to complete

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[30] Participants who completed the interview were also offered a store voucher worth ten pounds. This was not part of the original research design but as another researcher who was at the PRU at the same time was offering store vouchers to young women who took part in interviews I felt obliged to offer similar remuneration.

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the task was genuine, I offered young women at the MBU my digital camera to use. This worked well as the women's homes were on site. It was not possible to do the same at the PRU where participants would have had to take my camera home.

After recovering the cameras pictures also took time to develop. I then had to organise interview times with participants which involved locating them and organising a time to meet, usually outside lesson time. There were also additional complications when films came back under-exposed and I had to ask participants to re-do the exercise using the flash. In fact three of the young women this happened to failed to return the cameras the second time around. I also found myself printing several films where participants hadn't actually done the exercise claiming that they were unclear about what they had to do. I then had to provide another camera for them to repeat the exercise.

Photos were handed back to participants without me looking at the images. They were asked to remove any that did not relate to the exercise I had asked them to complete. For the interviews I drew up a short list of questions that I might like to ask about the images participants presented or could be used to stimulate conversation or to pursue questions most pertinent to the research. The interview also provided a point at which to collect demographic data and information about the current circumstances of participants including their living and income arrangements (see Appendix Five).

There is considerable debate in the social sciences about how to analyse the visual data that is collected by research participants. In this project the photos were not analysed for meaning by the researcher independently and it

was taken that participants' pictures could not be understood aside from their own explanation (Barker and Weller 2003, Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006). Indeed photographs can be subject to misinterpretation if the researcher's analysis is uninformed by the individual who has produced the image. Including participants in this part of the analysis is perhaps also consistent with the inclusive and participatory approach to research I intended to adopt and Harper (2002) suggests the elicitation interview is a form of collaboration between interviewer and interviewee where they both attempt to make sense of an image, limiting the gap between researcher and researched.

The photographs proved to be valuable props to talk around; easing the one to one encounter and meaning that participants had a greater investment and interest in the discussion. In line with the research design the one to one setting provided room for the more detailed exploration of participants' individual consumer practice as well as their particular social and economic circumstances. The range of objects participants photographed was extensive and in some instances unexpected. Introducing items selected by participants themselves into the interview appeared to provide profound insights into meaning and practice around material culture and the relationships, attachments and memories that were invested in objects. Indeed, as much of Miller's (1998a, 2008) work has demonstrated 'things' represent a valuable starting point for exploring the broader aspects of people's social relationships and lives. In this case the images of particular objects provided a concrete entry point for investigation and introduced new ideas and understanding to the research that might otherwise have been underexplored or underplayed (Croghan *et al* 2008). The exercise thus worked to expand my understanding and deepen my interpretation of the uses and role of material culture in the lives of participants in ways that I could not have anticipated (Chapter Seven

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in particular is informed by discussions of the items that participants brought into these encounters).

Yet, while the photo-elicitation interviews greatly enriched analytical insights, I am also conscious that the images participants produced were only partial and selective representations of their consumer practice and selves. The individual pictures participants produced were not necessarily authentic representations of their practice but created as a result of the task I had given them (Croghan *et al* 2008). Many young women appeared to want to present a particular image of their mothering to me and a number presented pictures of toys and items they had purchased that appeared to indicate they were providing appropriate care and the right kind of environment for the development of their infants. While these items were undoubtedly selected because they were important to participants for these reasons (see Chapter Five) participants may also have desired to show me they had the 'right' equipment in order to care for their children appropriately. Many of the objects participants photographed also demonstrated their desire to savour and remember their children demonstrating their investment in normative maternal practices of love and care (Layne 2004, Wozniak 2004). The concern about the selective and partial nature of what the research participants share and the element of display is relevant for most methods, however, and it is always important to be aware of the way in which research participants may temper their responses. In this instance I consider that the value of what was presented in the interviews far outweighs these concerns and would suggest that giving these young women control over their own image and representation appeared to be a particularly empowering experience given the stigma they usually faced as young mothers (see Chapter Four). Some young women who were more reserved and said little in the focus groups also came alive in

photo-elicitation interviews as they proudly presented their lives to me in images. The one to one photo-elicitation interview, therefore, seemed to provide space for those who were less confident talking in a group a space to speak, but also on their terms.

Shopping trip

The last of my methods to be employed was observation of shopping activity, a method successfully used by many other researchers of consumer practice (Miller 1998a, Clarke 2000, Chin 2001). At the MBU the YWCA worker suggested that the shopping trip would be something that should be organized outside of the group, though she did lend support to getting a group together. In practice it was very difficult to organize. I felt I had very little leverage to encourage participants to take part and felt uneasy about extending the research entirely outside of the bounded research setting. At one point I enlisted the support and help of one of the young residents who I had become quite friendly with and who seemed very enthusiastic about the trip. She gave me her mobile number and I called her several times to try and get dates together but each time something, usually to do with her housing, came up. After a time I decided that she, like the women who did not return their cameras, was exercising her right to dissent from taking part in the research. Again this brought home an understanding of the level of commitment and involvement I could expect from participants and further dented my hitherto romantic notion of the attractiveness of creative, participatory youth-focused research to young people. As the research period drew to a close I abandoned the idea of getting a shopping trip together at this site.

Organizing the shopping trip at the PRU was also not straightforward as I was generally unable to take pupils out of class time to carry out research activity. Eventually the trip was organized at the end of the summer term when formal lessons had come to an end. I was very much at the mercy of the head teacher in terms of how this activity was organized and though the city Mall was not the place where participants did most of their shopping the Head felt that it was the safest and most bounded place for her pupils to be. She offered to pay for the taxi fares from school funds and I covered the cost of lunch for the pupils. Five pupils were selected based on their availability and whether they wanted to come along on the day, but it occurred to me that I had only in fact had prior contact with two of the pupils. The trip was organized to take place at ten in the morning and the participants were expected to return after lunch. This turned out to be a very short time frame which was cut even shorter by bad traffic. After arriving at the Mall there was very little time to observe the young women shopping before they became hungry and wanted lunch, by which time we had to return to the school. One participant was also called back as her son would not settle in nursery. During the time we were there I managed to observe participants browsing for a short period and I asked them some questions about why they preferred certain shops or items as we went round the shops. The trip as a whole was very atypical of their usual consumption habits and in practice I felt that I was able to gain little more from following the participants round and asking them questions than I would have done during the focus group sessions. Had the shopping trip been more typical or had I observed participants on their regular shopping trips over a period of time, as Miller (1998a), Chin (2001) and Clarke (2002, 2004, 2007) had done, I may well have gleaned more useful data. This aspect of the research programme has been put down as a pilot activity that might be developed further in future research.

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Data analysis and synthesis

All focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim by me, with the help of a professional transcriber. These transcripts were analysed thematically and coded using Nvivo. My approach was loosely based on methods for analysis espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1968) whereby the data is mined until saturation point where no new themes arise. The process is iterative involving the checking and rechecking of one's interpretations of the data. This method of analysis is understood to be inductive allowing the data to 'speak for itself', though broader frameworks of analysis and perspective inevitably shape what is made of the data. Individual case profiles were also created for all interview participants, which described and related their individual circumstances to their consumer practices. These provided a more in-depth picture of individual lives and the place of consumer culture within them, contributing to a broader social portrait of participants. As in practice not all participants took part in each stage of the research, I ended up with quite an uneven data set which contained far more in-depth information about some participants and very little about others. In my analysis I have drawn on the data set as a whole and attempted to draw out themes that appear and apply across the whole sample. In the chapters that I follow, however, I draw on particular examples to illustrate my analytical points.

I also took extensive field notes throughout the research period and these have come to enrich the data and analysis expedited in this thesis. The time and effort that I put into writing field notes cannot be underestimated, yet they were inevitably selective and based on my ideas of what was significant

and interesting to my research area (Emerson *et al* 2001). They were always partial and incomplete and when I later returned to review them I updated them with new memories of things I had missed first time round or analytical frameworks I had come across that seemed to explain my observations. Crucially for this chapter, my field notes captured the practical complexities of carrying out research with young mothers in these settings as well as the range of feelings and emotions that were 'an essential part of the living texture of the research process' (Weeks 2009). They have helped me to recount the difficulties, anxieties, feelings of failure, disappointment and joy that I experienced in practice. They were read repeatedly as part of the data analysis and they inform, flesh out and enhance the analysis laid out here. My field notes also include many visual observations about items that were consumed and how they were worn - brand named trainers, jewellery and tattoos - which were not necessarily always spoken about during research exercises. In my analysis I have tried to be attentive to these aspects of the data which are not necessarily there or fully explained in 'talk' (Back 2007). The chapters that follow represent something of a patchwork or mosaic of all these different data which is drawn together to address my research questions and provide an in-depth picture of participants' consumer practice.

Conclusion

This study employed a staged and incremental mixed methods approach to researching the consumer practices of young mothers. Overall the methods worked well to complement, layer and enrich each other, building up an in-depth picture of the consumer practices of young mothers and how these are socially and structurally embedded in their lives. The mix of methods also allowed me to see contradiction and dissonances in participants' talk between

what was said in focus groups, what was said in interviews and what I observed. Some of examples of these instances are given in Chapters Five and Six. The interactive methods helped to ease the research encounters and provided an important focal point for focus groups and interviews. The photo-elicitation exercise in particular allowed for active respondent participation and brought new insights around the meaning of material goods for participants. Most importantly, though, my extended presence at each site was a very important and valuable aspect of the research design. I learnt a great deal about my research area from just being around the young women and the relationships I built up with participants over time were crucial to the success of the of the research programme, encouraging participation and enabling participants to feel comfortable around me. This aspect of the research inevitably enriched the data I was able to collect and the analytical interpretations I was able to make (Henderson *et al* 2007:4). While research relationships were at times complex to negotiate, for me developing and living them was also the most enjoyable part of the research process.

The study was not without its difficulties, however, and while the complex research design added value, it also took a lot of effort to plan, co-ordinate and manage. The fact that my 'creative' research methods and participatory approach to research did not initially inspire participants caused me a great deal of disappointment. The focus groups were hard to manage and it took me a while to relax into them and to be able to effectively listen and respond to participants. Both the photo-elicitation exercise and the shopping trip were logistically challenging to manage. I also have some real concerns about whether I was successful in gaining informed consent from participants and whether or not aspects of the research were coercive in ways that were

unanticipated by me[31]. When explaining why I was doing the project and how the young women's contribution would be used, for example, participants often seemed to be uninterested, asked few questions and went to sign consent forms without reading them. Indeed it seemed that the experience of signing forms might be a regular, unthinking practice for them. I was, therefore, very unsure and concerned that the young women had not heard or understood the implications of participating in the research. I was also very aware that as my time at each space extended into break, lunchtimes and into young women's flats that there could be some uncertainty about my role outside of structured lesson times and how disclosures made at these times might be used. Further to this when I asked participants to select their pseudonyms they often wanted to use their own names. To my mind this indicated that they were not clear about how their contribution would be used. Yet there is also of course always the possibility that participants fully understood and felt comfortable with how the research was to be used. They may not have perceived that their own position would be compromised by the use of their own names. Indeed it is possible that researchers may well overestimate the power, significance and risks of exposure associated with their research.

These experiences nevertheless underscored the necessity of adopting a process of seeking and negotiating ongoing consent (Morrow 2008) and reminding participants what I was doing in the setting, regularly asking for their permission to observe and getting their consent at every stage of the

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[31] As part of the ethical agreement research findings and outputs were also to be disseminated to both participants and staff at each research site. Thus far various conference papers have been shared with key contacts at each research site and a published paper (Ponsford 2011) has also been passed on. A staff member from the PRU was also invited to a seminar organised by myself and colleagues at the Open University (Mary Jane Kehily, Naomi Rudoe and Rachel Thomson) on Youth and the Maternal where I presented a paper on this research. Unfortunately, many participants at each research site have now moved on and it seems futile to return to present data to participants. Given the overall lack of excitement about the project I also wonder whether participants would have been interested in this kind of briefing. It would perhaps nevertheless have been part of my responsibility as researcher to disseminate my findings in this way and receive feedback from participants if at all possible.

research process. Yet it is debatable whether any amount of reminding or informing will have led them to fully understanding what it meant to take part in the research. Some commentators doubt if any researcher can claim to have obtained full informed consent given that most participants will be unable to understand the exact nature of social research unless they are themselves experienced researchers. Moreover, it may often be the case that researchers themselves cannot fully anticipate what participation may entail or accurately assess the outcomes of the research (Heath *et al* 2009). These were matters that concerned me throughout the research process and in later focus groups and interviews I brought along a copy of an academic journal as an example for participants and after completing a conference paper about the research, which used data from focus groups, I showed this to some of the participants at the start of their interviews.

Given that at the PRU and MBU the focus groups were organized as part of regular group/classroom activity and replaced whatever would have usually taken place in that group/lesson time, participants' may also not have had the opportunity to operate non-consent in these instances (see also Denscombe and Aubrook 1992, Edwards and Alldred 1999, David *et al* 2001, Strange *et al* 2003). Their participation in focus groups, for example, may have been seen as necessary in terms of the work they were expected to complete as part of their usual classroom activity at the PRU and for the young women at the MBU attending the YWCA sessions was necessary to the maintenance of their tenancies. Indeed while the fact that my research was able to form part of participant's assessment was consistent with my desire to make the research experience mutually beneficial, it may also have contributed to the sense that taking part in the research was a requirement for the completion of their course. Some participants may nevertheless have operated a form of non-

consent by limiting their talk in focus groups or interviews, and I was conscious of not pushing participants to contribute if they appeared not to want to (Leonard 2007). Ultimately what they disclosed was to a large extent what they chose to.

The reality of my fieldwork design in practice was perhaps quite different from what I had anticipated. It was an arduous process that was often not as rewarding for me or my participants as I had hoped. Although I deeply enjoyed much of the time I spent in both research sites, the fieldwork process generated intense feelings of discomfort, failure and anxiety within me. Throughout the length of the research my journeys to each site were often nervous in anticipation of what I might encounter that day (See also Weller 2009 for similar experience). I nevertheless created a large body of data that has been drawn together to address my research questions and provide some valuable insights into the consumer lives of my participants. I have also attempted to use my experiences in the field to understand the kind of data I was able to elicit and to enrich my analysis and understanding of my participants.

Chapter Four – Popular Representation of Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting in the UK

Introduction

One of the key interests of this research was to explore how the maternal material practice of participants might be embedded in their experience of 'stigma'. Prior to fieldwork I carried out an analysis of the media tone around teenage motherhood at the time of research, which was expected to provide some understanding of the climate through which young mothers might live their lives, and indeed carry out their consumer practices. The exploration presented here involved a review of a selection of online news articles related to teenage pregnancy and parenthood, a content analysis of two Web 2.0 sites where I was aware that the vilification of teenage mothers was both vociferous and frequent, as well as an engagement with television broadcasting about teenage mothers. I begin with a description of how the exploration was carried out before describing my findings in relation to each of these media. My aim for this chapter is that it helps to establish a landscape against which young mothers' consumer behaviour might be read and understood.

Methods for exploration

My exploration of media representation of teenage mothers tracked references to teenage pregnancy and motherhood through March and April 2007 in four major national newspapers; *The Daily Mirror, The Daily Mail, The Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. These papers were understood to provide a broad range of readership and opinion that would help to gauge the public tone around teenage motherhood at the time of research. Online searches were made on each newspaper website for references to teenage/teen/young/early and pregnancy/mother/mum. A total of 57 articles were collected, assessed and grouped according to their core topic and in what context teenage pregnancy or parenthood was mentioned. The content of each article and how the journalist approached teenage pregnancy and parenthood were also qualitatively evaluated. In addition, some of the online reader comments made about articles were drawn upon in this analysis, though these were reviewed on a much more ad hoc basis depending on the text that was available. It was not possible to leave comments on all articles, for example, and some articles received a great deal more comments than others.

Two web sites - www.chavscum.co.uk and www.urbandictionary.com[32] - were purposefully selected for analysis as they appeared to be spaces where there was a significant and visible flurry of activity around the association and derision of young mothers as 'chavs'. While these sites are not the only places where 'chavs' are spoken about or represented, nor do they focus only on

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[32] www.chavscum.com is a 'hate' website against "chavs" claiming to be a site about 'the world's peasant underclass that are taking over our towns and cities'. The site carries the regular feature 'chav of the month', 'celebrity chav', how to spot a "chav", 'Chav agony aunt' and name your "chav" baby name generator. Subscribers can log on, upload and make comments on images they feel are particularly 'chavesque'. www.urbandictionary.com is an online slang dictionary that functions as an unofficial authority on English slang. Users are able to log on, post definitions of new or existing slang terms and vote on the appropriateness of entries. Submissions go through a form of quality control where 'volunteer editors' agree the content that appears on the site.

deriding young mothers as 'chavs'[33], they are extremely rich arenas where there is exposition of the signs and symbols attached to the 'chav' phenomenon and the way in which the teenage mother is enmeshed within those discourses. To give some sort of indication of the reach and power of these websites, at the time of research www.chavscum.co.uk was linked to 296 external websites and 130 external websites linked from it. It also has an international counterpart. Many of the links from this website are to websites selling consumer items like clothing, which might hint at the marketing potential this site is understood to have. 400 external websites were linked to www.urbandictionary.com and 1018 external websites were linked from it. It is ranked as one of the 2000 highest web traffic sites in the world (Tyler 2006). Although it is still fairly unclear who actually might be using and self-publishing to these websites, the site profile for urban dictionary states that 65% of the users are under 25 (Tyler 2008). There may well be similarities in terms of profile between these users and bloggers and research done on bloggers suggests that they are often in their teens or are young adults, over half are students and many are technically adept (Herring *et al* 2006). Despite this limited demographic knowledge, Thelwall (2007) has argued that web space can be used as a gauge of public opinion and can have significant power in driving news and politics[34].

The content of chavscum.com was qualitatively reviewed and references to teenage motherhood were recorded. On Urbandictionary.com the definitions for 'chav' and related words were reviewed in their entirety, references to teenage motherhood were quantitatively recorded and qualitatively examined. The analysis of the contemporary representation of teenage mothers

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[33] 'Urban Dictionary' carries all sorts of slang definitions and chavscum focuses more broadly on the derision of the white working (or workless) class.
[34] Since the time I carried out this investigation I suspect the number and 'type' or person using web 2.0 sites and self publishing on the web sites will have greatly diversified.

presented here draws on my engagement with a set of recent documentary and comedy television programs that featured teenage mothers and that I viewed at some point during the research and writing period.

Findings

Press

Much scholarship in the area of teenage motherhood has argued that teenage pregnancy and parenting is marked out as negative in the popular UK media and researchers frequently refer to the perpetuation of sensational and salacious journalistic scorn about teenage mothers, their families and communities (McRobbie 1991, Phoenix 1991, Arai 2009b, Duncan *et al* 2010b). As Simms and Smith (1986) wrote at the time of their study, 'hardly a week has passed since this research project started without startling headlines in the papers about 'The-Perils-of-Young-Love'...'Teeny-Mums' and 'Adolescents-in-Trouble' (Cited in Phoenix 1991). Angela McRobbie (1991) similarly described how at the time of her writing on young motherhood the tabloids were filled with stories 'about teenage pregnancy being used as a means of receiving extra benefits, getting a council house, or at least getting on the council waiting list' (220). The notion that young mothers are seen to be problematic in the UK media is one that many scholars argue persists in present times. Arai (2009a), for example, describes how the recent diversification of media forms including internet-based news, and information sites, weblogs and podcasts has not led to a greater diversification of stories about teenage motherhood, but a *multiplication* of negative stories (39). Similarly, Duncan *et al* (2010b) argue that in the contemporary media landscape extreme and untypical cases are often taken as the norm, teenage mothering is seen as uniformly negative and there is a linking of teenage

pregnancy with the underclass and moral and cultural breakdown. In her later work McRobbie (2001, 2004) draws attention to the ways in which new class divisions between women are marked out symbolically in cultural space has further suggested that the image of the 'young mother prominent in the tabloids is of an unkempt, overweight, 'slovenly', and prematurely aged girl with her baby in a pushchair' (2001:370 see also Arai 2009a:51). The teenage mother, it is often argued, has become a symbolic epithet for failed femininity and the irresponsible, immoral and tasteless working or workless benefit claiming class (Skeggs 2004, Tyler 2006, McRobbie 2007,Tyler 2008).

In my own press analysis tracking references to teenage pregnancy and parenthood at a specific point in time and across a range of newspapers, however, the tone around teenage pregnancy and parenthood appeared to be much more tempered. I found no evidence of a proliferation of negative stories about teenage mothers in the press, as other scholars had described, and came across very few articles that explicitly denounced teenage pregnancy or parents themselves. Teenage pregnancy was far more frequently referred to (47% of all articles included) in relation to actual or proposed improvements to sex and relationships education and access to contraception. These findings appear to correspond with what the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Evaluation (2005) found in their review of press coverage of teenage pregnancy since the launch of the strategy. The report described how 'news stories and features on sex education and the availability of emergency contraception have been the most reported stories...' in relation to teenage pregnancy (22/23).

Many of the articles I collected came as a response to the Ofsted report released in the period during which I was collecting data - 'Time for change? Personal, social and health education' - which evaluated the provision of PSHE in schools and called on the Government to improve sex and relationships education and clinical sexual health services in schools. Articles in response to Ofsted's report - and to other proposed or currently running health interventions aimed at reducing teenage conceptions - expressed the longstanding and polarized debates in the UK about whether improved sex education and access to contraception leads to increased and premature sexual activity amongst young people or, conversely, allows them to act as more responsible risk takers (Hoggart 2003). On one side of the debate knowledge about sex and access to contraception is seen to be productive of the 'high' teenage pregnancy rates in the UK whereas, on the other hand, it is preventative. In some of these press articles the government strategy for reducing teenage pregnancy came under fire (particularly from *The Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*) for promoting sexual activity and failing to make inroads into teenage conception rates through improved sex and relationships education and greater access to contraception, despite their large financial investment (see for example *Widespread use of morning-after pill 'fails to cut teenage pregnancy'* The Daily Mail 24th April 2007 and Womack (a) 25th February 2007). On the other hand the government's SRE interventions could also be viewed as inadequate to the task of reducing the 'high' rates of teenage pregnancy and to be 'failing' young people (See The Daily Mirror *'Let down by lessons in love'* 29th March 2007') and calls were made for the UK to move more toward a Dutch model (See The Daily Mirror *'Sex Lesson we Must Learn'* 23rd March 2007). The latter critiques were more common amongst the Labour-leaning newspapers like *The Mirror* and *The Guardian*.

While teenage pregnancy and parenthood were most frequently referred to in articles about improved sex education and access to contraception, a small proportion (11%) focussed more specifically on teenage parents themselves. These stories depicted particular young women or couples, but rather than painting a negative picture of the subjects at the centre of the story, a positive representation of them as 'triumphing over adversity' emerges. A young woman whose life should have ended when she had a child at a young age rather struggles to successfully balance parenting, finances, work and education. These articles provide a positive representation of the parent who is the focus of the story demonstrating their competence, tenacity and achievement 'against all odds'. These depictions also rely on narratives of mistake, regret, lost childhood and hardship. Young mothers thus recount their misfortunes with contraception or first sex, how they wished they had waited until they were more mature and now struggle to enjoy their adolescence or continue their education. These stories appear as cautionary tales to other teenagers, confirming the 'difficult reality' and 'hard slog' of being a young parent. They are narratives of redemption in which these particular young women (and sometimes their partners) actively 'make good' by accepting their mistakes, taking responsibility and pursuing the accepted path to success and out of poverty, 'social exclusion' and welfare dependence through employment, education and training (see Chapter One). As Wilson and Huntington (2005) have similarly noted of news stories about teenage mothers in New Zealand:

> 'the traditional view that 'a mother's place is in the home' is...challenged by glowing media stories...about teenage mothers going to school and/or university while their children are still young. In contrast, those teenage mothers that choose to stay at home with their children...are totally absent in the popular media' (68)

Lisa Arai (2009a) has also picked up on what she calls the 'beating the odds' discourse in the contemporary press coverage of teenage mothers. She argues that it relies on the writer asking the reader to suspend judgements about teenage mothers on the basis that he or she has found evidence that 'their' teenage mothers are not like those elsewhere (imagined or real) (44). Indeed, from my own exploration, I would argue that these stories are very much about the 'one' that was able to 'make it' and take responsibility for their mistakes, while many others may have fallen by the wayside and/or chosen to rely on state handouts. An article from the Daily Mail, for example, entitled *'Proving the doubters wrong – couple who started their family when he was 12 and she was 17'* (8th April 2007) reports on a teenage couple managing to stay together, buy a home, go to university and look after their family of three. While these few young women (and sometimes their partners who 'stand by them') are to be commended for getting their priorities right and taking responsibility for their mistakes, the clear implication is that they are an exception to the rule. As a quote from the young woman in the above story makes clear:

> 'We might have been young when we had the girls but there was no way I was going to scrounge off the government. I could easily have put my feet up and lived off benefits in a grotty flat, but I wanted the best for my children. I didn't want to scrimp and scrape and I wanted to set an example to my girls'

It seems that in the popular press it is through the positive representation of the 'one-off' capable, self-sufficient teenage mother (or couple), struggling to 'get on' that the apparently more usual reality of dead ends, moral irresponsibility and easy welfare dependence is known, yet not explicitly spoken of. While these stories provide a more positive representation of particular teenage parents, a negative discourse which understands early childbearing to be inherently bad (a struggle or a blight to futures) and sees

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('other') young mothers as 'feckless welfare scroungers' often underpins them. These articles also tend to employ sensationalist language in the title of the story to attract the attention of the reader, as teenage parents continue to be presented as the strange and spectacular worthy of press attention (Arai 2009a:45).[35]

Moreover, although most of the articles in the sample did not explicitly pass comment about teenage pregnancy or parenting, it is nevertheless clear that assumptions about the scale of the 'problem' and the need for intervention were taken for granted. Seemingly lifted from the SEU report (1999), the statement that 'Britain has the highest' or often 'worst' rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe' was regularly repeated across the whole sample of articles. These often quoted the number of conceptions among young women without providing any wider context to the figures. One article even reported on the 'soaring' teenage conception rate in the UK (*'Should kids learn the facts of life?'* The Daily Mirror 27th March 2007). As I have already noted in Chapter One overall teenage conceptions in the UK had in fact been declining since the 1970s (Lawlor and Shaw 2004, Arai 2003a, Arai 2003b, Wilson and Huntington 2005, Arai 2009a, Duncan *et al* 2010b) and Arai (2009a) points out that the press often use data in a way that makes the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy look worse. She argues that numbers are often de-contextualised, small rises in conception rates can be expressed as percentages (making them look large), short-term changes are often looked at which do not give a full picture of overall trends and comparisons with other countries are used, which are not adequate or helpful (see also Arai 2003b). In the press the 'high' numbers of

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[35] In contrast these 'against all odds' stories there was one article printed by the Guardian that was written by a woman who had herself had children as a teenager. This article highlighted the more joyful and self-affirming aspects of early motherhood seeing it more as an opportunity than a dead end (Lavender 2007). Based on my sample I would assume that this kind of article is, however, rather rare (see also Arai 2009b and Duncan *et al* 2010b).

teenage conceptions alone seem to provide enough shocking evidence that something – whether it be improving or limiting young people's knowledge about sex and access to contraception - must be done about the issue. In the articles surveyed for this project, teenage pregnancy and childbearing is, therefore, understood as something that is inherently negative or problematic, as a 'problem' that must be stemmed and it seems there is no need for recourse to a 'poor outcomes' or 'economic cost' explanation (see Chapter One). In a handful of articles (10%) teenage pregnancy or childbearing was referred to in the context of 'troubled' or 'unhappy youth' and teenage pregnancy was used as a marker of young people's wellbeing, or rather lack of it. At the time this type of article frequently made use of the UNICEF report on childhood in industrialised countries that was published in February 2007 (Innocenti 2007), but continued to make reverberations in the media up to and beyond the time of this study. An article in *The Telegraph* I picked up in the exploration for example announced that:

'...we [the UK] have the unhappiest children in the developed world...That means, for example, that British children have the highest rates of underage drinking and teenage pregnancy'. (Telegraph 27th March 2007)

Others despaired at the state of Britain's youth and teenage pregnancy was mixed in with a range of other anti-social and criminal behaviours typical of an unruly, anti-social young population of 'troubled teens' who had been failed by their schools and their upbringing (see McCartney 2007). As well as being an indicator of 'troubled teens', in several articles (10%) teenage pregnancy and childbearing is referred to in the context of 'decaying neighbourhoods and nation', often in reference to the kind of legacy Tony Blair would be leaving behind as Hastings (2007) describes:

'All around, there are signs of a society decaying at the edges – binge-drinking, family breakdown, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, squalid 'reality' TV, neglect of the elderly, an increasingly hopeless underclass, rudeness and selfishness…'

In this type of article teenage pregnancy and parenting seems to be a symptom of an inherent pathology of the underclass signifying all that is wrong with contemporary society.

A polite discourse?

The press coverage I collected at this time therefore seems broadly to suggest a more tempered approach to reporting on teenage pregnancy and parenting than I might have imagined at the start of this exploration based on my reading of scholarship in the field. Reference to teenage pregnancy was usually made in terms of actual or proposed improvements to sex and relationships education or access to contraception. At the time of my investigation there were no articles that explicitly expedited the perils of teenage pregnancy or the immorality of teenage mothers themselves. Articles that were explicitly about pregnant and parenting teenagers tended to be more positive and less condemning than other scholars have suggested. There were, nonetheless, a number of assumptions that ran a current through the articles which continue to paint teenage pregnancy and parenting as calamitous for young mothers and their children and associated them with social decay and the underclass.

This 'softer' approach to teenage pregnancy, which still recognises it as a significant 'problem', seems consistent with New Labour policy at the time (as outlined in Chapter One) which presented those who became teenage mothers as the victims of 'social exclusion' and the sufferers of poor outcomes. This represented a much more compassionate approach to teenage pregnancy than had been adopted by previous governments and it seemed that this had also seeped into the media. Indeed Arai (2009a) has argued the SEUs report had a considerable impact on the media coverage of teenage pregnancy following its publication. The softer tone I have noted in press coverage of teenage motherhood perhaps also reflects the active attempts of the Government to win support for their Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and justify their financial investment in the matter. Indeed Wellings (2002) has noted how the use of the mass media has been common for national health campaigns since the 1980s, following the advent of the AIDS epidemic. The information we see in newspapers today is the result of a number of mediations, processes and influences and Governments may manage and filter the information they release and promote about social issues and their approach to resolving them very carefully. For the TPS it was perhaps particularly important that teenage pregnancy was publicly acknowledged as a 'problem' and we can see how in the press the statistic about the 'highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe' was bounded about making teenage pregnancy appear as an issue of some scale in the UK. They also used the media to promote the core messages of the strategy and the SEU (1999) described how there needs to be:

'nothing less than a common national effort...involving Government and professionals, opinion formers and the media, communities, parents and teenagers themselves, in sending much clearer messages about teenage sex

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and pregnancy...the national campaign will target young people and parents with the facts about teenage pregnancy and parenthood, with advice about how to deal with pressures to have sex, and with messages that underline the importance of using contraception...local campaigns...will be developed in collaboration with print and broadcast media and with youth, faith and other organisations, to reinforce the message' (SEU 1999:8).

The release and promotion of evidence that supported the Government's plan for intervention, like the Ofsted report mentioned above, for example, would have helped to promote and justify New Labour's approach to stemming the problem, while publicising interventions in young people's sexual health and contraception use may also have been a priority in terms of promoting the strategy and its work. As the strategy involved addressing adolescent sexuality, improving sex education and access to contraception for young people - still highly emotive issues in the UK (Hoggart 2003) – it was important for New Labour, however, to limit the sensationalist coverage of issues related to teenage pregnancy and the strategy, while keeping them high on the public agenda (TPSE 2005). It may also have been important to make those who become pregnant at a young age appear as worthy recipients of Government support. A 'softer' more sympathetic approach to teenage mothers in the press may, therefore, have been promoted as a means of ensuring support for state interest and initiatives to support pregnant and parenting teenagers.

At the time of research, we see then quite a 'polite' discourse in operation around teenage pregnancy in the press, orchestrated by the New Labour Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and the strategy evaluation team (2005) similarly noted how 'the tone around teenage pregnancy and the strategy was

becoming more positive' (23). Governments are, however, unable to control all press coverage and comment and journalists may represent perspectives of their own or those various interest and pressure groups, which are also highly effective at manipulating the media (McRobbie & Thornton 1995). The controversial nature of adolescent sexuality, sex education and access to contraception, for example, meant that in my sample the press reception of proposed or actual initiatives to improve sex and relationships education and access to contraception were not always received in the way proponents of the strategy might have preferred (TPSE 2005).

The 'softer' approach or 'polite' discourse I noted in relation to press coverage of teenage pregnancy and parents may also, however, have been a result of the fact that at the time I was collecting articles no 'big', 'press-worthy' cases emerged that might have sparked more of a media frenzy around teenage pregnancy. Had a case like that of Alfie Patten, who in 2009 became a dad at thirteen and sparked a wave of 'moral condemnation and outrage' in the UK (Duncan *et al* 2010b), emerged at the time I was collecting articles, the volume and tone of articles referring to teenage pregnancy and parenting could have been significantly different[36]. The release of conception statistics also often provoke extended discussion of teenage pregnancy and the best way to address the 'problem', but none were released at the time I was collecting data. Yet while I have demonstrated that a broadly 'polite discourse' existed around teenage pregnancy at the time I was carrying out this research, I now go on to describe how a far more 'im-polite' discourse existed around teenage motherhood in other media spaces.

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[36] Following a paternity test Alfie was later found not to be the father of the infant.

An impolite discourse?

When observing some of the online comments left on articles by readers it became very apparent that there was far more unpleasant condemnation of teenage pregnancy and mothers in operation online compared to what I had documented in my review of press articles. Comments attached to the article mentioned above ('*Proving the doubters wrong – couple who started their family when he was 12 and she was 17'*) for example, clearly articulated the feeling that the 'against all odds' narrative was rare and were more openly damning of 'other' teenage parents than the article itself:

> 'I congratulate this pair as they must be one of the very few under age couples/singles in the UK today who don't rely on handouts. I suspect they hadn't heard the Gordon Brown 'guide to scrounging off the state' and they're a lot better socially for it'

> 'O.K. However, there are always exceptions to the rule'.

> 'Thank god they proved people wrong. They seem to have their priorities right! Shame about the rest of the people who start out like this'

> 'I saw him on TV months ago. He is really nice, polite young man. And the best part is, is that he WANTS to work. It's just a shame other young parents are too idle to take a leaf out of his book'

The following comments left on an article about the UK pilot of the Family Nurse Partnership (Daily Mail 2007)[37] also demonstrates a less compassionate approach to teenage maternity and perhaps underscores the need for New

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[37] An intensive health visiting service for young mothers copied from the US reported on in two articles collected.

Labour to soften the tone of the press coverage of the issue in order to justify their financial investment to 'help' young mothers:

'Stop providing these girls with their own flats and benefits. When there is nothing to be gained from having a baby they might think twice about rushing into having one.'

'Heard it all now. People who fought for this Country cannot afford decent and dignified care homes and this Government is wasting money on girls who have got themselves pregnant so they can get a free flat and benefits.

'It seems to me that the Government is encouraging teen pregnancies. If they were a little less generous in helping pregnant youngsters, perhaps these young girls (and the men responsible) would think twice about bringing a child into the world. Everything is made too easy for them.'

The concern about the spending of state money on teenagers who become pregnant and a 'benefits culture' that encourages them to do so appear prominently in these comments. In the comments I reviewed, none represented alternative viewpoints to those above, so the online comments section, as also intimated by Arai (2009b) above, effectively provided space for a proliferation of negative narratives about the fecklessness and immoral welfare scrounging of teenage parents and mothers in particular.

While I did not carry out a detailed review of the web comments left by readers (and this would be complex due to the fact that not all the articles returned by my search had a facility to leave comments), I now wish to turn to a more systematic review of public comments and blogs left on the two

particular websites where I was aware that the vilification of teenage mothers as 'chav scum' was vociferous.

'Chav Scum'

In recent years the term 'chav' has become a ubiquitous term of abuse for white working class subjects and has appeared repeatedly in the British media; in television comedy, reality-genre television, newspapers as well as internet fora (Lawler 2005b, Skeggs 2005, Tyler 2006, Tyler 2008). Hayward and Yar (2006) claim that the use of the term 'chav' in UK national newspapers rose from virtually zero in the years 1995-2003 to a startling 946 references in the 12 months prior to their publication in 2006 (10). On the 4th April 2005 their Google search for the term revealed a total of 302,000 results (10). At the time of writing, my own search revealed a massive 2,210,000 results. 'Chav' was named the 2004 buzzword of the year in Susie Dent's (2004) book *Larpers and Shroomers: The Language Report,* and made it into the 2005 edition of the Collins English Dictionary. The *London Review of Books* has even conducted a debate on the etymology of the term; which is much disputed (Skeggs 2005:966). The contemporary significance and ubiquity of the figure[38] of the 'chav' is also confirmed by its apparent sales and marketing potential. In the mid-'Noughties', for example, a range of still available 'chav' merchandise sprung up and included such things as Bok's (2004) *'Little Book of Chavs'*, the *'Little Book of Chav Speak'*, and *'Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class'*. An assortment of, usually derogatory, 'chav' t-shirts are also available on the market (see www.chavscum.com), as well as 'chav jewellery' (see www.chavjewellery.com) and greeting cards. A Seabrook

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[38] Tyler (2008) specifically describes the 'chav' as a 'figure' to draw attention to the way in which at 'different historical and cultural moments, specific bodies become over-determined and are publicly imagined and represented (are figured) in excessive, distorted and or caricatured ways. The 'chav' is thus not a 'real' being, though as described below they may well be understood to be.

crisps television advert screened in May 2007 also used actors 'playing chavs' and included a hook line 'say blah to chavs'. The term appears widely in television programmes and journalists have picked it up, some using it with intent and some scorning its existence and meaning (see for example Jones 2011 and Toynbee 2011). A whole vocabulary has emerged around the 'chav' so that you can experience a 'chavalanche' (being encroached by a large group of chavs), have Chaverler Cheques (dole cheque), drive a chavalier, chavmobile or chaviot, ('chav' car), experience a 'chavasty' ('chav' related travesty), something can be 'chavtastic' (fantastically chavesque), celebrate 'chavmas' (Christmas with an *excessive* amount of home decoration), and play 'chavoploy' (Monopoly with a 'chav' twist). A range of websites and blogs have appeared which are expressly used to ridicule the 'chav lifestyle' (see for example the 'chav character' Devvo on the blog http://www.fat-pie.com/chavs.htm, www.chavtowns.co.uk, www.chavworld.co.uk, www.chavscum.com (explored in more detail below), www.chavmum.co.uk and you can even do you own 'chav' test at www.chavstest.com)

While 'chav' has become the ubiquitous synonym to describe the disreputable white working class; entering and permeating every aspect of the popular, up and down the UK there have for some years been a range of terms which have the same meanings attached to them. (For example: 'scallies' (Merseyside), 'Neds' (Glasgow), Charvers (North East), 'Townies' (Oxford/Cambridge) and 'Meaders' (Bristol)). Yet, while some of the regional variations can carry with them more admirable qualities[39], the 'chav' is consistently imagined as the non-respectable white working-class; the undeserving poor. They are the council-housed, ill-educated, badly spoken, violent, petty thieves who are

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[39] In his book '*Pies and Prejudice*', Maconie (2007) for example points out that the 'scally' can often be understood as more of a loveable rogue amongst Liverpudlians.

most importantly distinguished by a distinctive set of cultural dispositions that inform behavioural patters and choices, which might include a lack of interest in education, an apparent unwillingness to work, incessant breeding and poor consumption choices. Their disadvantage and general condition is thus understood not to be the result of any form of structural inequity, but to be self-imposed and unworthy of sympathy.

Importantly though the figure of the 'chav' is clearly identifiable by their participation in forms of marker-oriented consumption and Hayward and Yar (2006) argue that the 'chav' phenomenon represents a popular reconfiguration of the old underclass idea within new spaces of commodity consumption. The focus is thus often not on their absence of work, poverty and an inability to consume, but on their excessive, 'vulgar' and 'tasteless' forms of consumption that are lacking in 'distinction'. These are the kinds of styles that, as described in the literature review, are not attributed with value in the dominant system of validation and it is rather 'middle-class' style and taste that is legitimised in the symbolic order (Skeggs 2004). The figure of the 'Chav' is symbolically identified through their preference for crass branded or designer sports-wear, chunky gold rings and chains and a general lack of subtlety in appearance which has no value in dominant middle-class culture. It is 'bodies – their appearance, their bearing and their adornment - that are central to these representations of white working-class people and the marking of their inner pathology' (Lawler 2005a). In the figure of the 'chav' then an underclass discourse (itself maintaining an older class distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor) is refolded and combined with a popular notion of working-class susceptibility to a vacuous consumer culture and a trivial preoccupation with materialism (Seiter 1993, Lawler 2000b, Chin 2001, Skeggs 2004; see also Chapter One). While vulgar and tasteless these

apparent investments in expensive designer goods are also often seen to be unreasonable for the 'chav' working class, as they do not (or should not) have the financial resources to invest in such goods. Their spending on such items is regarded as an irresponsible and unnecessary use of tax payer's money and may also be associated with criminal activity (Griffin 1997, Chin 2001, Skeggs 2004, Archer *et al* 2007). 'In other words they spend money they haven't earned on things they shouldn't have' (Chin 2001: 43) and the purchase of these things may also contribute to their own poverty. The poor are thus seen to lack self-control and discipline and the ability to manage their money and expenses (Taylor 2004).

In the figure of the 'chav' this focus on dispositions, practice and appearance claims to be something about distinct individuals, culture, lifestyle and taste and nothing about class. Yet while 'class is rarely named it is nevertheless articulated through "moral euphemism" whereby processes of interpretation do the work' (Skeggs 2004: 468). Thus a range of classed signs and symbols are constantly invoked to make class visible without it being spoken and the image of the 'chav' invokes class distinctions at every turn (Lawler 2005b).

But why has the 'chav' emerged as such a prolific site of class disgust at this particular historical moment? Most of the literature on this points to the pressing need for the middle-classes to demarcate themselves as distinct from the working class in an increasingly unstable world, where a traditional class order has been rocked. Bourdieu (1986), for example, has argued that changes in relations to production and the economic differences that have traditionally signalled class distinction have receded in the late modern period. Such things as the reduction in traditional working-class occupations in manufacturing, an increase in service industry occupations and changes in

patterns of property ownership have disrupted the class order significantly. For Bourdieu the symbolic, therefore, becomes more significant to articulating class distinctions (cited in Lury 1996). The more recent opening up of the university system and the dilution of regional accents perhaps makes the matter of marking out of class distinctions even more pressing for the middle-classes and Tyler (2008) suggests that historical 'figures' of derision usually represent a particular crisis or anxiety of the time. Underlying the 'chav' discourse, then, are perhaps middle-class anxieties and yearnings for and old class order where everybody knew their place and aspired to make up the cultural pyramid (Walker 2006: 7) and 'in the context of shifting class definitions, the vilification of the chav is a symptom of a middle-class desire to demarcate class boundaries within the context of contemporary consumer culture' (Tyler 2008: 30). The figure of the 'chav', however, may also represent struggles within class fractions to demarcate the boundaries between respectable and non-respectable working-class in this new class order. In Nayak's (2003 & 2006) empirical study of young white masculinities in the North-East of England, for example, the fleshing out of these differences *within* the working-class were clear (see Chapter Two). Concerns about the 'growing' numbers of workless 'chavs' bleeding the state dry may also not just be aired by the middle classes but the 'respectable' working classes too who apparently got on with it and made good despite the hand they were dealt. Indeed in late modernity we have seen broad trends and sentiments toward notions of individualisation which rest on the idea of taking control of one's own destiny. This has inevitably resulted in the poor - those who are apparently unable to take advantage of the opportunities made available to them - being seen to be responsible for their own poverty and becoming ripe for this vehement form of vilification and abuse as 'chavs' (Skeggs 1997, 2004, Lawler 2005b). In the next section I explore my analysis of two

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websites where this 'chav discourse' is prolific and describe how in these spaces teenage pregnancy and parenting are treated as synonymous with the 'chavette' - the female version of the 'chav' – who is the softest subject for this violent form of class disgust.

'Chav mum'

As part of my exploration of representation of teenage pregnancy and parenthood on popular websites I examined the ninety-nine definitions of the term 'chav' on the Urban dictionary site as well as terms with slight variations including 'chavs', 'chavscum' and 'chavvy' . The vast majority of these definitions contained references to teenage childbearing and the most highly rated definition[40] of a 'chav' is:

> 'young lad about 12 years of age and 4 ½ feet high baseball cap at ninety degrees in a imitation addidas tracksuit, with trouser legs tucked into his socks (of course, it definitely the height of fashion). This lad is strutting around, fag in one hand jewellery all over the other, outside McDonalds acting as if he is 8 foot tall and built like a rugby player...with his pregnant 14-year-old girlfriend'

Other highly rated definitions repeated the reference to early fertility:

> 'Impregnating the female of the species – the chavette, who are only suitable for fertilising up to the age of sixteen'

> 'They tend to leave school before the age of sixteen...in order to pursue parenthood or a life of crime'.

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[40] Users can vote on the 'accuracy' of the definition and those with the most votes are listed first.

'The 15yr old n her 10 yr old boyfriend probably conceived their 1st 3 kids in the toilets there [McDonalds]'

'females have kids at an early age, and range between 5-10 kids by the time they are 20.'

'What do you call a 13yr old chav?
'PREGNANT'

Teenage fertility was also described in every (20) definition of the 'chavette', 'chav whore' and 'chav woman'. According to one definition:

'The chavette will be pregnant with her first child before she reaches 5th year; the father may or may not hang around. Some chavettes can have around 5 kids with different fathers. They will still believe that having sex while standing up will ensure that they don't get pregnant and will insist on keeping the hapless baby to ensure that they get a council house. The chavette will also be seen slapping her kids around the head and swearing at them in public.'

Similarly, the website chavscum.com also makes repeated reference to teenage childbearing being a characteristic of 'chav' women. These comments were made about two different entries for 'chav of the month' where pictures of teenage girls were submitted.

'They've all just turned 15 and are now going out on the piss to get knocked-up by some random blokes. How else do you expect them to get a new council house and maximum benefits when they leave school. (Picture of three teenage girls entitled 'Little Chav Slags')'

'I'll fcuk any fit buff lad in a trackie so I can get pregnant and start claiming

state benefits. My mum says I have to have my own council paid house and 4

kids by the time I'm 16 or she will throw me out onto the street.' (Picture of

lone teenage girl)

'baby!!.........benefit book!!.........they are one and same thing to a chav slut

like you!' (Picture of pregnant woman of teenage appearance)

In these spaces the 'chav female' is always a teenage mother who invariably

gets pregnant to claim council housing and state benefit. Other negative

characteristics typically associated with the working classes, such as a harsh

parenting style, are also attributed to the 'chav mother' (Walkerdine and

Lucey 1989, Gillies 2007). Most pronounced on both urban dictionary and

chavscum chav, however, is the way in which the female 'chav mother' is

associated with a sluttish, sexual looseness, sexual availability and an

ignorance about contraception that results in excessive breeding and multiple

births, which is often characterised as a means of obtaining maximum state

benefit. 'Chav women' are repeatedly referred to as slags, sluts and whores

who are judged as deserving of a 'good pounding' depending on an

assessment of their appearance. Their excessive use of make-up and short

skirts is commented on frequently and appears to illustrate their promiscuity

or sexual availability[41]. The slack 'chavette' is also sometimes criminalised as

a prostitute who embodies contagion as the spreader of all manner of venereal

diseases, and occasionally HIV. These associations draw on long-held

historical depictions of working-class women and Skeggs (1997 and 2004) has

demonstrated that the undesirable characteristics of dirt, contagion and

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[41] The 'slutty' disposition of the 'chav' female also makes her the object of desire and sexual abuse in pornography on sites like www.chavgirlsnaked.com.

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excessive sexuality (see also Gilman 1985) have always been attached to the bodies of working-class women. This she argues has historically worked to distance working-class women from respectable forms of femininity and has been used as an important means of marking out class difference (see also Chapter Six).

In discussions about the excessive sexuality and breeding of the 'chav', concerns about racial mixing are also expressed and 'chavettes' are said to bear a number of babies of 'different colours'.

> 'Chavette surprises us with it's cunning plan to avoid taking up a professional career and provide itself with free accommodation supplied by tax payers by spawning multi coloured mini chavs at an early stage in life, usually mid teens'
>
> 'The female Chav will, by the time she is nine year of age have realised what she wants to do with her life. Which is, to have at least four children by four different fathers (one of who will be black or Asian) by the time she is 18. She does not intend to support these children herself or ask the fathers of the children for support but instead rely on government handouts.'

Describing the 'chav teenage mother's' children as the result of different ethnic mixes seems to confirm or prove her promiscuity and her predisposition to sleeping with and bearing children for many men. But as Walker (2006) argues, this also represents an interface where harboured anxieties about multiculturalism are played out. This critique of the 'white trash' and their values allows for an inverted attack on multiculturalism and the form of a racism 'which dare not speak its name' (Walker 2006:4). Indeed as Tyler (2006) and Nayak (2003) note the whiteness of the 'chav woman' is tainted and devalued by her apparent geographical, familial and sexual intimacy with

working-class black and Asian males and a preference for racial mixing[42]. Yet complexly, the 'chav' is also associated with un-modern racism and this appears as a new refolding of an old tendency for the white working class to be cast as emblematically racist and the barriers to multiculturalism. Here the responsibility for backward racism is thus expressly located among the working-class and the middle-classes claims to respectable whiteness are left intact (Haylett 2001, Skeggs 2004).

Moreover, while the 'chav', and the 'chav female' in particular, are seen to be 'close to blackness' they are also simultaneously configured as hyperwhite - a particular form of non-respectable white. This is a whiteness that is dirty and contaminated with poverty, welfare dependency, violence, poor education, fecundity, racial mixing, racism and early childbearing. They are part of the 'sullied urban 'underclass' [who] have become 'urban primitives...existing on the borders of whiteness as the socially excluded, the economically redundant' (Nayak 2003: 82 and 103). They are themselves the subject of a racialised discourse which casts them as the unrespectable hyper-visible, 'filthy whites' (Tyler 2006). Indeed both urban dictionary.com and chavscum.com frequently describe 'chavs' as a 'race apart' or a lower 'species' as some of the comments above have already shown. There is also some allusion to genetic defects amongst the 'race' and notions of a bodily distinctiveness that echo the classic premises of racial hierarchy and likeness made to animals was also not uncommon. This mirrors what Wray and Newitz (1997) have commented on in terms of the construction of 'white trash' in America as 'a breed apart, a dysgenic race unto themselves' (2) and is consistent with what Nayak (2003) found in his empirical work on the construction of young white masculinities in

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[42] More broadly 'the chav' is also understood to be closer to blackness through attempts to appropriate 'black culture' by their choice of R&B and rap music and 'urban' language. Many of the comments on both urban dictionary and chav scum make reference to 'chavs' sharing similarities to the American 'wigga'

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North-East England. Those who were named as 'charvers' were constructed as 'a retarded race with deep voices, hunched statures and aggressive, unpredictable attitudes' (97). They were described as anatomically distinct; having a loping stride or walking 'head down...with an arched back'(98). They were depicted as animalistic and ape-like which elided with and elaborated upon a broader vocabulary of race (Nayak 2006:823).

From my exploration of these websites, I want to suggest that in these spaces teenage motherhood is clearly associated with being a 'chav woman'. Moreover, while 'chav' may operate as a more general site of class denigration it is the 'chav teenage mother' who embodies and comes to symbolize the 'chav phenomenon' most profoundly. It is she who suffers a particular form of intense classed and gendered denigration and comes to embody numerous access points for vilification - teenage fertility, fecundity, welfare dependence (to support her many offspring), a heightened sexuality, contagion, and proximity to other races - for the articulation of this broader class disgust. As Tyler (2008) notes it is through the figure of the 'chavette' that the 'chav' as a figure of class difference is made most explicit. This perhaps underscores what Skeggs (2004 and 2005) has pointed out about the way in which white working-class women are currently marked out at as the 'national constitutive limit to propriety...symbolically figured through the excess of the grotesque, weeping, leaking, excreting bodies' (Skeggs, 2004: 968). It is the 'excessive, unhealthy, publicly immoral white working-class woman...that epitomizes the zeitgeist of the moment' (968) and embodies all the moral obsessions historically associated with the working class. Middle-class disgust is, therefore, levied most vehemently at a particularly female working class subject (Lawler 2005a, Bullen and Kenway 2004 and McRobbie 2006) and the figure of the 'chav teenage mum' represents a specifically feminine modality of

symbolic violence, a process of class differentiation that is thoroughly projected onto and inseparable from the female body.

Drawing on my exploration of both press and webspace I want to argue, therefore, that teenage pregnancy and parenting can be approached and spoken about in quite different ways in each of these sites. While in the press a relatively 'polite discourse' operated around teenage pregnancy and parenting in online comments on press articles unkind remarks about fecklessness, welfare dependency and a benefits system that encourages young women to become pregnant are aired virulently. In the two websites I looked at teenage pregnancy and parenting is closely associated with and is characteristic of the current subject of the most virulent form of class disgust the 'chav female'. A discourse that appears to be much quieter in the press emerges vociferously here in the language of an anonymous public voice. Indeed as Tyler (2006) points out, these kinds of sites create a particular kind of sociability wherein anonymity provides community members with a licence to express themselves in extreme and virulent ways (2). While it is unclear how representative the views expressed in these web spaces are and they clearly represent those of people who have *something* very particular to say, research as touched on above indicates that these sites are becoming increasingly important spaces of representation production.

Touching on TV

While a systematic analysis of representations of teenage mothers in television was not conducted, I want to finish this chapter by drawing on my engagement with some of the recent documentary and comedy shows aired in the UK that have featured young mothers. I want to suggest that in much

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television programming there is a mirroring of the respectable 'polite' discourse' apparent in the press, which appears to reflect New Labour's stance on teenage pregnancy. Television shows thus appear to concentrate attention on sex education, contraception and the 'difficulties' of being a young parent. In Channel 4's *Lets Talk Sex* presented by Davina McCall, for example, the show purports to be a response to the 'high' rates of teenage pregnancy in the UK. The focus is very much on sex education and access to contraception as a means of combating the 'problem'. In other shows, such as Cutting Edge's *'Pramface'*, ITV's *'Britain's youngest mums and dads'* and the BBC3 show *'Teenagers desperate for a baby'*, sensationalist titles are used to attract an audience, though the content does not usually live up to them. In fact the films often attempt to show a 'real' insight into the lives of young parents and tend to be largely sympathetic in tone, though narratives again frequently focus on the difficulties of being a young parent, as young mothers struggle to buy Christmas presents or have a night out and live in poor housing conditions, isolated from family. All of this supporting an underlying theme which understands teenage motherhood as necessarily negative.

While, as in the press, in much television programming the tone around teenage pregnancy is broadly 'polite', in television comedy the teenage mother appears to have suffered extreme ridicule, reflecting the 'impolite' discourse identified in webspace. In Matt Lucas' character Vicki Pollard in the comedy sketch show *'Little Britain'*, for example, the 'chav teenage mum' - who in one episode sells her baby for a Westlife CD – is represented as uneducated and irresponsible, is dressed in conspicuously branded clothing and is adorned with an a mass of gold jewellery. The fact that the 'chav' appears to become a comic figure of humour and ridicule is quite significant here since as Tyler (2008) points out 'class-based discrimination and open snobbery is made

socially acceptable through claims that this vicious name-calling has a 'satirical' function….'laughter', she argues, 'is boundary forming; it creates a distance between "them" and us, and asserts moral judgements' (28). Perhaps the recent addition of the 'Ned' family with a son named ASBO and daughter named Chavette to the Beano magazine illustrates the comedic boundary forming reach of the 'chav'.

My own engagement with television programming around teenage pregnancy was rather conjectural and was carried out at a particular point in time. More recent and more detailed work carried out by Tyler (2011) indicates that the 'impolite discourse' around teenage pregnancy is very present in current reality TV shows in the UK. Tyler (2011) cites a range of reality TV shows on teenage mothers that emerged in the latter part of the 'Noughties' and describes how these shows promote the image of teenage mothers as 'pramface' girls living in poverty and council houses, surviving on benefits and being incapable of looking after their children. She describes how these shows use a classed and gendered series of visual semiotics that 'are easy for a British television audience to decode: bleached hair, sports clothing, baby in pushchair, dummy, cigarettes, broken home, regional accents, terraced houses, underage sex' (425). She also described how these shows frequently use 'judgement shots' that incite negative moral judgement about the shows subjects inviting criticism of their parenting practice or decision making. Tyler's (2011) work illustrates how the 'impolite' discourse around teenage pregnancy and parenting that I observed in online environments and comedy is increasingly evident in much recent programming around teenage pregnancy and parenting, suggesting that my own analysis captures a 'moment' within a very dynamic media-scape.

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Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to map the popular cultural framing of teenage pregnancy and parenthood at the time this research was carried out in order to provide something of a background to understand the context through which young mothers might live their lives, and indeed carry out their consumer practices. The chapter has explored how teenage pregnancy and parenting was approached in the popular press, 'webspace' and in television media at the time of research. My findings reveal that, contrary to much academic commentary, the press treatment of teenage pregnancy and parenting at the time of research was relatively contained and I have suggested that a 'polite discourse', influenced by New Labour's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, was in operation around the issue. While it was repeatedly illustrated that teenage pregnancy was a problem of some magnitude and was bad for mothers and children, there were few stories that directly denounced teenage pregnancy or parents themselves. I suggested that New Labour attempted to focus the attention on the key messages of the TPS, but also to promote a less sensational approach to matters related to teenage pregnancy and young people's sexual health as well as a more positive approach to those who the policy was aimed at. In web space, however, I have described how a much more unpleasant voice or 'impolite discourse' opens up around teenage pregnancy and parenting and teenage mothers were not only berated as 'welfare scroungers' in online comments about news stories, but were aligned with the immoral, fecund, 'tasteless', 'filthy whiteness' of the 'chav mum' in the websites I reviewed. I argued that in these spaces the 'chav teenage mother' suffers an extreme form of classed and gendered disgust and appears as the most emblematic figure of the whole 'chav discourse'.

I also described how the 'polite' discourse appeared to be repeated in television documentary, where the focus is on improving sex education, and young mothers are often presented as 'struggling against the odds'. I suggested that in TV comedy, however, young mothers again appeared to be represented as the promiscuous, stupid, tasteless and work-shy 'chavs' they were depicted as in webspace. I also drew on Tyler's (2011) recent work on 'teen mum TV' which suggests that the image of the poor, 'pramface' teenage mother is more prominent in TV, which suggests that the 'impolite' discourse I found in webspace may be permeating the mainstream media.

While the negative representation of young mothers was tempered in the press at the time of this study it proliferated in other spaces (Arai 2009a) and though it is unclear how much influence some of these media spaces may have I would suggest that the representation of the teenage mother as a welfare scrounging 'chav' remains prominent in the contemporary cultural landscape. My findings, nevertheless, represent some challenges to traditional understandings of media representation of teenage mothers and contribute to an understanding of contemporary depictions of teen pregnancy and parenthood (Arai 2009a). Indeed the negative depiction of early fertility in the media often seems to be taken for granted in much academic writing on the subject, requiring little up-to-date substantiation or sometimes relying on a small number of articles from particular right-wing newspapers to illustrate the point. As Arai (2009a) has suggested that, despite her own rather comprehensive analysis of print and online media coverage of teenage pregnancy and parenting, 'much work remains to be done on understanding popular representations of pregnant and parenting teenagers, how these have changed over time as the media has expanded and diversified, and the effects

on young mothers' (40). The exploration here, though of course not exhaustive, contributes to this understanding and draws on a number of media forms including the popular press, web-space and television, to understand the media tone around teenage pregnancy and parenting at the time of research.

It is also important to note here how representation can have a profound impact on the social value of those depicted and can greatly influence their political claim making ability, their ability to access resources and the kinds of policies that are made against them (Skeggs 2004). Figures such as the 'chav teenage mum' become real material, subjects that can be named as the undeserving. In this way it is impossible to separate the material from the semiotic and media forms can be understood not only as representational but as constitutive and generative. These figures become something and someone that is identifiable and 'real' - accredited forms that accrue affective value in ways that have significant social power and impact (Tyler 2008). Indeed empirical research has indicated how 'chav' can be used as a pejorative, boundary-forming label among young people, for example, and is used to exclude and marginalise others (McCulloch *et al* 2006, Hollingworth and Williams 2009). In some areas 'chavs' have also been prohibited from public spaces such as shopping malls and night clubs (Nayak 2003, 2006, Tyler 2006, Archer *et al* 2007). These representations of 'welfare scrounging mothers' or 'chavs' articulated through the symbolic may, therefore, have a crucial impact on the lives of real people who can be identified and recognised in this way.

Representation also has real effects in terms of how the subjects of them respond (Skeggs 1997:6) and many researchers have noted that young

mothers are acutely aware of the negative way in which they are culturally positioned and studies describe how young mothers actively resist stigmatisation in their maternal practice (Walkerdine *et al* 2001, Kirkman et al 2001, Hendessi and Rashid 2002, Hirst *et al* 2006, Formby *et al* 2010). The impact of media representation on the lives of the young women who took part in this study is discussed specifically in relation to their consumer practice in more detail in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five – Consuming for babies: income and money management

Introduction

This chapter is the first of three which present original empirical material from my fieldwork. Here I explore the economic circumstances of the participants who took part in this study, the financial resources they had available to them and how they managed their money to be able to consume for themselves and their children. I argue that while financial resources were restricted for these young women, the notion of being able to provide materially for children was an important aspect of their understanding of what it meant to mother. Buying for children was, therefore, a clear priority for them, which involved strict budgeting, much planning, foresight and the skilful negotiation of maternity and child-care markets, as well as the sacrifice of their own consumer needs and youth identity projects. I describe how the budgeting and shopping strategies the mothers in this study employed enabled them to act as 'good mothers' by providing successfully for their children, and by being able to do so on a budget. The mothers' focus on meeting the 'needs' of their children above their own, it is suggested, also works to locate them as selfless and devoted mothers who are willing to sacrifice for their children. I argue that the mothers' skilful employment of sophisticated budgeting and shopping techniques illuminates a tenacity, responsibility and maternal capability that is often missing from policy and public accounts of teenage mothers. Far from the irresponsible teenagers and frivolous consumers they might be imagined as (see Chapter Four), the young low-income mothers in this study can rather be understood as calculated and pragmatic mothers and consumers who

negotiate complex maternity and baby markets with skill, and are able to manage their limited financial resources responsibly and with great deal of foresight.

Young mothers' income in context

As was touched upon in Chapter One, policy and scholarship in the area of teenage motherhood tends to agree that financial constraint and poor economic circumstances are commonplace among young mothers in the UK (Phoenix 1991, Harris et al 2005, McDermott and Graham 2005, SEU 1999, Formby *et al* 2010). Indeed one of the key findings from Ann Phoenix's (1991) in-depth study of young mothers in London was that while most were faring well, poverty was a dominant factor in their experiences of motherhood. Though poor economic circumstances may not necessarily be a result of having a child as a teenager (Ermisch and Pavalin, Duncan 2007, Duncan *et al* 2010b, Hawkes 2010), given that in the UK teenage pregnancy and parenthood is more prevalent among young women from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas (SEU 1999, Smith 1993, Lee *et al* 2004, Tabberer *et al* 2000*),* it is perhaps unsurprising that the economic capacity of younger mothers will be restricted. Moreover, although outcomes for young mothers and their counterparts may differ little by age 30 (Ermisch and Pavalin 2003, Duncan 2007, Duncan *et al* 2010b, Hawkes 2010), younger mothers may be financially worse off in the early years of the children's lives when compared to their older counterparts because of their immediate employment prospects and their reduced access to welfare benefits. Under-sixteen-year-olds, as explored in more detail below, for example, have very limited access to benefits in the UK and lone parents aged sixteen and seventeen receive a lesser personal allowance than older lone parents. As documented in other

research with working-class young mothers, the mothers in this study regularly complained of financial difficulty and the restrictions this placed on their consumer activity and most importantly on shopping for their infants. As was outlined in Chapter Three, detailed information about participants' individual circumstances was not collected until interview stage, meaning that accurate information about some of the focus-group participants was not known. The description of incomes outlined here draws largely on interview data, but takes in data from focus groups and field observations where these contribute to a broader understanding of participants' sources of finance. Appendix Five describes all the interview participants and their circumstances at the time of contact with the researcher. The description of participants' incomes is now split into pre- and post-sixteens, as this marks a significant boundary in terms of access to financial resources in the UK. Indeed my findings in relation to participants' income highlight a core variation in the circumstances of young mothers by age, thereby contradicting much policy and research, which often sees them as a homogeneous group (McVarish and Billings 2010).

Under-16s – Access to resources and parental control

In the UK the only benefit currently available to parents under the age of sixteen is Child Benefit, which at the time of research was £18.80 per week. This meant that all the young mothers who took part in this study and were under the age of sixteen were almost entirely financially reliant on their parents and in some cases irregular and inconsistent contributions from the fathers of their children – with some of whom mothers were still in relationships - or the parents of fathers. Fifteen-year-old Carly, mother to James, put it like this in a focus group: 'I wouldn't be able to afford nothing if

my muh[43] didn't help me. I'd be so poor'. This sentiment was echoed by the pre-sixteen participants in both focus groups and interviews as many of the extracts that follow illustrate.

In practice, very few participants under the age of sixteen were actually claiming Child Benefit independently and in the vast majority of cases the grandparent at their place of residence was claiming for both their own child (the mother) and their grandchild. In some instances grandparents passed the Child Benefit for the grandchild directly onto the daughter to ensure she had some responsibility and autonomy over the purchase of regularly needed items like formula milk, nappies and wipes for her child. Other younger mothers received more ad hoc financial contributions from parents. The only regular money fifteen-year-old Faith received from her mother, for example, was £20 a month. The younger mothers in the sample were almost entirely reliant on the discretion of their parents and would often have no personal finance at all, as Jess and Selina's conversation during the 'becoming a mother' focus group illustrates:

> Ruth: How about money? Did things change to do with money?
>
> Selina: yeah. I dunno. It all changed for me when I turned sixteen because I had my baby when I was fifteen. When I was fifteen I didn't even have a POUND! It was just like that. It's like my mum...
>
> Jess: nor me I aint got no money on me at all now! It's like I got my baby's money in a little pot thing and that's it!

For Jess, who was still reliant on her father for her income 'having no money at all' on her appeared to be a particularly exasperating situation meaning that she had no money to travel where she needed - to take her daughter to the Baby Clinic, for example - to buy snacks or juice for her daughter when they

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[43] Bristolian dialect for 'mum'.

were out, or to buy much coveted items of clothing for her daughter, without asking her father.

Parents' financial circumstances, and in some cases taste and perception of what was necessary for the baby, inevitably infringed and constrained the consumer ability and choice of these younger women. Even where participants suggested that they were able to exercise personal choice in what was purchased for their babies by their parents, the notion of relying on others appeared to be restricting and sometimes infantilising for these younger mothers. Most would have preferred to have their own finance so they choose and provide for their children independently. While Carly, for example, felt her mum bought her mostly what Carly wanted for her son, she still desired to be able to shop for him and pay for the items herself. As she explained in interview:

> Carly: Yeah, well my mum didn't really say 'you've only got a certain amount to spend on such and such', she let me pick and choose and we'd just buy it, but I would have preferred it if I could pay for it myself and that. We usually went out together and picked everything except for something like little outfits she'd just like go out and buy them...if she liked them.

Having to wait for parents to buy or settle for what parents agreed to purchase were common experiences for these younger women and financial reliance on parents could become the source of friction or disappointment. Young women appeared to be attuned to the financial pressures their families were under and were concerned about the additional financial burden they were imposing on already stretched budgets. Jess, for example, who was living at home with her mechanic father, sister, brother and daughter, seemed to be aware of how buying for her daughter was both dependent upon and

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encroached on her father's already tight budget. As we discussed in an interview:

> Ruth: For clothes and things like that, or toys or whatever you need do you normally have to ask dad?
> Jess: Yeah.
> Ruth: Does he ever say 'no' or like . . . ?
> Jess: Sometimes he says 'no' cos he ain't got a lot of money himself when he needs to put petrol in the car and that, so sometimes it's a bit hard for him, but most of the time he gives it to me, he's alright with it.

Studies of children's consumption and experiences of living in low income families have consistently shown how children from poorer backgrounds are familiar with and sensitive to family budgets, learning to limit their desires or wait to have them met (Loumidis and Middleton 2000, Chin 2001, Ridge 2007, Millar and Ridge 2009, Ridge 2009, Chandler and Evans 2006, Evans and Miles 2008). I sensed that for Jess, as well as for several of the other younger women in the study, 'learning to limit' personal consumer desires for their children and accepting and working with the reality of their parents' material circumstances were necessary skills to develop. In the above extract, however, I also understand that Jess is keen to stress her father's generosity and to refute (and possibly conceal from me) any notion of a lack of purchasing power by suggesting that 'most of the time' her father *is* able to buy what she asks. In a similar fashion to Jess, fifteen-year-old Faith seemed keen to stress her parents' financial capacity to buy for her daughter

independently from the state[44], yet at the same time she suggests that she may have to wait for items to be purchased and recognised the 'trouble' her and her daughter's financial dependence placed on her parents:

Faith: Everything that I buy is from my mum and dad's like wages it's not the government.

Ruth: Do you find that uhm I mean do they buy everything that you want, your mum and dad?

Faith: Yeah

Ruth: Do they? So if you got into Mothercare and say I need this will they just go and pick it up for you or will they...?

Faith: They will buy it if they've got money but if they haven't they gonna buy it later on, and they do.

Ruth: And do you find that difficult at all the fact that you can't...?

Faith: I do but sometimes I just think I don't want to trouble them and stuff

Ruth: So you'd rather have your own...?

Faith: Yeah coz they got their own things to do as well

While the financial independence of the younger mothers in this study was limited it seemed they were keen to demonstrate to me that their children were not going without despite their own restricted access to financial resources and to deflect any suggestion that they might have difficulty being able to buy for their children. Indeed as has been noted in Chapter Two buying for children and providing the items for appropriate care are an important aspect of what it means to be a 'good' mother in contemporary society and I would suggest that these young women were keen, therefore, to stress their parents' ability to provide where they did not have access to the

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[44] Faith was the only participant who was not entitled to receive the £500 Sure Start maternity grant that was provided by the Government to mothers living on a 'low-income'. Where mothers were under the age of sixteen entitlement was based on an assessment of their parents' financial circumstances.

resources to be able to do so themselves. This allowed the young women to maintain and articulate a position of competent caring in our discussions. Moreover, while I did not speak to grandparents directly, I would suggest that they would also have been keen to ensure that grandchildren were well provided for, despite the financial burden that they may have placed on overall family budgets. Purchasing for grandchildren perhaps constitutes part of grandparents' own extended caring projects (Pugh 2001). While Miller's (1998a) account of the love that is manifested in shopping for children focuses most specifically on how mothers constitute relationships with their infants through the everyday practice of provisioning, grandparents as well as other family members also purchase for children as acts of loving and caring for them, objectifying their connection to children in material goods (Layne 1999b, Pugh 2001, Wozniak 2004, See also Chapter Seven)[45].

For the younger women in this study, gaining financial autonomy generally required them to start claiming additional benefits independently, such as Child Tax Credit and Income Support, post turning sixteen. But this was too a potential source of turmoil for some young women whose parents (usually mothers) had been claiming benefit for their daughter and grandchild as part of the household income, since making an independent claim could result in a significant reduction in the overall family budget. Keyleigh, for example, who was living at home with her mum who was not currently employed, her dad (a gardener), three brothers and her son was grateful for the level of financial support her parents had provided to her since she became a mother especially as contributions from her ex-partner, the babies' father, were infrequent and unpredictable. She was nevertheless ambivalent about relying on her parents

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[45] It would perhaps be interesting to add an intergenerational aspect to this research and explore grandparents' experiences of financially supporting parenting teenagers and their children.

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and desperate for more financial autonomy. Yet her concerns about the impact that her independent benefit claim might have on her mother's income were holding her back from making an independent claim. If she did not claim independently her mother could continue to claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit for both Kayleigh and her son.

> Kayleigh: No, but if he [baby's father] does then its like 4 or 5 days late, so by then [baby's] run out of things so my parents have had to buy it anyway. I do give them the money back as well like on what they've done, but the amount of things that they've bought for [baby] I don't think there's enough money that I can earn to give back to them. Through the Easter holidays we're going up to the Job Centre and I'm going to get some forms to start claiming for myself.
>
> Ruth: Cos you're 16 now, so you can claim something can't you?
>
> Kayleigh: I wasn't going to do it until I left school because I was coming back next year, but with my mum she hasn't got a job yet she was supposed to start her job but she didn't, I don't know why she didn't but I didn't want to start claiming for myself yet cos it would be a big drop with my mum's money, so I said to her that I'm not going to do it until I finish school, but I decided now that I'm going to do it next week through the holidays because its not fair on them having to buy Tristan things all the time. I feel as if I'm relying on them all the time. Like when I go out and things if I see something nice I'd like to buy it for Tristan, or if I see something nice for myself I'd like to buy it for myself, but I never do I always spend it on Tristan, whereas if I had my own money I'd be able to get things for both of us and his food and everything. I never want to like rely on my parents all the time.

Financial independence from parents is a key marker of adulthood and as these younger women take on the adult role of motherhood it seems that their

financial reliance on their parents undermines their adult maternal status. In financial terms these mothers are still treated by the state, and as a result their parents, as children who have had children. While they try to assert their competence as parents through their parents' ability to provide for their infants, they are denied the sense of independence and self-esteem that comes from being able to provide independently and spend your own money on your children (Woollett and Phoenix 1991, Power 2005, Hamilton and Catterall 2008).

Over-16s

The young women who took part in the study and were over the age of sixteen were financially reliant on a mixture of Income Support, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit, though some were receiving Maternity Allowance and in one case Maternity Pay from an employer, as they had worked for a period of time during or in the run-up to their pregnancy. Those at the PRU were also receiving Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)[46], which, along with childcare provision at the Unit, seemed to encourage them to attend[47]. How income was made up and the amounts received from various components varied across this group of participants as some young women were living with partners whilst others remained at home with parents or were living in independent or supported accommodation (see Appendix Five for a detailed description of participants, their living arrangements and incomes). In some cases estranged fathers were contributing to the family budget, but as with

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[46] Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was a financial scheme run by the Government for students and those undertaking unpaid work-based learning and were aged between sixteen and nineteen. The EMA scheme was closed to new applicants in England in January 2011 as part of a programme of budget cuts following the financial crisis of the late 2000s.

[47] One participant from the Mother and Baby Unit was keen to get into the Pupil Referral Unit expressly to receive this extra income.

the younger mothers, this contribution was often ad hoc and unreliable. Where participants were with partners, contributions were being made more regularly. When living together state benefit was calculated jointly and was dependent on whether partners were employed and how much they earned. In the two cases where participants were co-habiting their partners' work was insecure and inconsistent. All the mothers at the MBU were living as single people and were receiving in the region of £130 per week, though most seemed unclear about what money they received and from where and were required to make a small contribution to rent and utility bills. While the pre-sixteen participants were largely reliant on their parents for all their income, many of the participants aged sixteen and over also often received financial support from their parents in the form of gifts and money. Sian, who was living on her own in supported housing, for example, received regular donations of nappies, wipes, formula and other day-to-day items from her father's partner. Sian had come to expect and rely on this resource and it greatly relieved many of her everyday money worries. When asked about this in interview Sian suggested that purchasing these items herself now would require a considerable re-assessment of her finances.

Wider family and friend networks and other irregular income

While parents provided a great deal of financial support for both the pre- and post-sixteen young women in this study, wider family and friend networks also regularly provided gifts of new or used equipment and clothing and in some instances money for participants. Indeed, as touched upon in Chapter Two many studies of working class or low income families have described how family and friend networks often help to bolster family incomes by providing such things as gifts, hand-me-downs, free childcare, small loans and

sometimes groceries (Cohen *et al* 1992, Middleton *et al* 1994, Edin and Lein 1997, Gillies 2007). Most of the young women in the study received gifts from aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, in-laws and friends, some of which were quite expensive items like prams, cots, sterilizers, Moses baskets and baby walkers. Clothes, toys and shoes were also commonly given as presents and some participants described an extensive array of gifts that were not just given at the birth of a baby, but throughout early infancy. One participant, for example, who was expecting her second child, explained that she did not need to go shopping for her first child for at least six months after she was born, because she received so many gifts of clothing and shoes from friends and family.

Gifts of money as well as more regular, everyday contributions could also be made by family members other than parents. In a focus group Selina, who had just recently turned sixteen, revealed that a number of family members, including older and younger siblings, provided an important source of income for her.

> Jess: So where do you get all your money from?
>
> Selina: I, child benefit, income support, my mum, my dad, my step-dad, my brother, my sister. [laughs]

Borrowing small amounts of money from and lending money to friends and family seemed to be quite common practice among the older participants and those at the MBU, where young women were living independently and in close proximity to each other. Lending money for bus fare, nappies or groceries until the next benefit payments were made was a feature of the accounts of a group of young women at the MBU, so that small amounts of money seemed to circulate reciprocally between them over a week or two weeks. Other

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young women in the unit were less keen to be involved in these relations of exchange and preferred to keep friendships and finance separate for fear that fall-outs could result from money not being returned on time or at all. In some cases the lending of money and other items such as clothing and CDs was restricted to only the very few who were closest to them.

Friends and family also provided an informal economy of exchange for the circulation of baby clothes and various other paraphernalia for bathing, feeding, entertaining and educating young children. As I discuss in more detail in the following chapter, although the purchasing of second-hand goods for children from charity shops, particularly baby clothing, was taboo, it was not uncommon for young women to purchase and pass on second-hand goods within tight networks of friends and family. Many of the young women had received and were using items such as prams, cots, car seats and walkers as well as baby clothes and shoes that were either passed on or purchased from friends or family members and they too frequently passed on or sold on items .to peers and relatives. These practices were initially not so obvious to me since almost all of the women vehemently denied the use of 'charity shop' goods. In observations, however, I witnessed young women organising exchanges or mentioning who they had passed items onto or who they had received them from. It was when I queried where items had come from that the prevalence of these forms of exchange became so apparent. I was also involved in this system of exchange myself when one of the participants from the Mother and Baby Unit provided me with a bag of baby boy's clothing for my own pending arrival and I was offered a used Moses basket to purchase by another young women. Clarke (2000) has made a similar observation about the invisibility of second-hand exchange amongst the mothers of her North London ethnography of forms of provisioning for children. She suggested that

the invisibility of shopping for 'nearly-new' clothing amongst her participants was because the practice was so unexceptional and a form of everyday mundane maternal work for mothers. It is quite possible that these practices of exchange may well have initially escaped my attention as my participants did not regard them as activities worthy of discussion.

The level of financial support provided by parents and extended family and friend networks that I found in my sample tends to support the findings of other research on young motherhood (Phoenix 1991, Dawson 1997, Allen and Bourke Dowling 1998, MacVarish and Billings 2010, Alexander *et al* 2010). This research tends to debunk the policy perception that early motherhood is necessarily isolating or 'excluding' for young working-class women (SEU 1999) and that young mothers live a dismal existence reliant only on their welfare payments. As Alexander *et al* (2010) point out, the young mothers and fathers in their study 'were enmeshed in multiple networks of support, which often substituted or supplemented for more formal social provisions, particularly around financing and childcare as well as emotional support' (146).

While family and friends provided an important source of income and financial support for the young women in this study, their incomes were also sometimes bolstered by the occurrence of chance, though seemingly not infrequent, 'windfalls' of cash. These 'windfalls' generally came in the form of back payments of tax and benefit[48], unexpected contributions from children's fathers, parents or other family members, ad hoc one-off jobs or in one case from injury compensation awarded to a father. For many participants this was their main way of gaining access to the larger sums of money needed to

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[48] On the other side to a back payment of benefits is also the period when money was calculated and awarded incorrectly meaning that participants may have gone through periods of being with less money.

'stock up' or buy expensive items of baby equipment. This pattern of income and expenditure seems to be consistent with the findings of other studies, which describe how money may be an unpredictable resource in low income families, resulting in irregular forms of childrearing consumption (Shropshire and Middleton 1999, Loumidis and Middleton 2000, Evans and Miles 2008, Pugh 2004). Indeed as Pugh has noted, the unpredictability of money can be equally as significant in terms of consumer practice as the lack of it. The £500 Sure Start Maternity Grant that at the time of research was available for parents living on a low income and was received by all but one of the young mothers in the study also proved to be very valuable, allowing for the purchase of larger much needed items such as prams, cots and Moses baskets. This benefit greatly relieved the pressure on the everyday budgets of young mothers living independently and on the parents of those providing for their daughters and grandchildren. For the under-sixteen young women this benefit was only available for their parents to claim and the money was then passed on to daughters. In many cases how this money was spent still seemed to be the result of negotiations between grandparents and mothers.

For both pre- and post-sixteen participants then, income was limited, though the participants under the age of sixteen seemed to suffer more pronounced restrictions in terms of their spending due to their inability to claim benefits independently and their reliance on their families. While support from friends and family as well as other irregular forms of income helped to extend expenditure possibilities, participants nonetheless often conveyed how tough it was to meet the cost of providing everything for a new baby. Restricted budgets can be problematic when buying for children is an important aspect of caring for them. As intimated above in my discussion of how the younger participants were keen to assert their ability for their parents to cover the cost

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of 'baby stuff', for the mothers in this study being able to provide materially for children formed a significant component of what it meant to be a 'good mother'. This meant that they went some length to ensure that their resources stretched to buy the items they needed for their children.

Shopping for infants and doing maternal work

In her book *Mothering the Self* Stephanie Lawler (2000a) describes how dominant discourses of EuroAmerican motherhood centre on the meeting of children's needs (above those of the mother) and for the mothers in this study meeting the needs of children before their own was central to their definitions of what it meant to mother. This was demonstrated clearly in a written exercise carried out in focus groups where participants were asked to write on a piece of paper why they considered the mother to their left a 'good mother':

'[mother] is a good mum because she is always trying to understand her child's needs'

'makes sure [son] always got everything he needs'

'[mother] is a good mum because she makes sure [daughter] has everything she needs'

'she always put [son's] needs first and you always see her with her child. She connects with [son] well'

'she always puts him first and loves him'

'She puts [son] first and dresses him up good. He always looks cute.'

'She makes sure her baby has things that she needs and also shows a lot of love towards her'

'Always making sure [son] gets everything he needs'

Like the mothers in Lawler's (2000a) study, for these young women meeting the emotional needs of their children was crucial, but for participants it was also, as many of the examples above illustrate, providing the 'stuff' that children needed that was important. This desire to provide well for children was also intensified for some young women by their own experience of growing up in low-income families and they sought to give their children *more* and a better childhood than they themselves had received. As Marie explained in interview:

Marie: I can't afford much stuff, but I always try and make sure he's got new stuff, and he's got nice stuff and everything. I always make sure like I want him to have the best, not like what my Mum and Dad gave me. I'm always going to be there, give him nice stuff, give him what he wants.

Ruth: So you wanted to give him something different?

Marie: Than what I got brought up with.

Moreover, it seemed that some young women also understood that purchasing and providing for their infants was significant to official assessments of their maternal capability. One young woman, for example, spoke to me about purchasing clothing for her child in direct response to social service intervention. The young woman who was due to receive an inspection from a social worker explained to me that her visitor would not find a problem since she always kept her flat clean and she had recently bought her daughter 'loads of new stuff'. In a subsequent conversation when I asked how the visit had gone she reiterated that the social worker was unable to find a problem since

she had purchased 'a load of new clothes' for her daughter 'not so long ago'. While I was also made aware of other participants whose midwives had come to their homes to inspect what had been purchased in preparation for their babies, it is unclear how much of the social worker's assessment was reliant on what this young woman had purchased for her daughter. What is more clear, however, is that, for this young woman, buying for her daughter was a mark of her maternal ability and she felt that it could contribute to a positive assessment of her parenting capability.

Consuming for and providing for children was, therefore, broadly seen as an important part of being a mother: caring for children and meeting their needs. Indeed many of the young women who took part in this study wanted to complete their education and get 'good jobs' to ensure they would be able to provide well for their children in the future and give them the 'stuff' of a good enough childhood. The prospect of bringing up children on meagre benefit payments and the possibility that their ability to participate in child-rearing consumption might be curtailed by lack of resources troubled many participants greatly and seemed to inform feelings of anxiety about their parenting capability (Harris *et al* 2005). As Natasha explained:

> Natasha: I just want the baby to be happy, but everyone is going to look at me like 'young mum she can't even afford to buy things'.

Although they asserted that 'good mothering' involved providing children with the 'stuff' they needed, some participants were also very aware of the kind of condemnation that could be levelled at mothers who invested too heavily in consumer spending on children. These young women were careful to assert that emotional needs were the priority and meeting the material needs of

children was not more important than devoting time, energy and creating the 'right' kind of environment for the development of responsible and happy children. Miles *et al* (1998) noted a similar down-playing of the importance of consumer culture among the young people in their study due to their awareness of the negative connotations that were associated with the role that consumer goods play in young people's lives. The discerning narrative around consumer culture (see Chapter One) was very evident in the talk of my own participants as they manoeuvred themselves into positions of respectability in terms of their own consumer practice (Thomson *et al* 2011). It was invariably both a discourse about the incompatibility between motherhood and consumption (Taylor 2004) and childhood and consumption that was invoked (Linn 2004, Palmer 2006), as Cat and Ruby discussed in a focus group:

> Cat: yeah, 'cause money they don't need like toys and things as long as they got love and security
>
> Ruby: they need you, if they aint got toys, well it does matter, but they need love and security, yeah.
>
> Learning mentor: oh it's great to hear that isn't it
>
> Ruth: So do you think clothes and toys and things are important?
>
> Ruby: Yeah
>
> Ruth: they are important?
>
> Ruby: 'cause it learns em don't it
>
> Cat: They're not important not really. But obviously it's nice to spend money on 'em and things
>
> Ruby: Yeah. Not as important as what we gotta give 'em. But they are important
>
> Cat: Materialistic init
>
> Ruby: Yeah
>
> Learning Mentor: Especially this time of year we can get carried away

Cat: Obviously clothes are important they can't go out naked (laughter), but they don't need too much of it. It's stupid going out and buying too much like I know some people that's bought clothes and the kids haven't even worn 'em where they got so many clothes.

Ruby: And another thing I don't think it's I think it's pointless when people go out and buys their kids like name stuff

Learning Mentor: Yeah

Ruby: and it's so expensive they just gets it to make their baby look smart

Ruth: yeah

Ruby: and if they spent all that money and then they need money for summat like nappies or whatever

The young women's comments at the end of this extract also demonstrate a concern with mothers spending money on expensive designer items they cannot afford, invoking a discourse about the inappropriate spending of the less affluent. They draw upon the same narratives about consumer participation that are often used against young working-class mothers like them, in order to make judgements about others (Sayer 2005, Miller 2005). Interestingly, Ruby herself was involved in the purchase of 'expensive' designer items and would only purchase particular brand-named footwear for her daughter. Yet by berating other mothers for their irresponsible consumer behaviour, Ruby attempts to abstract herself from this form of trivial and pretentious purchasing, thereby situating herself as a more sensible and responsible consumer and mother. She alludes to a reticence in her own consumer expenditure which comes with connotations of restraint, sobriety and respectability (Miller 1998a:56). In this extract we also see how the professional in the setting corroborates the discerning narrative around consumer culture, praising and authorising the young women's emphasis on the irrelevance of commodities and the frivolity of spending on name-brand

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goods. For participants there is then some complex movement to be done around the meaning of consumer culture. While providing the 'stuff' of appropriate care is important to them in terms of their ability to mother and care for their children, they must also place themselves at a distance from consumer culture in order to retain their respectability as mothers and to have their parenting legitimised by professionals.

Despite their limited financial resources and desires to not appear too 'consumerist', for these mothers buying for children was a clear priority and they strove hard to act as good mothers by consuming the 'stuff' they 'needed' to provide an appropriate level of care for their children. This entailed a great deal of budgeting, planning ahead, much shopping around to get the best deals as well as the development of a sophisticated knowledge of complex baby and maternity markets. I now explore some of these strategies for consuming for children in more detail.

Young mothers' budgeting and being 'thrifty'

In order to manage their finances and ensure they were able to cover household expenses and buy for their children, participants who were financially independent adopted strict budgeting plans, making notes of their incomings and outgoings on a regular basis. Even the under-sixteen young women adopted practices of putting relatively small amounts of money away to ensure they could purchase clothing and toys for their infants or to invest in saving accounts for when children were older. Fifteen-year-old Jess, for example, saved her Child Benefit to buy clothing for her daughter, while seventeen-year-old Marie and her partner collected loose change to put into a savings account for their son. Ruby used the return of money she lent out to

friends as a saving mechanism to buy something special for her daughter when the money mounted up. Though the young women in the Mother and Baby Unit and the other women living independently often did not have access to the finances, transport or storage space to buy in bulk (Hamilton and Cattrell 2005), many spoke about stocking up and regularly took advantage of two-for-one offers on items like baby wipes when they came up at local supermarkets.

It was also common for participants to purchase and acquire items throughout their pregnancy slowly, collecting all the items they needed for a new baby over time. Nicole, for example, began purchasing for her new baby as soon as she found out she was pregnant to ensure that she could acquire all the items she needed by the time he was born. She began spending the money she was earning working part-time in a newsagent on preparing for his arrival by buying 'bits and pieces where she could'. Many of the younger women also purchased smaller items like clothing, booties and stuffed toys with money they received from parents and family members while they were pregnant. Consuming for expectant infants over a period of time is commonplace amongst mothers and works to bring both mother and baby into existence (Layne 1999b, 2000). Indeed many of the young women described buying for babies during this time as cementing their pregnancies and it was a particularly exciting time where they imagined using objects to care for their children and dressing them up in 'cute' outfits in the future. Several described keeping boxes or suitcases of 'stuff' in their bedrooms at their parent's houses while they were pregnant and how they loved looking at all the items, frequently taking them out, cataloguing them, imagining their 'biographies' (Kopytoff 1986) and putting them back tidily in the weeks up to giving birth. It is here where these young women begin the 'real' work of caring for a 'real'

baby. For these young women, and their parents in some cases, spreading this expenditure over a period of time and collecting small items for babies during pregnancy, however, also represented an effective means of spreading the cost of the arrival of their infants. For the younger women who were financially reliant on their parents I would also suggest that the collection of these small items over time was particularly significant and intimate because of their severely limited access to money. This allowed them to make a contribution of their own and their efforts to provide for their infants as mothers were manifested in their small, yet significant offerings.

In addition many young women spoke of only purchasing baby clothing in sales, while buying clothes in larger sizes that children could grow into was common. Taylor and Niemh's comments taken from the 'consuming for babies' focus group provides an example of how this method of 'buying big' was employed:

> Taylor: Yeah, you want something that lasts so you don't have to spend nuff money all the time you have to buy ten different, back every time you go shopping, you can buy them trousers that fold up and each time when he grows you fold it down you fold it down each time he grows in to it. Lasts! Niemh: I think you do do that. Get them a size a little too big so they can grow into it.

The longevity of clothing was also important and the money spent on better quality clothing was often thought to be economical since items would not disintegrate or fade after washing.

Participants also suggested they were money-smart in terms of the places that they shopped and the branding and the identity associated with particular stores and items was regularly said to be unimportant. Indeed in terms of

baby equipment it was often the functionality of items that was said to take priority as Simone explained in interview:

> Simone: It wasn't because of the brand it's because of the stripes on the pram. It had a travel system as well, so it was quite good and it wasn't too heavy. It was big enough to keep him cosy and warm, it weren't like too heavy so it's easy to push around, and it's got my swivel wheels. Cos I didn't mind where its from but I didn't want to get like not a good make but like spend quite a bit of money on, it because I like all the seat adjustments cos I'm going to keep that one, because when baby's turned like 1½ he's still not walking properly they tend to get smaller ones, but I wanted to have one where like it weren't too big, but weren't too small so we picked that one, cos I think that one goes up to the age of 4.

The young women who took part in this study presented themselves as very eclectic in the way they shopped for baby equipment, clothing and toys, and selecting the best value stores was important. For clothing they used a combination of 'quality' high street stores including Next, Baby Gap, H&M, and Adams that were available in the town centre as well as another large Mall on the outskirts of the city, and combined these with purchases from 'cheaper' outlets such as ASDA, Tesco, and Primark. The latter were said to be commonly used only for 'basic' items such as socks, vests and sleep-suits, though in reality these stores appeared to be used for a broader set of items of clothing and footwear. Young women frequently spoke of bargains they had managed to pick up from Primark, how they had found suitable items for their children they had not expected to in the store or implied that they had managed to select the 'good' items out of the rest of the 'chaff'. Indeed there was thought to be some skill to assembling outfits from cheaper stores and many adopted practices of mixing and matching cheaper and more expensive

items in order to make children 'look good' (see also Chapter Six), something that characterises the consumer habits of many mothers across classes (see, for example, Thomson 2009). While participants purchased some name-branded items, these purchase were relatively infrequent and complimented a broader set of shopping practices for buying the bulk of clothing and footwear for infants. Branding, and particularly the branding of footwear became, however, more salient at specific times around specific items, as the following chapter illustrates.

Some young women also made use of cheaper local shops to purchase small toys and basic items of clothing for babies, but there were few that sold larger more sophisticated items of baby equipment. One particular shop that specialised in selling baby "stuff" in South Bristol seemed to be well known and used among participants, some travelling a considerable distance across the city to visit the store. The shop was thought to be of good value and generally stocked brands at the cheaper end of the market. Importantly, the store offered credit, which allowed customers to pay for purchases in instalments, providing those with less immediate access to large sums of money, the opportunity to acquire larger goods over a period of time. Argos was also a popular choice for the purchase of baby equipment and furniture and with its small overheads in terms of distribution, space and sales staff is aimed at a lower income population offering a simple and accessible means of saving money (Clarke 1998:75)[49]. This store again was seen to represent good value for money and had a large volume of stock that changed infrequently, so that items could be selected and saved for without the fear of them selling out.

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[49] Argos also offers an online retail service with delivery at a charge, though no participants purchased from the store in this way. Clarke's (1998) work also shows how Argos now has a broader appeal to middle-class consumers and that the borders between middle and working class methods of consumption are blurred through the development of new consumer knowledge and skills.

A minority of participants used catalogues to acquire goods and pay for them over a period of time. Catalogues have historically been aligned with working-class credit functions (Clarke 1998) and allow customers to receive goods immediately and pay for them in instalments. Where catalogues were used it was usually parents of mothers who were responsible for the accounts and their limited use probably reflects the age, poor credit rating and/or the temporary living arrangements of most of the participants. Internet shopping for bargains was unpopular among the young women and virtually none used the internet to shop for baby goods, although some did research potential items for purchase online and then bought them in stores. Only one participant mentioned using Ebay to source second-hand baby equipment and other participants who had purchased second-hand items preferred to search the 'Trade It' - a local paper where individuals advertise goods for sale along with telephone numbers to contact for viewings and payment is made direct to the seller. The lack of internet use may reflect participants' limited access to computer facilities and this kind of provision at the MBU, for example, was poor. Using free, reliable computer facilities usually meant spending time in a local library with a small baby. Moreover, a number of participants, particularly the younger ones, will not have owned credit or debit cards independently, which would allow them to pay online. Parents may also not have had access to payment methods needed for online payment, which points to the fact that less affluent families may not have access to purchase special online deals. The nature of internet shopping tends to require an immediacy of funds in order to make purchases and may be better utilized by those with larger amounts of disposable income (see Thomson 2009). Indeed, as was touched upon in the literature review there may be a significant variation in the way in which material items are acquired for children

depending on access to material resources, even when the items purchased may be identical (Pugh 2004, Evans and Chandler 2006). While more affluent families may make more snap decisions to purchase that would not affect the family budget, less affluent families may be more likely to put away a little each week, research items prior to purchase, as many of these young women did (see below), or use small credit facilities such as catalogues.

When shopping for larger items of baby equipment like cots and prams participants often engaged in a great deal of 'shopping around' to get the best deals. Jane, for example visited many shops before settling on the cot she finally purchased for her daughter in the Mamas and Papas sale:

> Interviewer: The cot was from Mamas and Papas?
>
> Jane: Yeah.
>
> Ruth: Why did you choose Mamas and Papas do you think?
>
> Jane: I don't know, I went to Mothercare and they was really expensive, and I was just looking round and every shop that did cots, and it was in the sale so I just got it. It weren't for the fact of it being a Mamas and Papas or anything it was in the sale so I got it, and it goes into a cot bed as well which is good, I didn't have to buy her a bed straightaway cos you can just take the sides off and it will be a bed.
>
> Ruth: Cos she can go on that until she's about four?
>
> Jane: I think it's four or five, so that's good, all for a £100.

Shopping around, however, took up a considerable amount of time, not least because of the distance some young women lived from the major shopping centres in Bristol and poor connections to public transport. Mothercare, particularly popular for baby equipment more than clothing, and Mammas and Pappas, for example, were much liked stores but were situated in a central

retail park some distance from where most participants lived. Browsing or shopping there, therefore, involved a great deal of effort and additional cost.

As Jane's comments above, and indeed Simone's too, illustrate, baby equipment was not only selected for its price but because of its practical functionality and ability to transform into another object or to facilitate multiple purposes (Baraitser 2009a). So, for example, the cot Jane purchased could change into a bed, which could potentially be used for quite a lengthy period of time and would prevent the need for her to buy a bed for her daughter when she no longer needed a cot. Simone's pram would last her son until he was four, saving her from having to buy another one at a later date. This kind of additional functionality was calculated into the real 'value' of the product and items such as high chairs that could be turned into a toddler table and chairs and 'travel systems' that incorporated car seats and were useable from birth to age three were also favoured. Marketers seem to be well aware of the money-saving appeal of products that do more than one thing and shops and catalogues stocking baby paraphernalia abound with items like an eight-in-one contraption that Carly found in one of the catalogues in the 'consuming for babies' focus group :

> Carly: Ah look at this pram it's got like an eight in one thing. Look there's a toddler travel chair, baby travel chair, pram, car seat, rear facing pushchair, carry cot, overnight bed and a pram.
>
> Ruth: Wow! Did you have a pram anything like that?
>
> Kayleigh: No mine just had a car seat
>
> Carly: Yeah. Mine was like that when I first got one.

Objects that performed more than one function and/or could be used for older infants were seen as money saving alternatives to having to buy a number of individual items to do the same tasks. Decisions about which baby paraphernalia to buy were rooted in the physical capacity of objects and the breadth of maternal work they enabled (Baraitser 2009a). As was noted in Chapter Two, contemporary markets for new mothers and babies abound with all manner of products to assist in the care of infants, while part of learning to parent is about developing knowledge of a new product world that taps into anxieties around what objects are needed to enable 'good parenting' and ensure that children's needs are met (Martens 2008). Choosing items from the mass of products available on a limited budget, therefore, requires the development of consumer knowledge about these markets and an ability to assess and select the items to deliver an appropriate level of care for babies at the right price. Focus group activities which employed a range of catalogues from various stores stocking baby clothing and equipment revealed participants' consumer knowledge and familiarity with a vast range of brands and products. Participants spoke and conversed knowingly about the availability and respective benefits of different brands of formula, bottle teats, training cups, Moses baskets, prams, baby monitors, shoes, educational toys and endless other items. As Chin (2001) has noted, consuming not only involves the act of shopping, but also all the other social activity that surrounds it - the talking about buying, the sharing and the browsing.

For the young women in this study the purchase of the 'right' baby equipment that fitted within their budget was often not random or spontaneous but well researched and thought out, as indeed it may well be for many other mothers. They appeared to adopt a very thrifty approach to shopping for baby goods using a range of stores, searching for bargains and selecting items with

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multiple functionality. It is likely that these young women's 'thrift' and money management strategies were learnt through their experiences of growing up, as they all did, in lower income families. As the research on children living in low income families suggests, children are likely to learn the complex budgeting techniques of their parents (Loumidis and Middleton 2000) and Martens *et al* (2004) argue that parents' memories of their own childhood consumer practices are very much present in the ways they themselves consume for their own children. They suggest that an empirical focus on how children learn to consume may provide valuable insights into the operation of 'habitus'[50] and how structural differences are reproduced. Thomson *et al* (2010) have also described how experiences of hardship are embedded in family histories and can reverberate across generations. The financial concerns and practices of families in the present may thus be built upon experiences of the past and several of the young women who took part in this study spoke about being taught the value of money as children and following budgeting strategies that were adopted by their mothers. Yet, on the other hand, some were keen to avoid the 'silly situations' their parents had ended up in through not managing their money effectively. Jane for example spoke about not wanting ever to borrow any money since she did not want to end up going short every week through having to pay a high interest short-term loan back, like her own mother had. Yet despite these young women's concerted efforts to manage their own money effectively and shop smartly, buying for children nevertheless also relied on the sacrifice of their own teenage consumer desires and identity projects.

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[50] The set of socially learnt dispositions, skills and ways of acting, that are often taken for granted, and which are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life

Consuming for infants and the occlusion of the self

While the participants in this study frequently described budgeting hard and shopping carefully, buying for their infants invariably relied on not buying, or buying very little for themselves. Many suggested that they put their infants' needs first, which meant they had not bought themselves clothing, shoes or trainers for long periods of time and rarely spent money on eating out or socialising. In general they seemed to indulge little or treat themselves and any available financial resource was rather focussed on buying for their children. As Marie declared:

> I don't really care what I wear. I don't really care if I wear trampy clothes right, as long as he looks nice, he's got new stuff, he's got clean stuff. I don't really care what I look like as long as he's clean and he's got nice clothes, nice toys and everything I don't really care what I look like.

The participants under the age of sixteen who were reliant on their parents for financial support had generally experienced a reduction in the financial resources directed at them by their parents, as this money was invariably now deferred to their grandchildren or shared between children and grandchildren. The younger women, therefore, received less clothing or other consumables like trainers, CDs and mobile phone credit for themselves than they had prior to becoming a mother. This, however, was not regarded as an unsatisfactory outcome, as it meant their children were rightly the focus of family expenditure. While I did not meet any young women who were suffering hardship to the extent of missing meals to provide for children as other studies have described (Cohen *et al* 1992, Nayak 2003), in some instances it was not only items that might be considered 'luxuries' or 'treats' that were being

sacrificed by the mothers in this study, but the need for such necessities as warm winter clothing. In this extract taken from a joint interview with Nicole and Jamie, the two young women joke about Nicole freezing because she had no winter coat. Their jokes perhaps elide the real hardship that is implied by their comments.

Ruth: Like you've had a back payment?

Nicole: Yeah

Ruth: And then you were able to get yourself some stuff?

Nicole: Yeah I did. I got some clothes. But I can't do that now.

Ruth: So if you got a lump sum, what would you do with it?

Nicole: I'd go and get some clothes, yeah.

Ruth: You would. But really that's the only time.

Nicole: I'd get a coat, that's the one thing I'd get.

Ruth: A coat? That's what you really want at the moment?

Nicole: Yeah, coz I aint got one at the moment so...

Jamie: She's freezing her ass off in her jumper (laughter)

Jamie also spoke in the interview about how she had had to abandon the purchase of name brand items she used to purchase for herself with the money she earned from working part-time in a pub, in order to buy for her son. Jamie's comments suggest that for young mothers, having to focus and transfer financial resources on to children may compromise the formation of their own consumer related identity projects and McCulloch *et al* (2006) have described how stylized youth identities and group affiliations may become less important when young women become mothers.

Jamie: I had Playboy Jeans, Playboy belt, tops, everything was Playboy

Ruth: But you don't buy that any more, do you?

Jamie: Na, not really. No it's just like expensive, obviously when I had the money.

Ruth: Yeah

Jamie: I would buy it, but...

Ruth: like when you were working before him and stuff?

Jamie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I used to waste all my money (laughs)

Ruth: So you have different priorities now?

Jamie: Yeah, definitely.

Ruth: So...

Jamie: More I would put him before like anything

Nicole: Yeah

Jamie: Like if I had to go without fags or something so then give him nappies, I would. Definitely nappies or milk or something

Nicole: The only money I spend on myself is fags

Ruth: Yeah?

Jamie: Yeah

Nicole: Whas that? Three pound a week?[51]

Jamie: And petrol. Thas it.

Ruth: So you don't buy yourselves any clothes or anything like that...or?

Jamie: I recently have 'cause I got a tax rebate

Ruth: Oh yeah you were saying that

Jamie: So I was able to sort of go out and buy some clothes as well but normally on a normal sort of time none of that would happen. I haven't bought clothes for my self in kuh god knows how long.

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[51] While spending money on cigarettes might be seen as an unnecessary and wasteful expense it perhaps represents a relatively small expenditure given that these young women spend little on themselves. Moreover, this is also a seen as a flexible form of expenditure that can be sacrificed for other important items that babies might need.

Although a lack of economic resources as they became mothers inevitably influences these young women's participation in stylized youth cultures their departure from them may also have signified their transition to an adult role where these investments were seen as unnecessary and less significant in their current circumstances. In a sense they may see themselves as stepping outside or as being released from the competition and insecurity associated with having the right style markers to 'fit in' as they focus their consumption on their children (Miles *et al* 1998, Croghan *et al* 2006). Yet research in the field of youth studies has not typically focussed on young women (McRobbie and Garber 1975) and Marshall and Borrill (1994) point out that young women often become less visible to researchers as they enter the domestic field. It is therefore, perhaps interesting to explore these relationships between youth culture and maternity and as is explored in more detail in the following chapter, the youth styles and preferences of the young women who took part in this study seemed to reappear and become visible again in the way in which they dressed their infants.

Moreover, while participants alluded to the abandonment of their pre-pregnancy selves and any youth group affiliation as they embarked on motherhood, the young women who took part in the study also did not work at developing and defining their new maternal selves through contemporary consumer markets for mothers as described in Chapter Two. Few bought maternity clothing, preferring to wear baggy items like track pants and jumpers they already owned throughout their pregnancies. In fact, when I probed about clothing and items for maternity my conversations were often closed down and participants were far more interested in discussing consumer items for their infants. For these young women shopping for their pregnant selves did not appear to excite them and they were not concerned with

marking their pregnant bodies through consumer fields. While many privately enjoyed the bodily situation of pregnancy and the knowledge and feeling of the growing infant in their tummies, swollen bellies could also become the site of embarrassment in a context where participants felt intimately an increased visibility in public due to their age (see Chapter Six). As Cat explained:

> Well when I was pregnant I was like really embarrassed cause I was still young I just felt so embarrassed 'cause people was looking at me walking in shops and things. I wanted to hide away just felt. No, I just hated being pregnant because everyone was like lookin, lookin. [52]

For some participants there was nothing to be gained by dressing their pregnant bodies in maternity wear that flattered or emphasised their bumps. Pregnancy was seen as a necessary corporeal prelude to the real business of mothering and was a time to prepare for the new arrival through the consumption of objects, clothing and textiles for the baby or items to assist in the work of mothering, rather than the consumption of objects for the maternal self. The excitement and enjoyment of consumption was, therefore, lived through their expectant infants and gleaned from purchasing for them rather than mothers themselves. Indeed, for many participants the *best and most* exciting aspect of being pregnant was purchasing for their children. Moreover, mothers who might potentially invest heavily in their own appearance at the expense of their children could be cast as selfish and uncaring, as Taylor did in the 'consuming for babies' focus group:

> Taylor: If you're a mum, if your child's walking on the street and the mum is in nice shoes, a nice trousers, top, accessories, make-up's all done, hair is all

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[52] It is perhaps worth noting that pregnant bodies could also be used alternatively by some women as a statement of their early fertility. Some were keen to show the visibility of the growing bellies and use them in public space as form of defiance to those who they felt saw their fertility as inappropriate.

done and the child is not looking good she's selfish. She is selfish because baby clothes are cheap. Why she should look good and her baby shouldn't be? The baby should be the one that's carrying you off. I would rather look crap and he looks good. That's the way I see it. They're babies. They're supposed to enjoy life before they know much.

Some of the well groomed celebrity mothers I showed participants pictures of in the 'becoming a mother' focus group also invited negative criticism about their 'fakeness', how they were 'too thin' or didn't look like 'real' mothers. Although limited finances may have prevented participants investing in these maternity markets, I would suggest that it is through their non participation these young women were also able to locate themselves as 'good' mothers who put the needs of their children first. Indeed it seemed that they did not desire to invest in consumer markets for mothers and their action may be read as a slight against a preoccupation with the self in maternity. For these young women 'real' maternity was reliant on an investment in their children's needs above their own. It is by caring for their children rather than caring for the self that they locate themselves as 'good' mothers. Although contemporary markets for maternity appear to exclude them, they also exclude themselves from them and I would suggest that making particular investments in their caring roles may be something that was particularly significant for these young women given that (as is explored in more detail in the following chapter) they experience much stigmatisation and that at the time they had little education and work history to shore up other forms of value around the self. As other scholars have argued caring for others provides an important source of value and respectability for working-class women where there is an absence of other opportunities for the development of self worth (Skeggs 1997, McDermott and Graham 2005, Gillies 2007, Skeggs 2009, Alldred and David 2010). The

subjectivity of working-class women it is often argued is less individualised and defined in more relational terms than that of men or middle-class women (Skeggs 1997 and 2004, Gillies 2007). My participants were not the privileged women of late modernity visible in consumer culture, investing in their maternal appearance as a 'lifestyle project', and nor did they desire to be. As Taylor's comments above illustrate it is the baby who 'should be the one that's carrying you off' and while participants did not enter into contemporary marketing for the making of the maternal self, as data chapters Six and Seven illustrate in more detail, the maternal self was marked and displayed through material culture in the dress of infants, the consumption of tattoos of babies' names etched on the bodies of participants and in maternal jewellery.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the material circumstances of the young women who took part in this study and how they managed their resources to consume for their children. I have described how the mothers in the study were managing on very limited incomes, though individual circumstances varied and the young women under the age of sixteen suffered particular exclusion from material resources. While participants' experiences of material exclusion were tempered by the financial contributions of family and friend networks and the chance occurrence of financial 'windfalls', participants nevertheless regularly complained of financial difficulty. Despite their limited incomes consuming for children was a priority for participants and they employed a range of budgeting and smart shopping techniques to ensure that they were able to make purchases for their young children. Although these young women were consuming on low incomes they did not appear to be the 'flawed' and 'excluded' consumers that Bauman (1998) described and like young working-

class women in other studies (Skeggs 1997, Thomson and Holland 2003, West *et al* 2006) they appeared to be very much integrated into consumer culture. Their budgeting and shopping strategies enabled them to act as 'good mothers' by allowing them to buy for their children and the fact that they were able to do this on a budget allowed them to further to articulate a competency around their maternal and consumer practice. Indeed as Miller (1998a) has described there is much respectability to be gained from being 'thrifty' and Hamilton and Catterall (2008) have suggested mothers managing on a low income can be empowered through their ability to cope in such circumstances. I also described how buying for children often relied on the sacrifice of participants' own consumer needs and youth identity projects and I suggested that participation in youth style groupings may become less significant as young women embarked on the role of motherhood. In addition, I outlined how participants did not invest in developing their own maternal selves through consumer culture, but by focussing on the needs of their children they were able to locate themselves as good mothers, who put their children before themselves.

In recent years, amid a culture of rising credit card debt and reduced saving, the Government has expressed concerns around the personal spending of the nation and under New Labour personal finance became part of the school curriculum in England, Scotland and Wales from September 2000. At the time of research the young women at both sites were completing financial education courses in class time. Though not aimed specifically at those on lower incomes, the rationale behind implementation of these kinds of courses is often based on the suggestion that the acquisition of money management techniques will avoid the reproduction of inequality (Loumidis and Middleton 2000). As Cohen *et* al (1992) have suggested these initiatives tend to imply

that hardship may be alleviated if citizens were only able manage their money more effectively. Indeed as was explored in the previous chapter the working classes are often constructed as irresponsible consumers who cause their own poverty, in part, by wasting money on expensive and 'unnecessary' commodities that they cannot, and should not, be able to afford. My findings, however, provide striking evidence of resources in terms of the skilful management of budgets and clever shopping strategies that are often unacknowledged in policy and popular accounts of young mothers and of working-class people (McNulty 2010). This exploration of the consumer practices of young low- income mothers suggests that, contrary to public opinion, the less affluent may rather be very responsible consumers who are already very adept at managing their money and are calculated and careful with their resources. Concerns about personal spending are likely to persist following the financial crisis of the late 2000s as high unemployment, rising inflation, stagnating salaries and the implementation of austerity measures threatens to not only squeeze the poor even tighter, but the middle too. In the current climate where the notion of being careful with money, 'tightening belts' and managing resources effectively becomes particularly salient and for an increasing number of families, a real necessity we might also ask what we can learn from those who are already adept at living on limited budgets, rather than what we can teach them.

Nevertheless I do not wish to paint a uniform picture of the 'noble' poor struggling to provide for their families without acknowledging how participants in this study may also have been implicated in the presentation of themselves as responsible, pragmatic consumers. As has already been noted participants seemed to be aware of discourses that cast excessive patterns of consumption as unnecessary and irresponsible and there is much to be gained from being

seen to be a respectable mother who is restrained in terms of consumer practices and who manages her finances well (Miller 1998a). The young women who took part in the study may, therefore, have been keen to demonstrate their restraint and ability to manage their finances and to locate themselves as responsible consumers and mothers in interviews with me and in wider research outputs. As the following chapter shows, they were familiar with presenting themselves to others and promoting themselves as competent mothers. Moreover, there may have been other young women I encountered who declined to take part in the interview stage of research as they were unhappy to speak about their financial situations or their adoption of more 'risky' or 'disordered' consumer behaviours (Griffin 1997).

Chapter Six: Being a 'good mother': identity and display

Introduction

The previous chapter described how, for the young mothers in this study, consuming for their children was an important act of mothering and they made conscious efforts to ensure they were able to buy the 'stuff' their children needed, in spite of their limited access to financial resources. This chapter focuses on how commodities also featured in participants' *displays* of 'good' mothering, in a context where they experienced a sense of visibility and potential judgement about their maternal capability. It is suggested that for the mothers in this study, the appearance and adornment of infants provides an important site for the public demonstration of their ability to provide and care for children appropriately. While there is a lack of focus on mothers' own appearance, 'the look' of the infant acts as an important site where participants' identities as 'good mothers' are played out. It is also suggested that where mothers' own youth identities are abandoned as they embark on motherhood, these are present in the adornment of infants as children come to represent the stylistic preferences of mothers. The chapter begins by exploring how the young mothers in this study felt themselves to be *seen* by others before looking at how dressing and presenting their infants allowed

them to publicly articulate a form of 'good mothering' in the face of felt public surveillance and condemnation, and to express their own youth styles.

'They look at you like trash" - on being the subject of local surveillance

Like young mothers in other studies, the participants in this research were acutely aware of pejorative popular narratives that circulated about teenage pregnancy and parenthood and felt the social stigma associated with early fertility intimately (Kirkman *et al* 2001, Whitehead 2001, Arai 2003b, Arai 2007, McDermott and Graham 2005, Hirst *et al* 2006, YWCA 2008, Alldred and David 2010, Formby *et al* 2010). In my field notes, I regularly recorded young women talking about how teenage parents were negatively perceived and many of the young women believed that they were popularly thought of as 'slags', sexually loose and promiscuous and were thought to be 'too young' to have acquired the skills to mother or the resources to provide financially for their children. They also suggested that their motivation to become mothers and their moral character was regularly undermined by the popular and entrenched public assumption that young women got pregnant in order to claim council housing or welfare benefit.

Yet while my original exploration of the media representation of teenage mothers (see Chapter Four) had been premised on the idea that media imagery would be salient in participants' everyday experience of maternity, focus group activities revealed that, while there was a broad sense that the media was implicated in the creation, distribution and perpetuation of negative stereotypes about young mothers, it was local 'publics' (Baraitser 2009b) that carried far more significance for these young women. When probed few

participants were able to give specific media examples of the negative treatment of young mothers and only a handful when shown the image of the caricature Vicky Pollard from the comedy sketch show *Little Britain* in the 'becoming a mother' focus group identified it as a particularly damning portrayal of teenage motherhood. Some did not quite appreciate the performance of a man as young woman with the capability to birth children and others simply found it comedic and therefore light-hearted. This perhaps highlights the way in which such discrimination and name calling can be masked as irony and satire (Lawler 2005a, Tyler 2008), but here I also want to draw attention to the ways in which media discourses were marginal to these young women's experiences of maternity and discrimination. Media representation appeared to be relatively unimportant and it was hostile encounters with professionals and members of the public in their local communities that were far more prevalent in these young women's talk. While both the media and policy treatment of the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy may affect the way in which the wider population understands early fertility, the treatment of young mothers, their entitlement to resources and indeed young mothers' own perception of the level of negative attention early fertility attracts, the young mothers in this study themselves experienced 'stigma' on a much more local basis - in the 'non places' of late modernity where much mothering takes place (Baraitser 2009a); on buses or in shopping establishments; but also in their local communities with mothers, family or peers and in contacts with services.

Many young women in this research, for example, provided accounts of feeling unfairly treated by health care professionals, which they believed to be a result of their youthfulness. On several occasions young women reported being encouraged to terminate their pregnancies after they had made the

decision to become mothers. According to one young woman her social worker advised her to have an abortion while another was referred for a termination by her GP without her consent and arrived at the appointment unknowingly. Sixteen-year-old Selina spoke in the 'becoming a mother' focus group about her own decision to continue with her pregnancy being second-guessed by professionals, which is also corroborated by fifteen-year-old Jess's experience:

> Selina: I went to [hospital] to have my dating scan when I was pregnant and the midwife was like ah are you sure you wanna keep the baby. It's like, it's just annoying.
>
> Jess: That's what they kept saying to me!

Many young women believed they had received poor treatment at antenatal appointments and on labour wards and while the young women's age was rarely marked out by practitioners, participants felt it to be a determinant of the level of care they received. Natasha for example, below, described in a focus group her disappointment with hospital staff at her first scan and how excluded she felt from an experience she had expected to be joyful.

> Natasha: When I went to go for my first scan I walked in and they was all chatting to me normal and then my information came up on the screen and they found out I was like 16 and they just stopped talking to me and I was on the bed and they didn't even tell me what was going on and they was pointing to everything and chatting between themselves and I was like what's that? Obviously cause I could see the head and I was like "is there anything wrong with it"? And they were like "what do you think" and it's like well obviously I don't bloody know. And they were like chatting to me like "oh is this your boyfriend" and "who's this littlen" cause we had my boyfriend's nephew with us

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and they were just chatting away and they looked at the screen and I saw them looking at each other and they just stopped chatting to me....I just ignored them and said I want four copies of the photo and then we left. My boyfriend got angry.

It is important to note that some participants reported positive experiences with professionals, particularly with local Teenage Pregnancy Midwives assigned specifically to providing antenatal care for younger women. Some of those participants who were assigned social workers also found them to be supportive and helpful through pregnancies as well as post-natally. Though some recent research stresses that teenage parents wish to be seen and treated like 'any other mum or dad' (Alexander *et al* 2010), these findings perhaps underscore the value of providing dedicated, non-judgemental support services for young parents (Hirst *et al* 2006, Formby *et al* 2010).

A minority of young women also reported enduring name calling and rumour mongering from friends and peers. Kayleigh, Nadia and Chelsea, for example, spoke in the 'becoming a mother' focus group about school friends who had suggested they were promiscuous and made unkind remarks about the paternity of their children when, as they pointed out vociferously, they were in monogamous relationships with the fathers at the time of their conceptions and had had few sexual partners.

> Nadia: Like people from my school...They was like she don't know who the dad is, she's a slag and everything.
> Kayleigh: Who said that?
> Ruth: What other pupils?
> Nadia: People from my school my old one.
> Ruth: Were they like your old mates and stuff?

Kayleigh: Yeah that's what my old friends were like as well. They was calling me a right slut.

Chelsea: I don't know what anyone says about me. I don't really care.

Nadia: I didn't tell anyone and then everyone just sort of found out really.

Kayleigh: On my god! My old best mate...

Chelsea: Why did they think that you didn't know the dad?

Kayleigh: My old best mate [best mate] she told me that she had an abortion and a miscarriage...

Nadia: Oh I don't know we're still together and everything but people just decided to make...

Kayleigh: Yeah my old best mate [best mate]...She told me that she had an abortion, miscarriage everything right and then when I found out I was pregnant and keeping it she was calling me everything like stupid and that lot for keeping a baby, stupid for getting pregnant. I mean she told me she's been pregnant so many times and miscarried and everything.

Ruth: Yeah

Chelsea: But it's not stupid and it don't like people as well look down you to say you're a slag as well don't they but I've only slept with the person I'm with so it don't make you a slag just cause your young that's what I think as well.

Nadia: Yeah

Kayleigh: I've only slept with two people!

Nadia: My friend was like oh you have to get rid of it and I was like no I'm like five months pregnant I'm not getting rid of my baby now!

For most of the young women direct confrontation with professionals, with peers or members of the public, though defining of their experience when it occurred, seemed to be relatively infrequent, however. Yet participants maintained a deep sense of themselves as visible to the public eye and the target of potential condemnation. Many described feeling 'looked at' in their local communities, as well as other areas they frequented, in the city and one

focus group participant described feeling as if 'other people' were always 'looking at her like trash'. In this extract from a joint interview Nicole and Jamie speak about feeling scorned in public:

Nicole: It's like even when I walk over there [local shopping centre] I see people doggin' me up[53].

Ruth: Really?

Nicole: Yeah

Jamie: Or people on the bus

Nicole: Oh yeah!

Jamie: If you're on like a bus and they turn their nose up and things like that.

The external surveyor, however, was rarely identified explicitly and it seemed that the young women were subject to surveillance from both real and imaginary onlookers. It was inevitably a vague category of 'people' who were watching and casting judgement. Marie's comments in interview epitomise the way in which the young women spoke about this glare from 'everywhere and nowhere' and at the end of the extract Marie's narrative of surveillance is corroborated by her sister's similar experience when pushing Marie's son around the town centre in his pram.

Marie: Yeah, you can tell if you're a young mum you can tell when you're pushing a pram people look down at you, give you dodgy looks and everything, you can just tell. Some people look and 'oh what have I done, what I have done', but you get these other ones who said 'whatever, so what'. Like I'm a teenage mum so what's your problem?

Ruth: Where do you find it most? Is there like a particular place?

Marie: In town, in supermarkets and Asda, and everything, and in babies'

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[53] Looking at someone in a visibly condescending and sometimes confrontational manner.

clothes shops as well, some people look down at you.

Ruth: In the baby shops?

Marie: Yeah, in the baby shops as well.

Ruth: So it's like when you're going shopping and that really.

Marie: Or like you're just walking down the street, walking to the doctors, and then in the doctor's as well.

Ruth: From the doctors or . . . ?

Marie: No, inside the doctors, when you're waiting for the doctor, sometimes people give you dodgy looks. Just look at the baby and say 'oh so cute', and give you dodgy looks.

Ruth: So what happens like you said in the baby shop, what would happen? Has anything happened?

Marie: No, just looks, always getting looked at like people looking down at you. People look at you and then look at your baby, and look at you. Even my sister, I keep saying to

my sister that if you're young and got a baby you get looked at and she didn't believe me, but when she looked after [son] every single person she went past gave her a dodgy look, and its like 'yes see, now you understand?', and she went 'yeah, I do understand now'.

Ruth: And how old is she?

Marie: 17, so even she realised it when she was pushing him. She didn't even believe me.

Ruth: And you can think of specific bad experience you had even at the doctors?

Marie: Not really, it's not the professionals, its just normal day people, just like Looking down at you. They don't even say nothing its just dodgy looks.

Ruth: You're just kind of aware?

Marie: Yeah

Interestingly it is in spaces of consumption that Marie highlights that this form of surveillance often occurs and this was something that was described by many participants. Natasha was one young woman who felt particularly insecure about the way she would be judged when shopping for 'baby stuff':

> 'Every time I walk into a certain shop people look at my face and look at my belly and then look at me picking up something and then putting it back down again and walking out of the shop because I can't afford it. And it's just I feels like people look down on me and I don't like that feeling. I mean I don't really care, it's just I'd rather go shopping with someone else 'cause I don't like that feeling'.

The findings of other studies corroborate the finding that places of consumption are a site where young working-class women can feel fundamentally dehumanised (Skeggs 1997, Hunter *et al* 2005:11).

For these young women it was, therefore, not a clash with the more abstract and distant media that impacted on their consciousness and experience of mothering, but an everyday sense of public visibility and the painful realisation of direct hostility, real or imagined. It was stigma from a much more local 'public' that they internalised and, as is now explored in more detail, they inevitably resisted.

Resistance and resilience to local stigma

Most of the young mothers who took part in this study strenuously denied the social stigma they felt was associated with early fertility and engaged in much work to develop alternative narratives about their parenting and construct

themselves as 'good' mothers, a finding endorsed by other research (see Kirkman *et al* 2001 and McDermott and Graham 2005 for example). Many claimed that they didn't care what 'other people' thought, since they knew they were good mothers and were managing to look after their children well with the resources they had available to them. Age was generally perceived to be inconsequential, since being a 'good mother' was achievable at almost any stage in life. As fifteen-year-old Jess put it: 'it don't matter really do it? It's just whether you're gonna be a good mum or not'. Waiting to become a mother was thought to provide few additional benefits, qualities or skills for raising and caring for children. Giving children what they needed, it was thought, could be achieved by mothers of any age, as this extract of focus group talk between Taylor and Niemh in the 'becoming a mother' focus group illustrates:

> Taylor: They [people on the street] don't say nothing but I am like what are they thinking? 'cause I'm seventeen and got a baby. But I am just like what are they thinking. But I am this kind of person like you wouldn't want to say them things to my face, you really wouldn't want to say that to my face 'cause you wouldn't like the outcome. In a way I do wonder what they say, but in a way I don't care. I think whatever!
>
> Niemh: I was just gonna say that people do look at you and stare at you but I don't see why they're staring. What can't we do that a thirty-year-old mother can do? We can give them as much love and attention and give them an education and things. I don't understand what they're thinking.

Some young women also identified older mothers who were alcoholics or drug users in order to assert that being older did not necessarily guarantee good parenting. Many also appealed to the fact that their own mothers had had their first child as teenagers and had managed very well and focussed on the

benefits of having children at a young age. These included being closer to or growing up alongside children, being able to enjoy experiences together, being able to connect better with children and being able to build a career once child-rearing responsibilities were complete.

Despite assertions that they were able, good mothers and that there were positive aspects to their early fertility, when prompted in focus groups, it was not uncommon for participants to draw upon popular narratives about the 'right time' to have children. Some suggested that it would have been better to wait to have children until you had 'lived' a little more, been on holidays, attained a higher level of education or were in a more stable relationship. Nevertheless, the dominant pattern was one of a construction of positive 'reverse discourses' about teenage motherhood (McDermott and Graham 2005:72) and having children at an older age was sometimes re-cast against teenage childbearing as odd, abnormal and irresponsible, as Taylor and Niemh did in the 'becoming a mother' focus group:

> Niemh: It's weird seeing elder people with children. Now like when I see...
>
> Taylor: Yeah, thas what I find weird when you see some...
>
> Niemh: It is when...
>
> Taylor: 45 year old person with a little baby that they just had. No that is weird!
>
> Niemh: Yeah, coz...
>
> Taylor: Don't be staring at me when you're 45 with a young one.
>
> Niemh: Yeah, it is strange.

When discussing some of the older celebrity mothers who appeared in the images I presented in focus groups, many young women expressed concern

that they were 'too old' to be having children. In fact Kayleigh informed me that at twenty-eight I was too also 'a bit old' to be having my first child!

Nevertheless, despite emphasising their own maternal capability and disputing the negative narratives associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood, many participants believed there were 'other' younger women who were unsuitable carers and too immature to bring up children. Some also invoked publicly entrenched notions of ('other') teenage mothers getting pregnant in order to obtain social housing and welfare payments. As noted above, participants identified this as being part of the negative public perception of teenage mothers, yet they almost simultaneously pointed out how such a preposterous notion was not characteristic of them, their family or their peers. As participants from the Mother and Baby Unit discussed in the 'becoming a mother' focus group:

Sadie: If someone is stupid enough to give up their life you know no sleep, no thingy, be responsible 24hrs to get a flat then that's pretty stupid really.

Ruth: What do other people think about that?

Sadie: It's said a lot really.

Sadie: You hear it in the media as well.

Ruth: In the media?

Sadie: Heard it before saying that young mums getting pregnant to get places well?

Nicole: Everyone thinks like that really don't the?

Charlie: It's stupid who has a baby to have a flat a baby's like a lifetime responsibility

Facilitator: Absolutely!

Cath: Yeah you don't have a baby just to get a flat.

Dina: Yeah my niece said that she is gonna do that.

Ruth: Really?

Dina: Get pregnant so she just gets a flat. I said it aint that easy.

Facilitator: Have you told her how tough it is looking after a little one?

Ruby: I think it happens sometimes.

Ruth: Do you think so?

Ruby: You do hear it.

Dina: I've heard it around.

Ruby: I think it's cruel...You shouldn't bring a baby in the world just to get a flat. It's stupid. It's not fair.

Dina: But thas what people say about us. They only got kids...or they only got babies so they can get a flat.

Similar distancing and shifting behaviour has been noted amongst 'excluded youth' by MacDonald and Marsh (2005) and those in the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle by Shildrick *et al* (2010), where disparaging stereotypes of the poor that emphasise personal culpability or moral failure are denied by participants, yet freely applied to 'other people' beyond their immediate circles. For the young mothers in this study the process of 'othering' clearly worked to set them apart as respectable 'good mothers' with legitimate pregnancies – usually described as unplanned and therefore not calculated to claim welfare payments - in opposition to those who were unfit and/or better fitted with the common public perception of immoral welfare dependent teenage mothers (see also McDermott and Graham 2005). This 'othering' of mothers both old and young along with the construction of alternative narratives around their mothering can be seen as a form of identity work in which young women make use of the discursive resources available to them (McDermott and Graham 2005: 71, Miller 2005, Sayer 2005) to position themselves as 'good' mothers claiming the social status associated with this role. Findings from this study suggest that material culture and more specifically what is purchased for

babies and the way they are dressed and turned out act as a further resource for the configuration and maintenance of the 'good mother' identity, right at the visual interface with the gaze of local 'others'.

Material culture - appearance, resistance and respectability

All of the young women in this study, as may be common with many mothers (see Miller 1997, Thomson 2009 for example), took great pride in the appearance of their children and enjoyed dressing and shopping for them. They frequently went to great lengths to ensure their children looked tidy to go out in public and, as Jamie and Nicole make clear, it is particularly in public spaces where the appearance of their children is of great importance (see also Lustig 2004):

Nicole: Say like if I went to group [inside the Mother and Baby Unit] or whatever obviously it don't matter here, but if I went to the park I'd try and make sure he looked good like 'cause other people see him don't they? And they think how cute he looks in that or whatever.

Jamie: It's just the first impression isn't it?

Nicole: Yeah

Jamie: It's like if we were to maybe meet some new people out of here then he would be like dressed up or like I dunno....

In both interviews and focus groups many young women spoke about wanting their children to 'look good' and it was the display of appropriate 'nice' clothing that frequently appeared in their talk in interviews and focus groups as part of a demonstration to onlookers of their ability to cope and care for their

children, as Taylor's agitated conversation with an imaginary onlooker in the 'becoming a mother' focus group illustrates:

> Taylor: But I'm thinking, like what I think is like you looking at me saying I'm young and I got a child. LOOK AT MY CHILD and say he's growing well, he looks alright, he's got on nice clothes, so the same thing that you used to do when you're a parent I am doing and I can do it even better! So what's your point? That's what I think so in a way I don't care. But you still wouldn't wanna say it to me!

Significantly, it is the 'nice clothes' that this young woman dresses her son in, as well as the developmental marker of growth, that demonstrates her ability as a capable, competent mother and displaces the negative value attributed to her as a young parent. Indeed there was a definite sense that these young women had to work harder than other mothers to 'prove themselves' to the outside world. Jane's explanation of her rationale for wanting to purchase 'better things' for her daughter, for example, makes explicit the pressure to prove other people wrong and the power of material goods to help in her struggle to do so:

> Ruth: Do you think that is the case that people look at you differently because you're young?
>
> Jane: Yeah, that's why I try and get everything better and things like that. When I first had [daughter] I didn't think they think I was going to cope plus specially living up here they thought it was like a drug hostel. That's obviously what they thought, but I proved them wrong.
>
> Ruth: That's why you want her to look nice really so people don't think that?
>
> Jane: That's why it's important for me.
>
> Ruth: And do you think because you do that, that proves them wrong?

Jane: No, it don't prove them wrong cos she's got a Tesco baby-grow on, but if you keep on looking nice.

Jane's retort at the end of the extract about what her daughter was wearing *not* proving onlookers wrong relates to the fact that at that moment her daughter was wearing *just* a Tesco baby-grow. The implication is, however, that if her daughter were wearing something else 'nice', then Jane would be able to assert her competence as a parent to those whom she believed might question her maternal ability. If babies were not dressed properly for their public, participants perceived there was a risk that their maternal status could be subject to question. As this extract from one of the 'consuming for babies' focus groups that were carried out at the PRU underscores, a poorly dressed baby could result in the application of the 'bad mother' identity and Nadia and Chelsea here highlight the particular necessity of dressing a baby well when you are a young mother:

Ruth: Why do you think it's important that they look good?

Kayleigh: Coz you can't have your baby looking trampy can you?

Chelsea: Coz you're the one that gotta look after it and like people like...

Nadia: I know especially when you're young and stuff it's like ah if your baby looks a state it's like oh yeah you're a bad mum can't even dress your baby.

Ruth: So it's important?

Chelsea: And plus when you're young you like the best don't you for your baby, if you know what I mean.

Nadia: Yeah

It is here where we see these young women 'dressing' and 'displaying' their babies for a general local audience that exists in the spaces they frequent. For these young women, audiences, however, could also be constituted by those

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closer to them like social workers, family members or peers. For some young women their own mothers became significant spectators and 'dressing' children featured as a way of proving maternal ability, where parents had previously been critical of their pregnancies. As Jamie and Nicole discussed in their joint interview:

> Nicole: But if he goes out over my mum's or his mum's or whatever then I dress him up
>
> Ruth: Yeah
>
> Nicole: I like him to look good. Cause otherwise they'll think oh you know I seen him wear that last time and it's dirty still, do you know what I mean?
>
> Jamie: Yeah
>
> Nicole: It's like you wanna impress 'em to make em...
>
> Gemma: To show them you're a good mum, I think.

Selina also spoke in the 'becoming a mother' focus group about the potential for her own family to evaluate her on the basis of how her child looked and the clothing she dressed her daughter in:

> Selina: I just prefer to uhm I prefer people to come and say oh my baby looks nice than why's she got on that? Sort of thing
>
> Ruth: And do you think people would say that?
>
> Selina: yeah
>
> Ruth: Who'd you think would say that?
>
> Selina: Well my family. My mum or my brother will say it to me. They'll be like why has she got on that that doesn't go with that and stuff like that. But they never said it to me before so...
>
> Jess: I couldn't find a baby-grow to go with her dress today so I had to put a red and white stripy baby grow on with a denim dress with pink on it with pink

tights [laughter]. Coz I couldn't find nothing else to go with it and that was the only thing she had that would look better than anything else I had.

Ruth: Does that bother you then?

Jess: Yeah!

Selina: Yeah. Bringing them into school looking all...

Jess: I was going mad!

Ruth: So might people in school say something? Other girls?

Selina: Nah, they wont say nothing it's just...

Jess: I don't care what other people think.

Selina: They might look at the babies funny and stuff like that. I just don't like it when people look at me funny or my baby.

Jess and Selina's comments also illustrate that peers could form an important audience. Coming to school, therefore, presented an everyday challenge to ensure that children 'looked good', in order to avoid poor assessment by other students. As Selina and Jess's conversation implies, creating a babies' look relies not only on buying 'nice' baby clothing but assembling it and putting it together. Jess's comments describing her agitation at not being able to find the correct colour baby-grow to match her daughter's dress reflects the importance of assembling matching baby clothing and alludes to some of the mundane, yet intricate complexities involved in managing the 'logic of clothing' for a small child and 'dressing' them for the outside world. While there has been little research on the work involved in dressing infants, Woodward (2005) has noted that dressing is a daily dilemma of assembling clothing 'which involves the mediation of factors such as social normativity and expectations, as dressing involves not only individual preferences but fundamental cultural competences (23)'. Moreover, Miller and Clarke's (2002) discussion of their sample of North London mothers has suggested that women's relationships with clothing and fashion are fundamentally structured

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by anxiety over potential social embarrassment wherein everyday encounters with aesthetic choice are fraught. Dressing is often not a heedless task but a practice that involves careful consideration, attention to detail and knowledge about social expectations, acceptability and status. Transferring these ideas specifically to the dressing of infants, I would suggest that preparing young children for the outside world, while a banal, every-day practice, involves a great deal of thought, practical organisation and consideration about how the appearance of young children will be received in social encounters. Jess's comments here illustrate that dressing a child for the outside world can be troubling and decisions must be made about what to prepare in advance, matching socks or tights must be found and it all must be laundered, ironed and assembled in time for the 'look' to be received in public, that is, of course, if clothes do not end up covered in food, dribble, puke or other bodily fluids before leaving home. In case of this eventuality an equally well thought-out change of clothing must usually be brought along with infants to school. For the under-16 students who attended the PRU every day, the work that went into ensuring the suitable appearance of their infants for school must have been immense. Dressing babies is part of the banal everyday caring work that mothers engage in but these processes of decision making and preparation were also sources of excitement and pleasure for participants and many described planning what their infants would wear for different events well in advance. For participants assembling 'the look' of infants for the outside world was, therefore, an important task that involved much domestic work and had to be well thought out and organised. Indeed it was thought that there was some skill to assembling the clothing of infants and participants frequently suggested that making a baby 'look nice' was not reliant on the purchase of particularly expensive or name-brand clothing, but the ability to select and put the 'right' items together. Branding did become salient at certain times and

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around certain items, however, and it was very important to participants that baby clothing was always 'new'. I now go on to explore in more detail what was involved in making sure infants were dressed appropriately for their 'publics'.

Maintaining 'nice' - on branding and only buying new

As the previous chapter has already detailed, the young mothers in this study narrated themselves as careful shoppers, who were not in the habit of spending large sums of money on clothing that their children would grow out of quickly or ruin easily. As Cat and Ruby's comments in the previous chapter suggest buying expensive designer clothing for babies was seen as a stupid and unnecessary expense. Participants broadly presented themselves as adopting unprejudiced shopping practices when purchasing clothing for their infants, looking for the best value rather than spending on labels. While some suggested they preferred more expensive high street stores like Next and Baby Gap, 'cheaper' stores aimed at lower income shoppers such as Primark, Tesco or Asda, were also acceptable, particularly for the purchase of small everyday items such as socks, sleep-suits, baby-grows and vests. My attempts to suggest that their buying was influenced by the brand of clothing or the store where it was purchased were often refuted by participants. The priority was that baby clothing 'looked good' and was aesthetically pleasing, rather than being a particular brand and with the expansion of outlets for affordable children's clothing like Primark, Tesco and Asda, 'nice' clothing for babies, it was suggested, could be picked up cheaply at a range of more affordable stores. Babies, it was also often said, could easily 'look good' in inexpensive clothing given their innate 'cuteness'. There was, nevertheless, a certain amount of skill to being able to select and assemble items of clothing

from more affordable ranges. With this resource at hand, children dressed in cheaper alternatives could look equally as good, or better than children who were dressed head to toe in costly designer wear, as Taylor's comments from one of the 'consuming for babies' focus groups illustrated clearly:

> Taylor: If you look at it this way, yeah, alright, look at celebrities, every single thing that their child wear is name-brand and designer and if my son or her son was to stand beside one of those celebrity child or children they will put the celebrity child or children to shame. Because the top might cost a hundred pound but it's like not fashion sense. How does that make her look good? Because it's from Debenhams or Harrods you're gonna buy it? Yeah, I just think of it that way as well if it looks good, buy it!
>
> Learning Mentor: Yeah, absolutely.
>
> Taylor: If it makes them look good buy it but don't buy it because it's got name on it and it's from Timberland. If it look good buy it!

This belittling of the fashion ability of her more affluent counterparts works to assert Taylor's own competence as both a consumer and a mother where she was perhaps not in a position to purchase more expensive designer items in any case. Skeggs (1997) noted similar behaviour amongst her young, female working-class participants who while seeking to emulate middle-class feminine style often ridiculed and held the middle classes in contempt. Middle-class 'style' was thought to be lacking as one participant exclaimed 'they haven't got a clue about style, about what to wear, about how to put things together. If I had that much money I'd look fucking brilliant' (Cynthia, 1992 in Skeggs 1997:93). Fashion, Skeggs suggests, is usually an important form of working-class cultural capital (85) and 'style' is often used as a means of generating local worth and value (see also Chapter Two).

Although participants claimed that branding, expense and where baby clothing was bought from was unimportant, I noted many incidents in my field notes where cheaper brands of baby clothing were publically mocked. In some of the focus groups too, participants at times described their reticence for the cheaper brands of baby clothing, as this extract of talk between Selina and Jess illustrates:

> Ruth: What about like Tesco, Asda?
>
> Jess: No. Well, Asda I got her some stuff in there
>
> Selina: I dunno but it's like some it's like Tesco I can never find anything I like in there.
>
> Teacher: But if you went into Tesco and saw something that you liked would you buy it even if it was Tesco.?
>
> Selina: No
>
> Jess: No
>
> Selina: If it had that name on it called Cherokee then I wouldn't buy it.
>
> [laughs]
>
> Jess: No
>
> Teacher: If it had what?
>
> Ruth: Cherokee like the Tesco brand
>
> Maggie: Oh right. Could you not cut the label out of the back?
>
> Selina: No!

Focus groups therefore appeared to act as spaces where particular consumer identities, which relied on *not* shopping from cheaper stores, were acted out in front of peers (see also Chapter Three). Participants, therefore, seemed to enact something of a 'consumer paradox' (Miles *et al* 1998, Croghan *et al* 2006) in their explanations of how they purchased for their infants whereby they simultaneously located themselves as the purchasers of the 'right' brands

for their children but also as sensible, thrifty shoppers and mothers for whom branding was of no concern.

For the participants in this study, buying items from more expensive ranges tended to indicate an ability to be able to finance that kind of purchase, while buying cheaper brands of baby clothing suggested a lack of financial capacity. On several occasions when asked why participants' preferred particular brands they suggested outright it was because they were more expensive, sometimes subsequently laughing off and going back on their apparently shallow remarks. Children's footwear for many participants, although not all[54], represented a specific visual site where branding came to be particularly salient, as the following two extracts from individual interviews illustrate:

> Ruth: So these are Nike?
>
> Jane: Yeah
>
> Ruth: Is that a good brand to you then?
>
> Jane: Yeah
>
> Ruth: Why would you choose Nike?
>
> Jane: Cause they're the best – They're the biggest brand
>
> Ruth: Would you ever choose her a pair of trainers that wasn't Nike?
>
> Jane: No. Obviously she got a pair that's Adidas but I wouldn't buy her like any from ASDA trainers or something....I think that's what I'd worry about people think more; the trainers.

> Ruby: I like buying her name stuff. I've got name stuff for her like trainers. I wouldn't buy her a non brand pair of trainers.
>
> Ruth: No?
>
> Ruby: That's something I wouldn't do

---

[54] A handful of participants maintained the 'thrifty' shopper identity even when it came to footwear suggesting that footwear from general high street stores was acceptable as long as it looked 'nice'.

Ruth: Why is that do you think then? What does she have Nike?

Ruby: Yeah. I don't know about that but I always buy her name trainers...they may be £25 but still.

Brand-named trainers regardless of their cost (£25 would be around the same amount some women would spend on their weekly shop for themselves and one child) were decidedly important to the 'look' and aesthetic appearance of infants. This sometimes also extended to the purchase of branded sports wear, particularly for little boys. While branding appeared to be more significant in the display of their infants than they were willing to admit, it was also very important for these young women that baby clothing was always 'new' and shopping for second-hand clothing was constructed as an almost sacrilegious activity. Indeed although some participants found it quite acceptable to purchase baby equipment like toys, prams, walkers and cots from people who were unknown to them, they almost unanimously agreed that they did not and would not shop for baby clothing second-hand. The sense of 'thrift' I described in the previous chapter, therefore, did not extend to buying used baby clothing, especially when affordable new baby clothing was widely available from stores like Primark, Asda and Tesco. So while participants suggested they would shop pretty much anywhere for baby clothing, charity shops were strictly out of bounds. As Jane explained in interview:

Jane: Yeah, I'll buy her clothes from anywhere really. If it looks nice on her, I like it, I'll buy it.

Ruth: Is there anywhere you wouldn't go do you think?

Jane: It would be like a charity shop or things like that. I wouldn't touch a charity shop, but anywhere else is fine, if I like it I'll buy it.

Ruth: So you wouldn't buy anything for [daughter] in a charity shop?

Jane: No

Ruth: Why do you think its important to get new stuff for [baby girl] and things?

Jane: Just so that no-one's ever used it before. It's cheap enough just off the street, but then obviously some people haven't got the money for it and if they've got more children. I've only got one so it's easier.

As Jane's comments illustrate, most participants in this study associated second-hand or charity store shopping with a lack of access to financial resources and as characteristic of 'the poor' or 'my nan'. Their approach to shopping for second-hand baby clothing can be contrasted with the behaviour of middle-class mothers described in other studies who often choose to buy second-hand items for babies. This is invariably not a result of a lack of financial proficiency, however, but of a class cultural preference and shopping for second-hand baby goods can become a high status pursuit among middle-class mothers, one that comes with the positive associations of bargaining and 'thrift', even though savings may often be marginal (Miller 1998a, Clarke 2000, Lustig 2004). For the young mothers in this study shopping for their children at charity shops threatened to suggest an inability to consume - something that their middle-class counterparts would perhaps be less concerned about, given their relatively secure economic or social positions. A lack of financial resources carries negative connotations and for the less affluent shopping in charity shops there is a real risk of exposure that does not exist for the more affluent (McRobbie 1989). Thus it is only those who are better off who can afford to play with a form of consumption that is usually associated with poverty – this is part of their privilege and indeed part of how they distinguish and create value for themselves as more responsible and respectable consumers (Skeggs 2004).

Ruby, who was living in the Mother and Baby Unit, had spent time in care and I gather had suffered real hardship as a child, explained in the 'consumption' focus group the 'total embarrassment' she would face if it was ever exposed that she bought second-hand clothing for her daughter:

Ruby: I went to Little Ducks to get her first buggy, I got her reins from there, the rain cover. But I go everywhere.

Ruth: Do you go into town as well?

Ruby: Sometimes it's good in Primark as well they got nice clothes in there.

Ruth: Yeah.

YWCA Facilitator: What about places like Sainsbury, Tesco and Asda

Ruby: Yeah and Woolworths they got nice clothes in there

Ruth: Is there anywhere you wouldn't go?

Ruby: Second-hand shop

Ruth: Really? Why is that?

Ruby: No that's just a total embarrassment. If someone asked you where you got it from you'd have to say second-hand shop. That's one place I wouldn't go.

YWCA Facilitator: is that because you worry what people might think if you clothe [daughter] in second-hand stuff?

Ruby: I wouldn't let 'em know if I did! (laughter)

Ruth: Would you worry they might find out?

Ruby: Yeah!

For Ruby, as with other participants in this research, the risk of exposure was too great and charity shop clothing for babies was to be avoided at all cost. While the purchase of second-hand clothing may be associated with poverty Gregson et al (2000) also describe how charity shop clothing is particularly

troublesome because of its association with the body. Second-hand clothing which has been worn close to the skin has the potential to withhold the residue of other people's bodily secretions and is often viewed as a vestibule for dirt and smells with the potential to contaminate and pollute. Indeed many of the young women in this study spoke about second-hand clothing as being dirty and some even seemed to be physically revolted at the thought of it. Sadie's response in interview was particularly severe, yet she was not the only participant who said they would not even step foot in a charity shop.

Ruth: Is there anywhere that you would never have gone? Like anywhere you wouldn't have gone to buy him stuff?

Sadie: Charity shops I wouldn't.

Ruth: You wouldn't ever go to charity shops?

Sadie: No, I wouldn't even go.

Ruth: Why is that do you think?

Sadie: I don't know, it's unclean. Maybe it's just me being snobbish....Wouldn't even go near one. Wouldn't even go anywhere near a charity shop I need to cross the road.

Ruth: Really?

Sadie: And I crossed back over when I passed it. I'm really paranoid about germs....

Ruth: But when you was younger did your mum ever like bring you anything from a charity shop?

Sadie: I hope not.

Ruth: Not that you know of?

Sadie: Not that I know of, I hope not. I wouldn't even walk near that place let alone buy something!

The young women frequently referred to 'new' baby clothing on the other hand as being 'fresh' or 'clean' and there was a sense of it's *safeness* in comparison to charity shop clothing. It thus generated an alternate affective response and while Gregson *et al* (2000), drawing on Clarke's (2000) work, suggest that because children's bodies are understood to be unsullied, baby clothing may be immune from concerns about the bodily residue left on charity shop clothing, I would suggest that my data indicates that buying second-hand baby clothing can carry and invoke the same bodily associations as used adult clothing. In fact I would suggest that buying new for babies may be particularly important given that they are often associated with purity and are seen to be vulnerable to infection and contamination from others (Zelizer 1985). Babies may also be considered to be particularly 'leaky' given that they excrete bodily fluids more often than adults.

Despite their rebuke of charity shop clothing for babies, as noted in the previous chapter participants were nevertheless happy to use items of baby equipment including clothing that were passed on from friends and family and were involved in developed informal economies of exchange of second-hand baby goods. Indeed it was precisely the unknown biography (Kopytoff 1986) of charity shop clothing that was particularly problematic for participants while hand-me-down clothing could potentially be redeemed through knowledge of the cleanliness of the prior owner. Clothing coming from someone thought to be unclean might be refused or remain unused. In interview Sadie, for example, explained how she would be unwilling to take items from another tenant she knew to be unclean:

Ruth: So you gave the stuff to other girls in here?
Sadie: Yeah.

Ruth: And you gave a big bag of stuff down there didn't you?

Sadie: Yeah.

Ruth: Do you ever take anything from anyone else in here?

Sadie: No.

Ruth: You didn't fancy?

Sadie: It's all girls when I came in here. It depends who it was I think.

Ruth: Like if it was like a person . . . ?

Sadie: If it was a person who was generally hygienic yeah, but if a person you walked in and their flat was always a mess, and it had this and it had that, I wouldn't.

The boundaries around the purchase and use of second hand goods were therefore not straightforward and while it was acceptable to acquire some items used and receive hand-me downs from close family and friend networks the purchase of charity shop clothing for babies was taboo. As Gregson *et al* (2000) note the boundaries around shopping second hand shopping and the level of 'dirt' people are willing to engage with operates along a continuum of levels of acceptability. Dirt is therefore, simply 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966) and the result of collective and subjective interpretation. For the participants in this study their levels of acceptability did not extend to shopping for baby clothing in charity shops in the same way that they seemed to for some middle class mothers as discussed above. For the working-class young mothers in this study buying sullied second hand clothing for their children was something they would not do and for these young women buying dirty second hand clothing for children could be constructed as cruel and unkind. Not buying second hand was important to the maintenance of their standards of hygiene and their sense of what it meant to be a good mother. Indeed Skeggs (1997) has described how cleanliness is an important symbol

of good caring practice, yet working class women have often been at a distance from it and associated with 'dirt', sexual excess, contagion, disease and poor domestic practice (Gilman 1985, McClintock 1995, Skeggs 1997, Nayak 2003). The very respectability of the middle-classes was built up around notions of the degenerate and dirty working class and the Victorian feminine-domestic ideal was central to the articulation of class distinction. Working-class women were set at a distance to this ideal and became the other through which respectable femininity was defined (Skeggs 1997). As was touched upon in Chapter Four these historical legacies persist into the present where young working class women are configured as sexually excessive, dirty, fecund and the carriers of disease while their parenting practices are subject to policy intervention (Gillies 2005a, 2005b and 2007). They continue to be represent the 'constitutive other' (Skeggs 2004) to the respectable middle class.

Working class women are only too aware of their positioning (Skeggs 1997, Power 2005) and maintaining high standards of cleanliness and domesticity perhaps hold particular resonance for them as they attempt to set themselves apart from these associations and claim respectability by maintaining standards of hygiene. Indeed Carolyn Steedman (1986) has delicately revealed the omnipresence of these associations and how working class women must struggle to be recognised as 'not dirty'.

> '...I found a reference written by the local asylum confirming the she [her mother] was clean, strong, honest and intelligent. I wept over that, of course, for a world where some people might doubt her – my – cleanliness. I didn't care much about the honesty, and I knew I was strong; but there are people

everywhere waiting for you to slip up, to show signs of dirtiness and stupidity, so they can send you back where you belong' (34).

The residual dirt present on second hand clothing perhaps does not conform to the standards of cleanliness and the claims to respectability and good mothering the young working class women in this study were striving for. Participants' concerns with maintaining cleanliness were also evident in the way in which they 'displayed' their children and while maintaining 'the look' of infant was reliant on buying and assembling the right clothing keeping babies clean in public was also a matter of some importance:

Simone: I mean I suppose I make sure he's always clean, cos he's teething a lot so he's just constantly dribbling, and when I'm shopping I can't see over the pram so when I look at him he's got like dribble and I'm thinking 'oh my God, what must people think'. So I like to keep him clean.

Jane: If you walk down the road and she's got a snotty nose and things like that, then they'll chat about you in my area.

Ruth: Who would chat about you do you think?

Jane: Just anyone.

Ruth: So would it be like anyone in particular, older people, younger people?

Jane: Older people, I don't know just because we're young and things like that. 'Look at her, she's only young, she can't even wipe her baby's nose', things like that.

Marie: Yeah cos if you've got a dirty baby then you think you're a bad mother And bad parent like if you've got a dirty baby or something like that.

Having a clean baby was, therefore, important to the public representation of themselves as good mothers who were domestically capable and adopted good caring practice.

'Fitting in', protecting children and the legacies of childhood

As I have so far suggested in this chapter despite their assertions that the brand and where baby clothing came from was unimportant, for the mothers in this study branding was in fact more salient for them than they were often willing to let on. When buying baby clothing it was also necessary for it to be brand new and charity shop clothing carried much stigma and the associations of poverty and dirt. When I enquired as to why participants wanted to buy certain name brand items for their children they often suggested that they did not want their children to be identified as being different – not having something – or to suffer from bullying. As was outlined in Chapter Two research on young people and consumption suggests that for many young people the fear of being identifiably different or 'sticking out' from peers is a major concern (Middleton *et al* 1994, Miles *et al* 1998, Croghan *et al* 2006) and mothers often strive to ensure that their children do not become the subjects of ridicule for not sporting the right markers of fashion (Middleton et al 1994, Edin and Lein 1997, Power 2005, Evans and Chandler 2006). The young women in this study were familiar with the negative attention not wearing the right clothing could attract and if they had not experienced bullying themselves they had certainly witnessed it happen to others. Given their age at the time of the study these memories and experiences may have been particularly acute and some young women recalled recent memories of being or feeling ridiculed and shamed for violating clothing norms and/or having to wear second-hand clothing as children (Nenga 2003). These

experiences were recounted as being painful and humiliating. Bullying and embarrassment invariably coalesced around the inability to finance the right markers of style and participants wanted their own children to escape the degradation they had endured themselves due to their parents' poor financial circumstances, experiences that stayed with them and remained troubling (Nenga 2003). Marie and Cara discussed their shame in one on one interviews:

Marie: I hated it, like second-hand clothes and everything, going to school and people taking the piss out of you, 'oh trampy' and 'your Mum and Dad can't even buy you new clothes' or 'look at your shoes' and everything. I don't want that for my son.

Ruth: And did that happen to you?

Marie: Yeah, and that happened to [partner] as well and we both don't want it. We want him to have the best stuff, cos there are some evil kids and evil children and that and I don't want that for my son.

Cara: No I don't know what she [mother] put on me! I seen these photos before and I had these like cords on and I was laughing at it. And like this horrible red dress like we had these photos done, a school photo it just look weird. She put us in all these dresses and they looks horrible...And my hair was a state (laughs). Oh I would never wear that if I could dress myself.

Ruth: Is that why you wanna do things differently for uh?

Cara: Yeah, I wouldn't dress [son] like that!...At least he can look back aaa I wan't a state like I was. If I look back now at all my photos I got like this dummy with a shoe lace just tied on it. I don't know why, I just. They used to put it on a shoe lace...I had this horrible pram.

Photographs seemed to create particularly painful reminders of the horrors of childhood dress and some young women sought to provide alternative visual histories for their children, as Cara intimates above (see also Chapter Seven). Mothers vowed to 'do better' for their children and shelter them from the shame, degradation and low self worth associated with an inability to consume (see also Chapter Five). For some participants' the desire to purchase the right style markers and avoid second hand clothing for their children was, therefore, particularly acute given their own childhood experiences of living on a low income. Their own memories of childhood consumption are therefore worked through into the ways in which they consumed for their own children and their structural experience of low income consumption informed their later consumer practice and was instilled in their habitus (Martens *et al* 2004). In a sense they might also be understood as shopping for themselves through their children, trying to recreate for their children the childhood that *they* never had.

Though participants implied that they purchased branded clothing for their infants in order for them to 'fit in', their children were at the time of research too young to encounter negative treatment from peers themselves. While undoubtedly they wanted onlookers to think good things about their children, I would argue that this was as much about demonstrating their own ability as mothers to finance the consumption of expensive name brand goods as it was about affirming the social status of their children. Thus by buying only 'new' clothing and certain brand name items participants sought to deflect and negative associations of poverty from both themselves and their children and demonstrate their ability to provide as mothers. This was perhaps particularly pressing given their location as young mothers who were managing on a low income; had first hand experience of the dehumanisation associated with a

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lack of financial capacity; and felt their mothering to be subject to public judgement and condemnation because of their age and lack of financial wherewithal. Their consumer practices in terms of purchasing for their babies are therefore very much rooted in their structural location as low income young mothers, who have also experienced impoverished circumstances as children and desire to stave off the negative association that comes with being unable to consume and provide for children. Their experience is, therefore, lived through a 'structure of feeling' and their action is an affective response to their marginal position as young, poor mothers (Steedman 1986, Skeggs 1997, Nenga 2003).

I would suggest that the clothing and footwear purchased by participants for infants also represents a particularly classed style of dressing babies which carried validity and currency in the young women's local communities and certainly did across the group of participants. It is not just that mothers buy more expensive items to show that they can finance the cost of their children, but they follow particularly classed patterns of shopping for and presenting infants which are recognised across generations by parents, peers and others in their local communities. Much sociological work particularly in the area of youth research points to the cultural specificity of working class style and demonstrates the value that that 'style' demands in working-class communities, particularly where other avenues for conferring value to the self (like education or work) may be limited (Skeggs 1997, Skeggs 2004, Nayak 2006, McCulloch 2006, Hollingworth and Williams 2009, Archer *et al* 2007). Buying only new clothing and certain named brand items like baby trainers, for example, therefore generates particular value in their local contexts[55]. The

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[55] In my data I only noted stylistic preferences that seemed to be consistent with descriptions of 'working-class youth style' (see Chapter Two). There may have been other nuances with these styles, however, that my data did not lend me to explore in more detail (see for example Nayak 2003, 2006 and Chapter Two). I

value (economic and cultural) the participants attributed to certain designer items was also visible in that they were often kept as mementos of childhood as the following chapter explores in more detail.

Work on motherhood and consumption has also demonstrated how infants come to represent the stylistic aspirations of mothers (Miller 1997) and while participants spent little money on themselves I would argue that it is through the dress of their children that they seek to demonstrate their own style and taste, creating value around their infants' rather than their own appearance. In a sense infants constitute something of an extended self as if possessions in themselves (Belk 1998) and the local style identities of mothers are worked through their infants (see also Anderson 1991). As Daniel Miller (1997) noted of the middle-class mothers in his North London study, images of the mother are often projected through children's style of dress eliciting identifications with a certain group or type of parent. While styles of dressing babies may carry local value it is questionable, however, whether they are ascribed wider social validation. As (Skeggs 2004) has laid out it is the middle-classes who have the power to legitimate their own cultural styles and tastes and working class style is often positioned as tasteless and excessive by dominant systems of symbolic value (See also Lawler 2000 and 2005a&b). While dressing babies in 'Nike' trainers may demand local value these styles are not legitimated across boundaries and may even become the subject of ridicule as was indicated in Chapter Four.

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am also aware that 'working class style' is not something that is necessarily fixed or so tightly proscribed and classed stylistic preferences may seep over the borders. My purchase of the baby Timberland boots described in Chapter Three perhaps illustrates this point.

Pram power

In this chapter I have focussed specifically on the adornment and appearance of infants as the crucial means whereby young mothers engage with onlookers and display themselves as competent carers and 'good mothers'. I want to end by pointing out that while the appearance of infants, their adornment and cleanliness was the most significant to participants' public performance of good mothering, for some young women other baby paraphernalia also formed part of this display. As young mothers participants felt pressured not only to dress their babies well but also to purchase 'nice' baby equipment to prove their worth to onlookers. Though this extended to buying Moses baskets, cots, car seats, blankets it was the pram, the item regularly wheeled out in public that tended to act as a further site for visual engagement with onlookers, as Simone described in interview:

Simone: Yeah, it was the look of the pram, I did want a nice pram.

Ruth: Do you think it's important to have a nice pram?

Simone: I think it is, yeah, because like people look . . . it might be silly saying this but people look at young mums and everything, and they look at what they've got and all that.

Cara also feared that she might be subject to ridicule from her family if she didn't purchase the 'right' pram. In this extract taken from an interview with her we are referring to an old pram that happened to be present in the room where the interview was carried out:

Ruth: Why are you laughing at the one?

Cara: Laughs

Ruth: You just don't like it? Would you put him in there?

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Cara: No. I wouldn't even put (laughs). It's so funny.

Ruth: So it's important which pram he has?

Cara: I don't think any of my family would put their babies in there (Laughs)

Ruth: Why is the pram so important?

Cara: I just don't like that. If any of my family seen me walking on the road with that they'd laugh at me!

The pram in particular, therefore, featured as a further site where mothers demonstrated their status as good providers as they negotiated the outside world. This object, one of the most expensive purchases a new mother makes, enables participants to show others exactly 'what they have got'.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how for the young mothers who took part in this study consumer culture was an important resource for them to *display* and *make public* their (good) mothering (Baraitser 2009b) to various local audiences in a context where they feel their maternal capability is the subject of much surveillance and judgement. It is in this way that they publicly constitute themselves as legitimate mothers. Like other mothers who occupy a precarious relationship to motherhood this is a space where they make themselves 'real' (Layne 1999b, 2000, 2004, Wozniak 2004). For these mothers the project of making their mothering public is a particularly urgent given that they are placed outside the boundaries of normative motherhood. Their marginal position means that their mothering must always be a very public, as well as a private act (Lustig 2004, Kehily and Thomson 2011).

More specifically in this chapter I described how it was the appearance and adornment of infants that proved to be crucial to these mothers' displays of good mothering and while they do not invest in buying for themselves it is their babies that come to 'reflect directly upon them' (Anderson 1991: 390). Appearance is everything and the outward presentation of infants that marks the maternal capability of mothers. For the young women in this study it was essential that their babies were dressed well to go out in public and that they were clean and tidy. Dressing babies well did not, however, rely on spending lots of money on expensive name-brand goods and when discussing the adornment of babies, participants maintained a sense of themselves as responsible and cautious consumers for who brand and store identity did not matter (see also Chapter Five). Making babies 'look good', participants suggested, could be done relatively cheaply and there was thought to be some skill to selecting and assembling outfits for babies. Branding, however, appeared to be more salient than participants explicitly let on and charity-shop clothing was taboo. They were, therefore, less eclectic in the way they shopped than they implied and there was some dissonance in terms of how they described themselves as consumers as they attempted to align themselves with various respectable consumer identities - the 'thrify' shopper, the 'good' provider – and distance themselves from others – the 'spend thrift' and the hollow designer shopper.

It was suggested that the buying of branded items implied a certain financial ability to consume and charity-shop clothing represented a site where associations of poverty and dirt converged, making this form of consumption highly problematic and undesirable for participants as young working-class women. By buying some branded items and avoiding the purchase of second-hand clothing the young mothers in this study asserted their ability to provide

well for their children and maintain good caring practice. Commodities were understood as being protective, deflecting the appearance of poverty and the negative stigma and identity that comes with being seen to be poor from both children and mothers. For some young women this was particularly poignant given their own experience of the shame associated with the violation of clothing norms (Nenga 2003). I also suggested that while the young women's participation in youth style had receded as they embarked on motherhood, the way in which infants were adorned seemed to reflect the local youth styles of participants, which preference the purchase of expensive name brand sportswear items that carried value among their communities.

Yet the styles of dressing children in which these young women invested might, however, have become the subject of ridicule and scorn, as was suggested in chapters Two and Four. Their purchase of name-brand trainers and sportswear for their children may be regarded as crass or a waste of the limited resources they have access to. They, therefore, succumb to another moral judgement which asserts that they should not waste money on expensive name-brand items they cannot afford. Here, however, the consumer behaviour of these young women is read alongside their (marginal) position as working-class young mothers. It is through consumer culture and the appearance of infants that mothers seek to displace the associations of the poor, incompetent and dirty young mother who is unable to provide for and take care of her children properly. While consumerism is often understood to be dangerous or corrosive, here the consumer behaviour of these young women is understood not simply as a matter of mindless materialism, but as productive and enabling within a certain set of social circumstances. Moreover, as was indicated in the previous chapter, these young women did not appear to be frivolous consumers managing their money meticulously to

ensure that they could consume for their children and more expensive branded items were purchased relatively infrequently. Indeed although these young women maintained investments in the dress and style of their infants they were perhaps not, and nor did they have the resources to be particularly *consumerist*.

The current consumer markets for maternity and the new baby aimed at more affluent mothers perhaps indicate the vast amounts of money that these women spend (or are at least encouraged to spend) on buying for their babies and establishing themselves as mothers (see Chapter Two, Thomsen and Sorensen 2006, Kehily 2009, Thomson *et al* 2011). Yet, unlike working-class consumer practice, middle-class consumer practice is regularly coded as being somehow not material at all (Lawler 2000b). The middle classes are abstracted from the concern with status and appearance although their practices of distinction are imbued in every purchase. Their consumerism may also be hidden in bland beige items that purport to be free from the profane world of commoditisation and to be 'natural' and 'organic', but far exceed the cost of any of the items that the young women in this study purchased. As Skeggs (2004) referencing Frank (1997) notes 'one of the greatest marketing achievements of contemporary capitalism is the ability to sell 'non-materialism' to consumers through material practice. It is by situating themselves outside the world of materialism that the middle classes are able to assert their moral superiority as apparently 'thrifty' shoppers who are unconcerned with materialism, despite the fact that they invest vast amounts of money on practices of 'distinction'. As was argued above shopping second-hand may be one way in which they assert their moral consumer superiority and distinguish themselves from the working classes. Indeed, ironically it is often through their attempts to show that they are not poor by buying

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branded items and not shopping second-hand that the young women in this study invoked themselves as working class.

While the working class are often pathologised as being excessively consumerist, the middle classes it seems are often left intact and their consumer practice is coded as inherently normal, requiring no explanation, while those of the working class must be made 'intelligible' (in the same way that teenage pregnancy must be - see Chapter One). Indeed I am aware that my own analysis of the consumer practices of the young working-class mothers in my study contributes to a tradition of authorising and making working-class practice acceptable (Lawler 2000b). There are perhaps also some questions to be asked here about how we move on from a position where working-class practice is understood to be different but is also pathologised. In the interests of social justice, how do we make it less so?

Chapter Seven – Giving gifts to babies and the making of maternal memory

Introduction

The preceding chapters in this thesis have looked at how the participants in the study consumed for their infants and their maternal selves, with attention paid to the value of certain items and where and how they were shopped for. The role that participants considered consumption played in a mother's caring work was outlined, as well as how the 'good' mother identity was articulated through acts of providing for infants and the negation of mothers' consumer needs. The part that consumption plays in the 'performance' of mothering identity to various local audiences has also been noted, suggesting the importance of the well dressed and presented baby as a protective gesture, fending off the judgements of known and imagined others. This chapter complements the preceding ones by focussing on two further areas of material maternal practice (Kehily and Thomson 2011): the giving of gifts to babies and the saving and preserving of 'baby stuff'. These cultural practices are little researched, but were prominent in participants' accounts of how they acquired items for their children and the meaning they attributed to 'baby stuff'. This chapter uses data from the mothers in this study to explore these forms of material practice, describing their prevalence and making some propositions about the uses and meanings of material culture in these contexts. It is suggested that giving gifts to babies represents an important form of modern gift exchange, which is aimed at establishing relationships between adults and infants. The relational meanings associated with

particular presentations are explored. I also describe how objects perform important functions in terms of enabling the recollection of special childhood moments and developmental life stages and providing a record of 'adequate care' for mothers and children. In this chapter the presentation of 'mum' jewellery and inscription of maternal tattoos also emerges as one of the few sites where the participants in this study marked their maternity through the purchase or receipt of items for the self. It is suggested that this represents a particular form of displaying the maternal through material artefacts that are expressive of a relationship between mother and child, rather than of the mothers' own individual style and identity. Drawing together themes from previous chapters, it is suggested that for these young women there is a disavowal of consuming for the self in favour of focussing on the infant and the points at which these young women engage with maternal consumption remain focussed on expressing their devotion to their children rather than accentuating their maternal style and appearance. For these young women it is the child and the maternal relationship that is very much at the centre of their consumer practice.

In terms of data, the chapter makes particular use of the talk from elicitation interviews as it was through photographs that participants drew my attention to the practices of gift giving and the processes of saving 'baby stuff' when they presented consumer objects that were 'important' to them. Interviews provided space to explore the individual meanings participants attached to these objects and the social processes behind them in more detail, yet the writing here also draws more broadly on the complete set of interviews, observational data as well as that collected in focus groups to embed the words of the young women represented in this chapter in the wider meaning making practices of the group. I describe the general patterns of gift giving

and saving 'baby stuff' and the meaning attached to the objects given and saved, though some of the individual narratives are used as examples to illustrate my more general propositions. Copies of some of the images participants took are inserted into this chapter for information only and are not analysed as images in their own right (see Chapter Three).

'Gifting' babies

Giving gifts to babies

Purchasing gifts for incipient babies and new mothers is a common Euro-American practice (Layne 1999b, 2000, 2004) and while data Chapter Four described how the receipt of gifts for babies from family and friends bolstered family incomes alongside the provision of more day-to-day financial support, here I wish to focus more specifically on the social meaning associated with the giving of gifts to babies. Given that many participants received considerable day-to-day financial support, a 'gift' is distinguished in this chapter from that which enables or includes the bulk of the mundane shopping for baby commodities, which might more usefully be termed 'provisioning' (Miller 1998a 2001a). Thus a mother or grandmother who, for example, is responsible for provisioning for a new infant can also purchase and give presents to them. The context in which an item for a baby is given is important and while some items provided by family or friends that were not understood as gifts for those living at home and who were almost fully financially dependent on parents, may well have been for those participants who were living independently and experienced relative financial independence.

The participants in this study reported receiving gifts for their babies from a wide range of people including friends, family, friends of family, in-laws, neighbours and even occasionally professionals they were in contact with. In fact some seemed to describe the receipt of gifts for their infants as almost ubiquitous – coming from everyone and everywhere - as Taylor and Niemh from the Pupil Referral Unit discussed in the 'consuming for babies' focus group.

Niemh: Yeah, you don't need to be shopping do you like yet. I don't think I went shopping for a good like six months for [baby] coz so many people buy you stuff and you buy a lot of stuff.

Ruth: So who bought you stuff then?

Taylor: Everyone

Niemh: Everyone

Taylor: EVEREEY ONE!

Niemh: Uhm

Ruth: Who friends....

Niemh: Yeah, family

Taylor: Friends, family, everybody

Niemh: I think the only person that didn't buy [daughter] anything was her dad. [laughs] That was about it. And you do get so much.

In Chapter One, I discussed how growing from the work of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1990 [1950]), a schism had been established between traditional societies, which are seen to be based around the practice of spirit-laden gift exchange, and modern societies which are seen to be based around the calculated exchange of commodities. Recent scholarship on 'the gift' in modern capitalist economies has argued, however, that the 'spirit of the gift' is very much present in the practices of contemporary gift giving and explores

the multifaceted nature of contemporary gift exchange (Belk and Coon 1993, Agnew 2003, Godbout and Caille 1998, Miller 2001a, Hall 2005, Hurdley 2007). Much of this work draws on Kopytoff's (1986) proposition that being a commodity is only a moment in the biography of an object and that, once acquired, an item may take on any number of social meanings throughout its 'life'. My understanding of giving gifts to babies draws on the literature on modern gift giving and work which, as outlined in Chapter Two, suggests that buying for children is primarily a relational act, one striving for connection (Pugh 2002:5, Miller 1998b, Layne 1999b, 2004, Wozniak 2004). My main proposition supports that of Mauss' (1990 [1950]) original thesis which was that the giving of gifts enables social relationships. Yet while Mauss's conceptualisation of gift exchange implied that the giving of presents is motivated by the desire for reciprocity, gifts given to babies are usually given freely and do not carry any obvious reciprocal obligation. They rather represent a particular mode of modern *agapic* gift exchange as described by Belk and Coon (1993) in their work on dating experiences. This form of presentation is not driven by reciprocity but by unselfish love and gifts become an altruistic symbol and an expression of emotion. The items given to mothers for babies, I would suggest, were primarily given as a means of demonstrating an emotional, familial or friend's attachment to a particular infant. For some participants these attachments were declared and sustained over some distance, for example for Taylor, whose extended family lived in Jamaica and for Sian whose grandparents (with whom she had lived for part of her childhood) had moved to Turkey. Those who make gifts to infants attempt to express their love and establish their position in relation to the infant. While reciprocity is not given in the form of a present, the giver may nevertheless get something out of making an affective presentation and being able to establish themselves in relation to the infant. For those who buy for babies

there may also an amount of pleasure or joy to be received from shopping or buying for babies (Layne 1999b) and some more subtle obligations to return a gift when another's baby is born, to repay in favours or to allow someone to be in a relationship with you and your baby.

The absence of gifts for a baby

While most participants seemed to receive many gifts for their infants, for a small minority there was a conspicuous absence of gifts from others. Ruby, for example, spoke about receiving gifts only from one person - her aunt. This can be contrasted to Niemh and Taylor above who described extensive gift-giving networks. Ruby was living in the Mother and Baby Unit and had a complex and difficult relationship with her mother who was an alcoholic. Though I was not privy to all the details about this relationship during the time I was in contact with Ruby, and it was not within the scope my research to explore this, I observed a number of instances where Ruby was let down by her mother and I sensed that the relationship was disruptive and unsatisfactory for her. Ruby had spent time in care and her own caring practice was subject to Social Service surveillance at the time of research. There was a restriction around who could be in contact with her daughter and she had very limited relationships with her siblings and other people outside the MBU. It perhaps follows that there was an absence of gifts for her infant from friends and family members. A lack of gifts for an infant suggests a lack of significant others within a babies' social network or that of their mother.

This is perhaps similar to Daniel Miller's (2008) proposition that a lack of objects displayed in the home signifies a lack of social cohesion. Through the portraits he draws of the lives of Londoners in a single South London street he

illustrates how the presence of possessions in his participants' homes was reflective of their level of sociality. Thus in the chapters *'Empty'''* and *'Full'* he describes how a lack of objects signifies a distance from other persons, while an abundance of objects represents a closeness to others. The example of Ruby given above could be seen as illustrating one of the central contentions of Miller's work; that an exploration of people's material worlds can provide a window onto their social lives and relationships. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

Giving gifts to mothers

Chapter Five described how participants rarely engaged with contemporary maternity markets for mothers and their buying was focussed upon their infants. Similarly their gift-giving networks of participants also seemed not to purchase items for expectant or new mothers. The mothers in the study did not usually receive gifts for themselves and no participants took pictures of objects that were given to them as mothers. When I asked explicitly about the gifts others gave, no-one provided any indication that items were given to them personally. Thus while contemporary markets for the pregnant woman and new mum abound (Kehily 2009) these were markets with which neither participants _nor_ members of their social networks engaged. The exploration of these gift-giving practices, therefore, perhaps reveals broader localised cultural and consumer preferences that favour the centrality of infants over mothers. The gift of 'maternal jewellery' usually given *by* infants *to* mothers, as outlined in more detail below, however, provided an exception to the general rule of not giving gifts to the mother.

Purchases of clothing for infants were a particularly popular gift and many of the participants who took part in the photo-elicitation exercise included in their pictures items of clothing that had been given to their infants by friends and family. Some of these items were to become keepsakes to memorialize a particular moment of babyhood as is outlined in more detail below. Layne (2000) proposes that a gift of cloth can be understood to symbolically represent a continuous thread and a binding tie between kinship groups. I would also suggest that clothing is a particularly individualized gift representing the stylistic preference of the giver or that which they wish to attribute to the receiver. It is perhaps a certain familiarity with the style of infant, mother or family that creates a sense of sameness between giver and receiver of an item of baby clothing. That sense of 'getting it right' is symbolically significant as it demonstrates knowledge of and/or similarity to the recipient in terms of style and taste. While the style of baby clothing was often left to the discretion of the giver of the gift, few participants complained of not liking gifts of baby clothing they had received from others. One participant, Ruby, however, did make the point that she did not like the style of the clothing her aunt had bought for her daughter and had passed much of it on without it being worn. The intention of a gift of clothing for a baby may, therefore, not be fulfilled and can evidence distinction rather than similarity, placing the gift and the giver of it at a distance. This highlights the way in which a gift can be 'wrong' and might not do the work that is intended by the giver. This was also made evident in several participants' descriptions of items given to them for their children that did not seem to fulfil the aim of the presentation.

Nicole, for example, had a strained relationship with her mother and step-father. She described her mum as 'disappointed' at finding out she was pregnant at seventeen. Her mother had wanted something different for her own daughter, as she herself had had two children by the age of 21. Nicole was living in the MBU when I met her and had been quite happy to leave her family home. Her photos included an image of a Moses basket, one of the few gifts her mother had purchased for her son. When I asked Nicole about this photo, it became apparent that the gift was particularly significant since it had come from her mother. Nicole interpreted the gift as an acceptance of her pregnancy and of her mother's relationship to her son in a context where she might have anticipated her mother's absence due to her displeasure with Nicole having a baby. The gift re-asserts the relationship between grandmother and infant.

Ruth: This was from your mum?

Nicole: Yeah, she [mum] bought it.

Ruth: Did she buy anything else?

Nicole: Yeah, she bought him a bath and that for him, but that's the main thing in'it?

Ruth: Yeah, were you quite happy that she bought you that?

Nicole: Yeah. It meant a lot. She weren't happy with me when I first got pregnant so it was nice that she gave *him* something, you know?

Ruth: Yeah. Cos you said you didn't get on very well before as well?

Nicole: No, we still don't really but I still chat to her.

The Moses basket given to Nicole's son by her mother

As Nicoles's last comment in this interview indicates, however, the gift does not reflect the actual relationship between her mother and her son and in a sense does not fulfil its full promise according to Nicole. The relationship between Nicole and her mother remained quite unpredictable with infrequent contact.

Sian's father and step-mother also sought to re-affirm their relationship with both Sian and her daughter by buying for the baby. Before Sian had bumped into her father's long-term partner in a local shopping centre when she was pregnant, she hadn't been in contact with her father for some ten years. Since then regular contact with both her father and his partner had ensued and they sometimes babysat for Sian's daughter. Sian's father and in particular his partner frequently bought Sian gifts for her daughter including a cot, which Sian included in her photos, and regular presents of clothing.
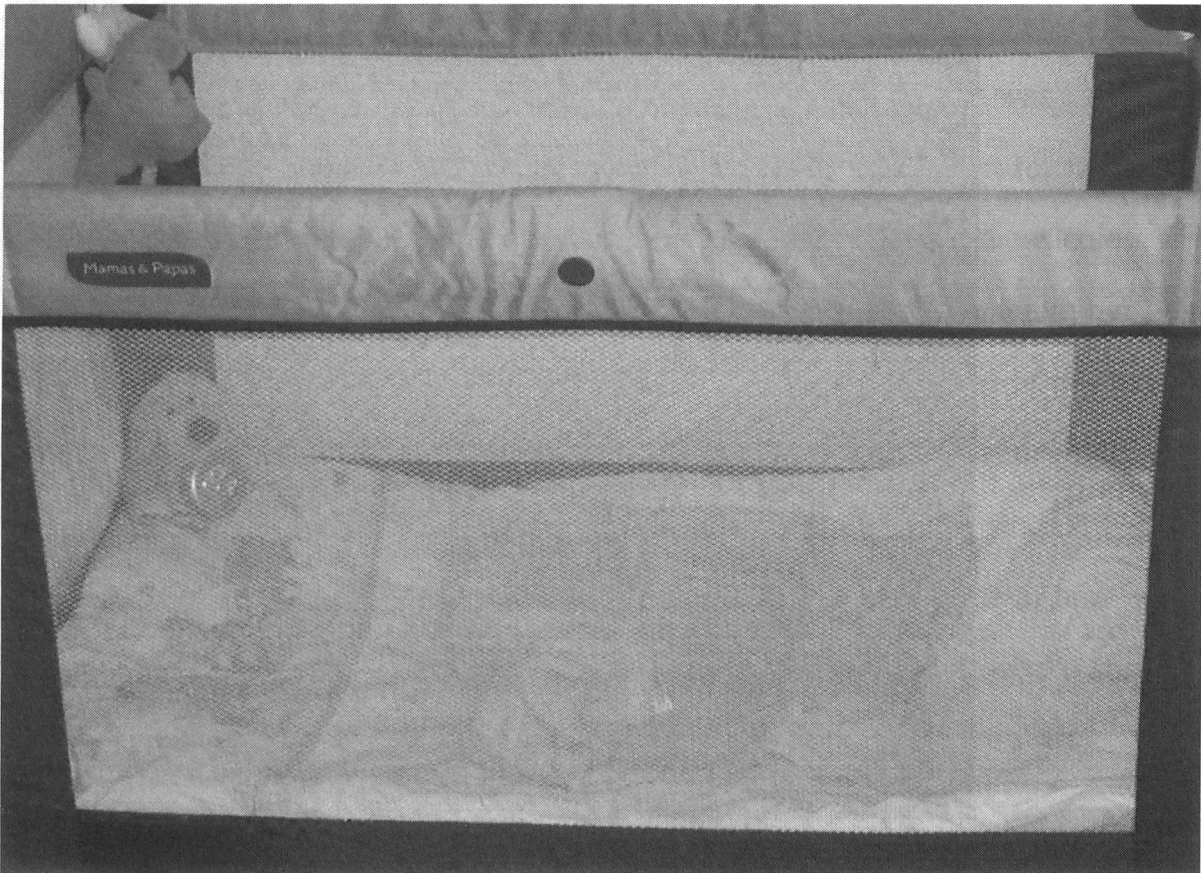
The cot Sian's father and partner bought for her daughter

They also often presented Sian with 'essential' items like nappies, wipes and formula. These gifts were often received particularly well since they were not 'cheap' and were purchased from expensive brand-named stores. While Sian was pleased with the gifts she also indicated in the interview that she felt that the amount and volume of gifts she received from her father and his partner was unnecessary to the maintenance of their relationship. When Sian had explained this to her father's partner she had responded by saying as Sian recounted, 'no, I'm going to get you it because I haven't seen you for 10 years, and we've some making up to do'. I said 'no, you don't I don't want you to think of it as like that, I want you to get it because you want to get it not because you think you have to'. The response of Sian's father's partner resonates with research that suggests commodities are often used as by carers as a form of replacement for time they have missed with their children

(Pugh 2002). For Sian, however, the gifts from her father and father's partner are in a sense 'too much' and exceed that required for the establishment and maintenance of their relationship. Sian is unhappy with the rationale her father's partner gives for wanting to purchase the gifts since it implies that there is motive behind the gift and that it is necessary. This is not what Sian would like, and she desires for the gift be given free of interest and obligation. In this sense the gift wounds Sian, causing her embarrassment and to question the sincerity of the items offered (Mauss (1990 [1950]).

The way in which Kayleigh was able to modify the gifts the father of her son bought perhaps further illustrates the way in which the gift may 'not work' in the way it is intended or expected to. Kayleigh had split up with the father of her son about two months before he was born and appeared to harbour some contempt for him. She suspected him of spreading rumours about her trapping him and squeezing him for money. At the time I interviewed Kayleigh her ex was seeing his son sporadically and she complained about his lack of keeping to times when he was supposed to visit, his negligence toward their son when he was supposed to be caring for him and his unreliability in terms of the provision of financial support. Toward the end of the research period Kayleigh told me that her ex had got engaged to another young woman who was also pregnant and was no longer visiting their son. Kayleigh suggested that by this point neither he nor his family were contributing financially to the provisioning of their son. Kayleigh's ex, however, had previously purchased gifts for their son. When I asked Kayleigh about some of the gifts her ex had purchased for their son she was keen to assert their inappropriateness:

Now for Easter right, this made me laugh, [ex] bought him a bunny cos I go to my parents 'I'm not going to get him an egg for Easter because everyone's going to get him eggs', so I got him a tiny little Thomas the Tank egg, and I bought him a teddy bear, an Easter bear, and somehow [ex] found out. I think my brother's mate might have told him, cos my brother's mate's his cousin so [ex] went out, he bought him a teddy bear which [son] has got to be 36 months to play with, 3 years. He bought him a big Postman Pat Easter egg, which it says on the back not under 3 years, because the egg has got nut traces in, and the thing that come with it has got tiny little pieces, and the stuff comes off of it. He bought him a china set, what the fuck is a tiny little baby going to do with a china set? He got him a few Christmas presents, but he got him two pairs of jeans, one top, a thing to go on a pram, but his jeans they're pink, they were for girls he bought him arse hole.

While the father of Kayleigh's son may have been trying to assert his social relationship to the infant or replace his relative absence to the child (Pugh 2002) through the giving of presents, Kayleigh appropriates this attempt by highlighting the inappropriateness of the gifts and her ex's inability to purchase suitable items for her son. Her ex is located as the incapable and irresponsible consumer who has little knowledge of his sons needs. Kayleigh thus undermines her ex partner's presentations, locating herself as the one who has the knowledge to buy the 'right' things. It is she who is the appropriate carer and her ex's gifts cannot mediate that.

Items of footwear (though less frequently than clothes) were also given as gifts to the infants of participants and these items were particularly prized if they were 'the right' brand - (usually Nike or Adidas). As was noted in the previous chapter, branded trainers for babies carried particular stylistic value in participants' local communities. Little baby shoes were also often described

as being 'cute' or 'sweet'. Lydia Martens (2008) has noted that while 'the cute' is a much appreciated aesthetic in 'the West' it is an underexplored phenomenon, which incites an affective response in people. 'The cute' is often understood to be a quality of babyhood and is connected to the 'the small' and 'petite'. Thus small things are often regarded as being 'cute'. The tiny shoes (and more often designer trainers) of infants seemed to embody 'the smallness' of an infant and their 'cuteness' was confirmed through their appearance as a miniature version of an adult product.

It seemed that the value gifts of clothing and branded footwear in particular could also be judged by participants on the basis of knowledge of financial cost. This is consistent with the way in which symbolic value was attributed to particular brands of baby clothing and designer baby trainers (and therefore persons) because of their association with a significant financial outlay. Miller (2001a) notes that money played a key role in the substance of the gift among his North London participants and particular social relationships were translated into a monetary value. In the giving of children's birthday presents, for example, a stronger relationship or friendship could be symbolized through the purchase of a particularly expensive gift and an undesirable friendship could be discouraged by giving gifts of a lower value. In this study the recipients of gifts of clothing and footwear for their infants relished any expense lavished on them, which made them all the more meaningful and expressive of a valuable relationship between the mother and/or the baby and the giver of the gift. For example, in the 'becoming a mother' focus group Selina discussed a gift of clothing her midwife had given for her daughter when we spoke about relationships with professionals:

Sasha: Yeah. I had one favourite. She was just nice. Anytime I went up there she was more like a friend than a midwife and stuff. She bought my baby clothes. She bought this outfit for my baby when I was pregnant.

Ruth: Did she?

Sasha: Yeah

Ruth: What did that mean to you?

Sasha: I don't know. It mean a lot coz you it's like you're not expecting a midwife like someone that does your scans and stuff to go buy you clothes for your baby and it wasn't even from like Primark she bought it from Next as well.

The gift from the midwife enables Selina to re-categorize the giver from professional to friend, which is assisted by the fact that the gift she receives is from a store that was desirable and considered to be expensive and of good quality compared to the cheaper Primark that was ridiculed by many students at the Pupil Referral Unit where Selina was completing year eleven.

Similarly, Sian explained in interview that the gifts of clothing her step-mother bought for her daughter were particularly special because she didn't buy 'cheap stuff' and usually went to Debenhams and House of Fraser to buy clothing for her daughter. While the expense or branding seemed to be most relevant to gifts of clothing, some participants did apply this rationale to other items as well. Nicole, for example, was particularly pleased with a stuffed toy she had received from her brother and sister. While the gift is clearly significant because it was given by her siblings, the value of the object lies in its costliness, but more than that, it was particularly costly for the people who bought it since they had little money. An expensive gift takes on new and enhanced meaning when it is received from those with little money (see Gillies 2007 for a similar argument about the value of consumer goods in poor households and Chapter Two). The lengths to which Nicole's brother and

sister would have had to go to obtain this gift are recorded in its value as Nicole explained in the photo-elicitation interview when we discussed the toy:

> Ruth: And this is a little teddy from?
>
> Nicole: My brother and my sister.
>
> Ruth: Your older sister or younger sister?
>
> Nicole: Older sister, that's when I was ill. They gave it after I had him.
>
> Ruth: So why did you take this one do you think?
>
> Nicole: It was what my brother and sister got me, so it means a lot, and it was expensive as well and they don't have a lot of money.

The monetary cost and/or brand of gifts given to infants were important to the receiving mothers and this affected the value they attributed to them. More expensive gifts were usually attributed with more value and taken to represent a particular interest in the mother or child by the giver.

While the monetary value of gifts was important to participants, few mentioned that money in itself was given to their babies, though it is not uncommon in the UK for gifts of money to be presented, particularly to children (Hurdley 2007, Miller 2001a). Only one participant, Marie, mentioned the receipt of a gift of money. She discussed in interview receiving a gift of £20 from her grandfather for her son at the hospital on the day he was born. Marie recounted this moment as a particularly special one where her grandfather places the money directly in her son's hand. It appears that this direct and physical interaction between the two signifies their connection and pleases Marie greatly, particularly given a strained relationship with much of her immediate family. The money in this case is distinguished clearly by both Marie and her grandfather from money that should be spent on provisioning as

her 'son's' money, belonging to him only and for saving or spending on pleasurable items for him alone.

Stuffed toys, like that given to Nicole by her brother and sister, were also popular gifts for infants. These items (small fluffy animals) share many of the qualities associated with babyhood such as 'the small', 'the cuddly' and 'the cute' or as Layne (2000) points out the softness of their bodies. Layne also suggests that the analogy between infants and small, fluffy animals is often drawn and both are understood 'yet to be civilized...or....yet to be corrupted by and tainted with civilization' (329). Cuddly toys are also aligned specifically with childhood and babyhood or are feminised in Euro-American culture in that they are items only babies, children and sometimes teenage girls and women (who might also be associated with the 'child-like') can own. Gifts of toys that potentially enabled interaction or enjoyment on the part of the child or were what might be described as a conduit to 'childhood wonder' (Pugh 2002) were also frequently given. The driving force behind this sort of gift is perhaps a desire to evoke the 'magic of childhood' and 'happiness' in children as was the case for participants in Pugh's study of parental purchases for children. As Pugh noted this type of gift seems designed to elicit a reaction in the child, thereby making a physical or emotional connection between giver and receiver.

What might be termed ornamental 'keep-sake' objects for babies were also sometimes received as gifts by participants. These were usually given by family members or those considered akin to family. They tended to be in the form of 'hard' objects that were suited to lasting and not breaking and perhaps provided metaphors for the solidity and the longevity of a relationship between the giver of the gift and the infant or family. These items also appeared to be

given as treasures and were made out of or simulated the appearance of expensive metals, which symbolized the preciousness of a relationship. Cara had received the gift of a silver-plated angel from the paternal grandmother of her son and photographed it as one of her 'important' objects. Cara had a poor relationship with her mother and had been the subject of social service intervention for most of her childhood. The oldest of ten children, her nine siblings were all 'looked after' at the time I interviewed her. Cara's interaction with her mother and father was restricted by social services and she saw them rarely. The mother of her partner was one of the few significant people in her social network that provided her and her partner with support financially and otherwise. Cara described this gift from her partner's mother as something special that she liked the look of but she also suggested that it implied her partner's mother cared for her son, wanted to be involved in his life and was committed to being there for him long term. I would suggest that the value Cara's partner's mother attributed to her grandchild and the commitment she had made to him was implied and borne out through the material properties of the object; its solidness; its propensity for longevity and its preciousness. Cara usually displayed the angel proudly on the windowsill of her son's bedroom and as Miller (2001b and 2008, see also Hurdley 2007) has suggested the home provides an important place for the display objects, which often have specific social and emotional relationships and/or memories invested in them. Moreover, the positioning of the angel in her son's bedroom perhaps suggests that the angel is intended to 'watch over' her son.

The angel given to Cara's son by her partner's mother

Tiny (usually gold) jewellery was also a popular 'keepsake' gift for infants usually given by the mother or a particularly close family member like a grandmother or father when children were first born or were a few months old[56]. These items could be necklaces, rings, earrings and most often bangles for babies. In one of the 'consumption' focus groups Selina and Jess devoted a considerable amount of time to showing me the rings, earrings and necklaces (in the Argos catalogue) they had purchased for their six-month-old little girls. Pictures of baby bangles given by mothers or close family members were also frequently pictured in the images participants took for discussion in interviews.

While these items, like the miniature footwear described above, again invoked a sense of 'the small' and 'the cute' the properties of these objects also had

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[56] Most participants' infants were below the age of one. It is quite possible that gifts of jewellery were also given to children when they were older though the data cannot attest to this.

additional qualities that implied further meaning. Like the other 'keepsake' ornaments described above, the gift of jewellery perhaps implies an immutability of relationship through the strength and 'hardness' of the material that will not break and can be kept forever. The expensive metals and stones used in its construction also often convey a sense of the higher value of the relationship between giver and receiver, usually symbolizing a significant economic outlay and a sense of 'preciousness'. Jewellery is often given to those with whom we wish to signify an equally valuable or precious relationship, for example, in the form of an engagement ring, wedding band or eternity ring. As an object that is worn on the body jewellery also serves as a highly visual manifestation and constant reminder of a particularly special social relationship. As items worn close to the skin and sometimes the heart they can further provide a metaphor for the closeness of such a relationship. For Ruby the gold bracelet given to her daughter as a gift from the child's now absent father seemed to symbolize the solidity of a lasting relationship between her ex and her daughter. Ruby explained that the item was particularly important since it was given by her daughter's father and it was something she would keep forever and wear on her necklace once it had become too small for her daughter. The relationship between father and daughter is thus etched onto the gift of jewellery and I understood it to be significant to Ruby that this object was made from a precious, immutable, metal that will last, as Ruby says 'forever'. It provided evidence of the love her ex held, or perhaps still holds, for their daughter even though he is no longer in the picture.

I would suggest, therefore, that these gifts of jewellery to infants represent a permanent register of love or commitment to children and of their value. The practice of buying jewellery for infants was common across the sample and

seemed to be affirmed generationally. Kayleigh's dad, for example, had purchased a bangle for her son and Kayleigh spoke about her and her siblings also having them as children. Thus while the sight of little pierced earrings and jewellery pedalling children might symbolize an excess of commoditisation (which for the middle classes is not to be associated with children and can become the subject of disgust and scorn; see Chapters One, Four and Six), I would suggest that the purchase of jewellery for infants symbolizes the permanence and higher meaning of a relationship, usually between mother and baby or close family member, which holds value and is legitimated through accepted local cultures of consumption. It represents particular localised styles of presenting babies (see also Chapter Six) and as Back (2007) has suggested jewellery holds particular value in working-class communities and can act as an important vestibule of filial love. While I am, however, unconvinced by his suggestion that love is not spoken in working-class communities, it is nevertheless in these items where affect is profoundly condensed.

This section has concentrated on the gifts given to infants, I now turn to another practice that was popular among participants - that of gift giving from infants to others, and often the mothers themselves.

The gift from a baby

Though babies and children can be conceived of as gifts in themselves or the givers of non-material gifts like pleasure, joy and love (Layne 1999a), they can also be implicated in the processes of gift exchange[57]. We can perhaps

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[57] Landsman's (1999) work on parenting disabled children suggests, for example, that children with disabilities are the givers of gifts such as 'enlightenment' and 'knowledge of unconditional' love. By re-defining her child as the giver of gifts a mother elevates the status of her child.

acknowledge this in the popular tradition of signing an infants' name on cards on mother's or father's day, signing a gift to one child from another and sending thank you cards or birthday invitations from young children. In these instances infants are endowed with an agency that they are normally understood not to be capable of exercising (Layne 2000).

Many of the participants in this study claimed to have received gifts from their infants though these items were clearly not selected and purchased by the infants themselves. These gifts often came in the form of jewellery frequently with the word 'mum' engraved on or carved out of the metal. Ruby explained to me in one of the 'consuming for babies' focus groups how her daughter had already given her two necklaces and a ring which all had the word mum engraved on them:

Ruby: And I gotta buy myself something from [daughter] for Christmas

Ruth: What and do you buy that yourself then?

Ruby: Well, [daughter's] already got me two necklaces and one ring.

Ruth: Okay

Ruby: But one of my necklaces was tangled round this one so my other mum one is on the other side so I have to untangle this so I might buy myself another ring...

Ruth: So did it say mum on it?

Ruby: Yeah

Ruby: Two chains coz ones got a bit twisted but I got another one of these which is thicker which she bought me as well.

Ruth: And that says mum as well?

Ruby: Yeah.

Here Ruby makes it obvious that it is she who is buying this jewellery when in the first line of this extract she says that she has to buy herself something from her daughter for Christmas. Yet she refutes my suggestion that she might be buying the gift for herself in our first exchange and moves between the position of the items being purchased by herself or her daughter. Ruby is keen it seems to maintain the pretence that the gift is from her daughter even though she knows that she herself has purchased the item. A gift to the self does not imply any form of relationship with another person and might rather be understood as self-interested. Ruby, however, is keen to maintain the sense that the jewellery is a gift initiated by her daughter since it implies a relationship; one that is objectified in the preciousness and immutability of the material it is made out of. It is perhaps an imagined sense of her daughter's love for her which is embodied in the object and the preciousness of the maternal relationship. The bond is encapsulated in the physicality of the marked or carved metal and paraded upon the body proudly. Like the jewellery presented to infants, I would suggest that 'mum' jewellery represents a particular site for the manifestation of the relationship between mother and child.

Gifts from infants could also come in the form of other objects. Kayleigh, for example, included a stuffed dog that she had received from her son for Christmas in the photos she took for the auto-photography exercise. When I asked her about this item she mentioned other gifts and cards that had been given to her by her son. The fact that her mum and dad had 'actually' purchased the gifts seemed not to distract from the feelings she experienced from receiving a gift from her son.

Ruth: And what about this little doggy?

Kayleigh: That's what [son] bought me for Christmas.

Ruth: So who actually bought it then? Was that your mum and dad? So what do they do with it then?

Kayleigh: They wrapped it up and they give it to me and said that's from [son].

Ruth: Have you had any other presents from like Mothers Day?

Kayleigh: Yeah, I had some chocolates on Mothers Day with some flowers, and on my birthday I had . . . I got a nice top from [son] for my birthday. He spoils me with my mum's money!

Ruth: So how does that make you feel then when it says 'from [son] on there'?

Kayleigh: Yeah, it feels lush. I keep reading over my Mothers Day card, and my birthday card, and my Christmas card from him. I like sleeping with that teddy on my bed, but I can't usually because [son] sleeps in my bed and that teddy is not baby proof. The fluff comes off of it, so I always put that teddy at the bottom of my bed when I go to bed.

Kayleigh's son thus 'spoils' her with 'her mum's money', yet it is him that she imagines shows his love to her in this way. The gift from an infant thus furnishes babies with an ability to instigate acts of gift giving, making imagined independent social connections and expressions of love as they become integrated into systems of commodity exchange even before they are truly able.

Thus far I have suggested that making gifts to new babies was a popular practice for both the social networks of the mothers in this study and in some instances the mothers themselves. I have also provided a descriptive account of the sorts of gifts that participants received for their babies, the qualities of the objects, the social meaning attached to them and the form of relationship they might imply. The custom of making gifts from infants, usually to mothers

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was also touched upon. In the next section I explore the second area of material maternal practice examined in this chapter; the making of maternal memory.

The making of maternal memory

The objects young mothers kept

Much work in material cultural studies testifies to the importance of objects to practices and processes of constructing memories and relationships to what has past (Miller 1987, Hurdley 2007, Miller 2008, Layne 2004, Wozniak 2004). Memory is enshrined within and recalled through artefacts and 'things' perform an important role as vehicles of nostalgia. While memory is often understood to be lost over time, objects act as important prompts to enable the recollection of special moments, times, places and people. In Euro-American culture children are often endowed with particular sentimental value and childhood, and especially babyhood, is felt to be a precious time that is over all too soon and should be recorded in some way and returned to once it has past (Zelizer 1994, Layne 2004:126). There is an inevitability to the babies' and children's growth and that they change and develop in a linear way. Although there is little research in this area, the data available suggests that the storing of items of babyhood (and indeed childhood) is a common Euro-American practice (see for example Layne 1999b, 2000, 2004, Wozniak 2004) that provides a way of recording the development of children, enabling families to 'look back' at this special time that can never be returned to. Indeed Layne (2004) describes how modern mothers are expected to ensure that their children have all they need and enjoy their childhood but are also charged

with recording these precious moments of childhood. She argues that this 'two-part enterprise – providing children with 'memorable experiences' and then assisting them to remember them – is an exercise in the contemporary management of childhood and hence and enactment of love' (126). Layne's (op cit) work looks specifically at how this kind of memory work is carried out by mothers who have suffered pregnancy loss. She suggests for these women there exists a 'realness' problem whereby there is limited acknowledgement of the existence of a baby or mother following miscarriage, still birth and early infant death. During pregnancy the existence of a foetus or baby may be acknowledged, as advancements in imaging technology mean that the foetus comes to take on an increasingly important role in contemporary society and is assigned personhood much early on than in previous times. During pregnancy women (and their social networks) actively begin to construct the personhood of their baby through material culture and the acquisition of items in anticipation of the new arrival. Yet following pregnancy loss the social acknowledgement of the baby is usually revoked. There is a cultural taboo and denial around pregnancy loss which 'challenges the validity of the cultural and biological work already undertaken in constructing that child and belittles the importance of the loss' (323). Mothers thus face pressures to leave behind their children and their loss, and struggle to assert themselves as 'real' mothers. Layne (op cit) describes how mothers use 'things' to counter these problems; to preserve memories of their children and lay testament to the existence of a 'real' baby. It is by saving and preserving baby items purchased and received from friends and family during and after death that mothers are able to recollect their babies and 'prove' that they existed where they are often expected to forget. Indeed as Layne (1999b & 2000) points out, in a society imbued with 'possessive individualism' to possess things is to exist - to be a person - and these mothers seek to demonstrate that 'their

babies were real babies with real things' (Layne 2000). This in turn constructs the mothers as 'real' mothers. Mothers thus employed material objects as technologies to invoke memory of their children and their loss and to solidify their baby's existence and their status as mothers. Layne (2004) also suggests that these practices of memory work – the saving and storing of baby goods - enabled mothers to take part in normative maternal practices of love and care. For these women, however, the compiling of objects that were bought and given to babies during pregnancy and were bought to memorialize them following death may be a particularly pertinent project given that memories are understood to fade and there is so little time of their children to remember. There is a fear that the mothers themselves may quickly come to forget their children as they are encouraged to by wider society (Layne 2004).

Wozniak (2004) has also outlined how the foster parents in her study engaged in the curation of commodities pertaining to individual children after they had left foster care. The practices helped to preserve their memory and the mothers' (and families') relationship to them and formed part of foster mothers' work as 'real' mothers (see also Chapter Two). Mementos often took the form of photos or items that made children tangible like dresses or shoes and were stored in a designated spot in the home. By holding on to such items foster parents engaged in the maternal work of asserting themselves as 'good parents' who like other 'real' mothers desired to hold onto and invoke memory of their children. The saving of material goods for these mothers in particular also worked to preserve their claims to children who had moved out of their foster care. Wozniak (2004) thus asserts that 'through the commodities associated with particular children, foster parents were able to tangibly mark the child's existence, to affirm the kinship relationship, and to retain their identities as mothers to particular children' (92).

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The commonality of the prominence of the practice of preserving 'baby stuff'
on a wider scale is perhaps evidenced through the many keepsake boxes,
scrap books and various other products currently available on the market in
the UK, which support the documentation of infancy and enable the repository
of objects to recall a history of infancy and childhood. Memory is always
partial, however, made and selected in the present rather than existing as an
objective and accurate cognitive record waiting to be recalled (Misztal 2003).
Objects of memory thus do not allow for the recollection of an 'actual' past but
can rather be understood to contribute to its making. Memory can be
understood as 'staged' through material practices (Thomson *et al* 2009). In
this section I refer to a process of 'making' maternal memory, whereby
mothers pick and select 'things' to memorialize particular moments, events
and relationships in the lives of their infants.

The young women who took part in the study were very involved with
practices of collecting and saving a variety of 'baby objects'. Their usual
reason for holding on to them was because they wanted to remember special
moments or events in the lives of their infants or because objects were given
by and/or symbolized relationships to special people. These items were also
regularly described as helping to evidence the development and changes in
their growing children. Most participants kept boxes, some of which were
purchased specifically, by themselves or friends or family, as 'memory' or
'keepsake' boxes, to store these objects in. A few participants had also
purchased or been given specially designed books which allowed for objects to
be placed inside, like the one Taylor had. Taylor explained how important the
book was as a means of recording that early period in her child's life and this

extract from her interview provides a good example of the sorts of objects the young women collected:

> Taylor: This is the baby record book, this is very important because I put everything in there. My friend got me this when I was pregnant, records of every single thing that he does.
>
> Ruth: So tell me about what you've got in there then?
>
> Taylor: Well, I've got his umbilical cord.
>
> Ruth: Oh yeah, the little clip that they stick on. Oh, so you've like stuck things in, it's not like flat?
>
> Taylor: I put it in a bag, I put a little pile in there so it don't smell and I stick it in there. I've got pictures of me when I was younger, his dad was when he was younger, information about his relatives, his family, godparents, pictures of him bathing, playing, sleeping, everything.

Items that could remind participants of the size their babies once were proved to be particularly popular keepsakes. In Nicole's account of why she was keeping a newborn outfit of her son's, for example, she described how the tiny items of clothing helped her to record how much her son had changed and enabled her to remember how small he once was.

> Ruth: So why did you pick this one?
>
> Nicole: Cos it's lush, he looks so cute in it, but it's tiny. It was huge on him when he was first born as well. It just means how much he's changed.
>
> Ruth: Is that why you're keeping a lot of the stuff then so you can like . . .
>
> Nicole: I just want to be able to remember him like that.

In Nicole's words we see the popular equation between babies, the 'tiny' or 'small' and the 'cute', mentioned above. The 'lush' outfit that her son looked

so cute in seemed to incite a particular affective response linked to the way her son's little body sat in the item that was so small, but still over-sized.

Baby's shoes were often kept and the size of infants' feet (and by extension the rest of their bodies) seemed to be crystallized in these objects. Most participants who took part in the auto-photography exercise included pictures of shoes or trainers of their children's they were keeping and participants usually explained that this was because these items were so 'small' and that they wanted to remember how tiny their infants had once been. The creation of a physical memory of the size of babies was often also achieved through the production of hand and foot prints in ink on paper and sometimes in plaster. These were activities offered at both the Pupil Referral Unit and classes that the residents and the mother and baby unit took up. These parts of the body (and items associated with them) seem to represent the actual physicality of the small baby in a way that other items or parts of the body cannot and Layne (2000) has noted that both hands and feet are common symbols of childhood. These items were thus collected to hold onto the 'smallness' of infants in some way and as a mark of that period in their children's lives.

Lacoste trainers bought for Nicole's son by her partner

In some instances the brand or expense of an item was significant in terms of whether it would be kept or not. Thus, like the assessment of the value of gifts, the alienability of objects was significant to the assessment of their value for saving. When I asked Nicole in interview, for example, why she was keeping her son's Lacoste trainers she explained:

> Ruth: So tell me about these then
>
> Nicole: They're expensive.
>
> Ruth: Are they?
>
> Nicole: Yeah.
>
> Ruth: They're Lacoste right? So who bought these?
>
> Nicole: [partner]
>
> Ruth: So do you think that these are like special ones?
>
> Nicole: Yeah, I wouldn't get rid of them.
>
> Ruth: So why do think they're so special then these ones?

Nicole: I don't know, I just really like them. They're Lacoste and they cost a lot of money. I couldn't just throw them away. I don't know, I've got shoes like I used to wear a few years ago. I still kept them cos they're nice. I've got shoes that were really expensive but I don't really wear but I still keep them.

Similarly, Cara reasoned that she wanted to keep all her son's Nike tracksuits because they were 'dear' (expensive) so she 'wasn't gonna just give them away'.

The hospital bands of babies were items that were kept by all interview participants and also provided evidence of the size babies once were. The hospital band, however, also clearly marks out one of the most significant moments in the infant's life: birth and separation from the mother. While mothers will have bonded with their babies and afforded them some king of personhood through pregnancy (Layne 1999b, 2000, 2004) that rupture marks a critical point where the infant becomes its own person. The belly-button clip that is used to help heal the wound opened through the separation of infant from mother was also kept by all participants that I had the opportunity to interview. This object symbolizes the physical separation between mother and child most profoundly through its concrete connection to the wound and may also remind of some of the physical trauma of labour, including the tearing and bleeding of flesh. Indeed the remnants of congealed blood and dried flesh left on Jane's daughter's belly-button clip certainly prompted a notion of the very corporeal for me when I held it.

Scan pictures of foetuses *in utero* were also popular keepsakes and many participants held on to these, again as records of how small foetuses once were and of the growth through the womb and into childhood. Layne (2000)

has argued that the improvements in technology that provide access to images of foetuses in the womb has resulted in the speeding up of the point at which a foetus may be thought of as a person. Scan images certainly seemed to provide an extension of what it was possible to display and provided visual documentation of an infant's life back into the womb thus providing a window inside what would usually remain unseen. Participants treated these images very much like they did other pictures of their children or they could become more prized as images of the usually invisible. Marie, for example, made a framed collage with her scan picture at the centre and images of herself and her partner and her son post birth around it. Others framed scan pictures and displayed them on their walls, placed them in photo albums or in scrap books that documented the stages in their infants' lives.

Objects that symbolized babies' 'firsts' - first Christmas, first Halloween, first outfit, first shoes, first birthday, first party invitation - were also popularly kept and often featured among the pictures participants took as part of the auto-photography exercise. Nicole, for example, was keeping outfits (pictured below) she had bought for her son for both Christmas and Halloween. I would suggest that these items were being saved to preserve the memory of 'precious' childhood moments. Soft toys were also popular 'keepsakes' that seemed to invoke a sense of infancy or childhood specifically.
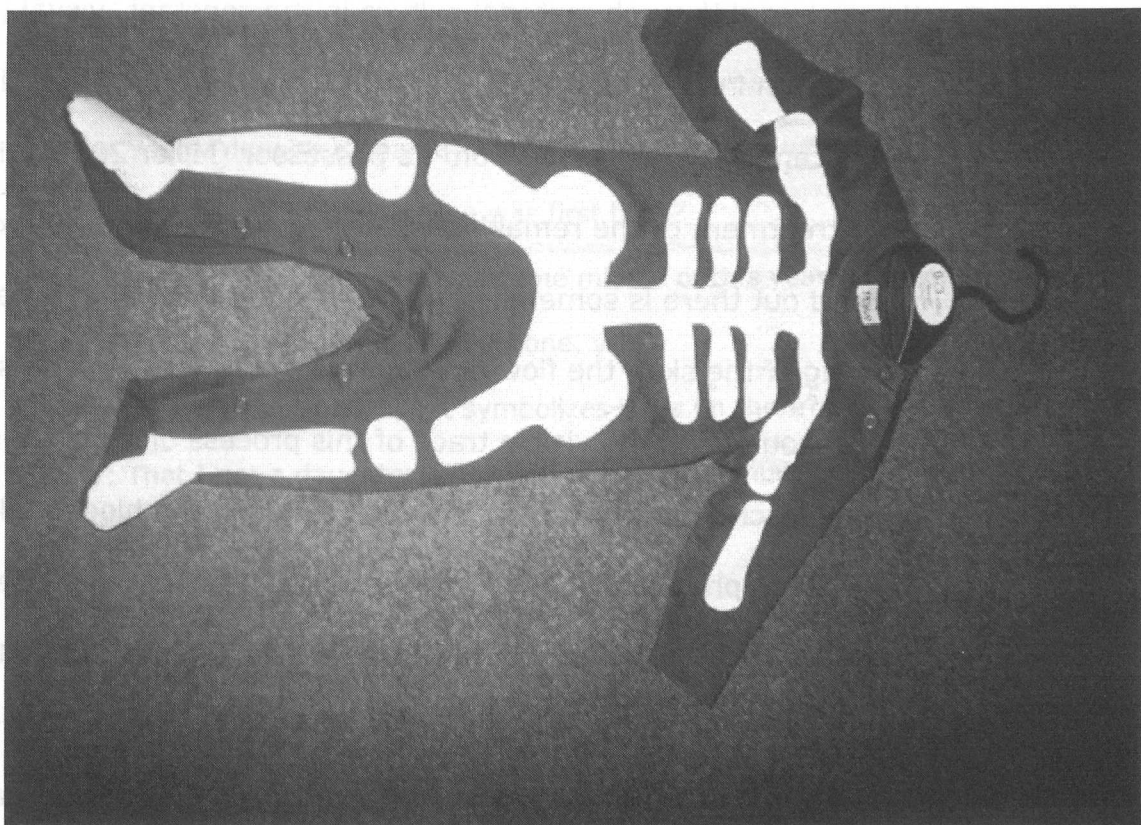
The Halloween outfit of her son's Nicole was saving

The lasting symbol of maternity

Above I described how the jewellery that was given to both infants and mothers implied a certain longevity and preciousness of the relationship between mother and child in terms of the material it was made out of and its associated connotations. These items were, therefore, often purchased and given with the intention of permanence. During my fieldwork I also observed that the tattooing of the names of infants on the body, usually on the inside of the forearm, was a popular practice among participants, which like the jewellery given to both infants and mothers, was to be kept as a permanent record of the attachment between mother and child. The tattooing of the body symbolizes perhaps the most profound statement of an attachment to a special moment or relationship and provides a very specific way of marking

the maternal through material culture in the constant, visual (and sometimes visible) reminder on the body. It is the ultimate in inalienability and that which cannot be separated from its possessor (Miller 2008) without expensive laser treatment or the remaking of the motif in new ink. Back (2007) has pointed out there is something profoundly corporeal about the tattoo – the piercing of the skin, the flow of blood, pain, the forming of a scab, the healing of the wound and the visible trace of this process of incision and closure. The pain of inscription, the cutting through skin and the blood make tattooing a particularly physical almost sacrificial act. It demonstrates the distance that someone is willing to go to have an image etched not only onto but almost inside their body. There is a connection between the ink, the blood and the internal. Though I spoke to only three young women specifically about their 'maternal tattoos' in interviews I recorded observations of tattoos and my conversations with young women about them in my field notes.

While the tattoo historically carries negative associations of the ethnic and class other (Riley and Cahill 2007, Back 2007) and in the UK may conjure images of football hooligans, working-class female sexual deviants and prostitution, body art has become increasingly popular since the 1960s and is now an established part of late modern identity construction, particularly where young people are concerned (Sweetman 1999, Riley and Cahill 2005). Based on the interviews and my visual observations I also want to suggest, like Back (2007), that for these participants the marking of the body with the names of their infants represented profound gestures of love and devotion.

The participants I spoke to about their tattoos implied that they symbolized their complete dedication to their children and investment in the mother and child dyad, as I discussed her tattoo with Ruby in interview:

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Ruth: You have a tattoo of [daughter's name] on your wrist don't you?

Ruby: Yeah, [daughter's name]

Ruth: Did you get that when she was first born?

Ruby: No I got that this year sometime middle of this year. Six months ago want it? Coz I *remember* having it done, yeah.

Ruth: And what do you think it symbolizes if it's on there?

Ruby: That I got a daughter. That I'm [daughter's] mum and I'm proud that kind of thing.

Ruth: You can kind of show it to people?

Ruby: Coz people ask and I'm like "oh it's [daughter's name] my daughter". It's quite a big thing to get a tattoo in't it? Coz I would never get a tattoo of a man on my arm or a boyfriend coz it, half the women I know got like three different tattoos of different men because she broke up with that one, broke up with that one the only one that will last is your child's name coz your never gonna part from them are you. Just looks stupid dun it when you go out with another one and by the time you got like to thirty you got like ten tattoos. Just gurt[58] tattoos everywhere.

Ruth: Having your child's name I guess is quite different?

Ruby: Yeah, definitely!

Ruby's tattoo provides an externally visible display and allows for public articulation of her status as a mother. Importantly Ruby marks out the tattoo of her daughter's name as different to that of having a male partner's name etched upon the skin in that relationships to men may be fleeting and temporal but the relationship to an infant is permanent – 'you are never gonna part from them'. For Ruby it is only the relationship to a child that is worth materialising on the body. As Ruby's daughter was the subject of social service intervention and Ruby had a court order to remain at the mother and

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[58] Bristolian dialect for big or very.

baby unit until her daughter was at least two, 'parting' from her daughter was perhaps something that she was sensitised to. There was some real risk for Ruby that her daughter could have been removed from her care and it is perhaps through this enduring marker of her attachment to her daughter that she seeks to demonstrate her commitment to her baby, one that would also persist should her daughter at some point be in the care of another.

Marie also sought to exhibit her solid commitment to her maternal role through the marking of her skin. In her photos Marie included an image of the tattoo of her son's name and birth date she had had etched inside a red heart on the outside of her wrist. We discussed it in interview:

> Ruth: And why his name tattooed on you do you think?
>
> Marie: I don't know, I wanted his name to say that I've got a son, and 'yeah' that's when he was born, and I don't really care what anyone thinks, like being a young mum and that don't really care so . . . 'yeah' that's my son and I just want to . . . it looks smooth as well. Yeah, like I'm a proud mum, like I don't care.
>
> Ruth: So this thing with the tattoo then is really kind of to show that you . . .
>
> Marie: I don't care what anyone thinks, and teenage mums we are.

The immutability of the tattoo asserts and lays permanent reference to the fact she is a mum - a 'proud mum' – someone who is committed and takes that role seriously. This is something that she intends to let others know through the display of the mark upon the body that almost operates as a form of defiance or empowerment for Marie in face of the stigmatization she felt from others.

Another young woman in the study, Kayleigh, indicated that her father had a tattoo on his arm of her name and had offered to pay for Kayleigh to have a tattoo done of her son's name on her own arm. She was in a quandary when I spoke to her in interview about getting it done since her ex-partner was considering doing the same thing and she didn't want to appear to be copying him. This, along with my observation that many young women had the names of their infants tattooed on their bodies, implies that this was common practice among both mothers and fathers in participants' communities and across generations. Back (2007) has argued that the etching of the names of family members and lovers on the body is a particularly working-classed practice which involves 'the embodiment of filial love and kinship' (Back 2007:82). Indeed as Skeggs (2004) has noted, the body is a site where the class is condensed most profoundly. For the young women who took part in this study, I would suggest that tattooing the names of the infants on their bodies represents a specifically classed practice where the devotion, love and enduring relationship with an infant is condensed and recorded forever in this object of maternity - the mark of their infant's name on their physical bodies. Like with maternal jewellery the particular properties of the tattoo provide testament to participants' commitment as mothers and act as a visual form for the articulation of their maternal status and pride. The fact that it is precisely these expressions of love - the 'mum' jewellery and tattoos of people's names - that become the targets of disgust is perhaps quite revealing. It is upon the most sacred of practices that the degradation of the working-class cruelly cuts (see Chapter Four).

The purchase of maternal jewellery and tattoos were some of the limited purchases that the young women in this study made (or received) for themselves and they provided one of the few sites where the maternal self

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was marked and displayed through a form of commodity consumption for mothers. While these items may omit classed stylistic messages about mothers, the investment is not in the appearance of the mother herself at which much popular and consumer culture is aimed (see Chapter Two). This is a different kind of 'self project' one which expresses relationality rather than individuality. As was touched on in Chapter Five many scholars have suggested that working-class women tend to construct their sense of self through their relationships with others rather than in an individualised way, which is understood to be more characteristic of the middle classes (Skeggs 1997, Skeggs 2004, Gillies 2007). This appears to be reflected in the ways in which the mothers in this research used consumer culture to construct their maternal selves. The points at which these young women engaged with consumer culture in maternity are quite specific and like the practice of focussing on the consumer needs of their children, their interest in maternal jewellery and tattoos is not expressive of themselves as individuals but of their caring and devotion to their children. As was suggested in Chapter Five the lack of focus of the self may be used as a means of locating oneself as a 'better' mother who prioritizes her relationship with her infant. It is a way that these mothers distinguish themselves from 'other' older middle-class mothers who they cast as selfish and self-absorbed. Their level of participation in maternal consumption and the kind of items they invested in, therefore, represent not only class cultural practice but a site where a struggle takes place around the meaning of motherhood.

Creating childhood memories and evidencing 'good mothering'

Up to this point this section has primarily focussed on the 'stuff' that the young women in this study kept to document the development of their infants

and memorialize special moments or relationships with significant people. While participants often spoke about these items enabling their own memories, many also suggested that they wanted to hold onto the items for posterity and to share the 'things' in their collection with their children. Indeed infancy and childhood is often taken to be a period that we will have no recollection of once we have grown up and the items mothers collected were instructive in building a history of infancy and childhood for their children. Mothers spoke about wanting their children to look back on and share those special childhood moments such as first Christmas, first birthday through the objects they had saved. There was a sense that these moments will have been missed the first time round due to later lapses in memory. Some participants also wanted their children to explore their own development through the objects and Marie described how she wanted to show her son how small he once was through her scan pictures:

> Ruth: And what do you think you'll do with it?
>
> Marie: Keep it. And then I'll show [son]. Yeah, that's when you were in my stomach, when I was pregnant with you. To kind of show him like how small he was and it's his development I suppose isn't it?

The notion of 'looking back' at these objects with children also anticipates a moment in the future when this will be possible or will happen. Wozniak (2004) suggests in her work on foster mothers in the US, however, that keeping a box of memory items is not just about the retention of memories or the documentation of a child's progress, but it also carries a moral imperative. She argues that for the foster mothers in her study who were not 'real' mothers to the children they looked after the preservation of childhood memories demonstrated that they were good mothers who would not forget

their children. I would suggest that the practice of objectifying infancy in objects which are to be shared with infants when they are grown might more broadly be understood as a symbol of 'good mothering' through the desire to savour and cherish the memory of a precious childhood. The saving of 'baby stuff' can also provide a record of adequate care to a child (or indeed others). The objects saved, for example, may imply that a childhood was sufficiently 'precious' or that a child the 'stuff' of a good enough childhood (Power 2005). As was noted in the previous chapter photographs depicting the dress of participants as children provided evidence of the 'poor' childhood they had endured when they were younger. Participants desired to do something different for their children and wanted to create different visual histories for them to look back on. This perhaps provided another incentive for these young women to store their infants' 'expensive' brand-name shoes and clothing like Nicole and Cara did above. Indeed Ruby explained in interview that she kept all of her 18-month-old daughter's shoes because she wanted her to be able to look back and know her mum put her in 'good names':

> Ruby: yeah. And then she'll probably turn round and tell me at least you didn't put me in scabby trainers.
> Ruth: Yeah, is that important do you think that she knows...that when she looks back she can see that she was wearing Nike and um and good names?
> Ruby: yeah, cause she'll probably go and say to her friends well my mum did put me in name trainers.

By keeping her little girl's shoes Ruby is able to record the fact that she was able to provide well for her daughter and to meet the cost of local cultural styles. The saving of these objects thus also provided a way of demonstrating 'good' mothering through material practice.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined two key areas of material maternal practice (Kehily and Thomson 2011) that are little researched: that of giving gifts to (and sometimes from) babies and the saving of objects of infancy and childhood. The chapter has described the prevalence of these practices in the lives of the young mothers who took part in this study and broadly explored the form that they took. It was suggested that giving gifts to babies represents an important form of modern gift exchange, aimed at establishing relationships with infants and that 'baby stuff' can be saved and invested with memory, used to recall special moments in a babies life or document their development as well as provide a record of appropriate care. A descriptive account of the items that were given and saved, their properties, the social meaning attached to them and the kind of relationships they might imply was provided. The chapter thus describes and highlights the further significance of material culture for the mothers in this study and 'work' that objects do for them. The meaning attached to particular gifts given to individual babies and objects saved, however, was often very specific to the individuals concerned, signifying and furnishing both real and imagined relationships, histories and futures between babies, their families and significant others, some of which have been alluded to in this discourse. This general exploration of the objects given to babies, those being kept and the broad social meaning attached to them cannot explain the nature of individual presentations, objects and their significance. To look at the specific meaning attached to a presentation or object would require a different form of analysis. Indeed this data could have been written up quite differently as a means to explore the nature of the participants' individual social lives and relationships. Indeed much of Daniel

Miller's work on material culture implies that starting with objects and possessions provides a fruitful means of exploring these aspects of people's lives and those which sometimes may lie silent in dialogue (Miller 1998a, Miller 2008). Yet, my intention here has been rather to document the broader material cultural practice of giving gifts to (and from) babies and the keeping of items of infancy and maternity that was evident across the data set. This chapter, nevertheless, is situated alongside the literature in material culture studies which reveals the significance of 'things' in contemporary lives and suggests that objects (including commodities in modern economies) have 'social lives', that is, they are attributed with social meaning and give value to social relations (Appadurai 1988).

The chapter has also drawn attention to some of the very specific ways in which these young women made and displayed the maternal through material culture. The practices of giving 'mum' jewellery to mothers and tattooing the names of infants on the body were highlighted as particularly classed ways of making the maternal which are given value locally and are affirmed intergenerationally. These material practices represent one of the few sites where the mothers in this study displayed the maternal self through consumer culture and along with the appearance of infants (see Chapter Six) is one of the crucial ways in which they make their mothering public (Baraitser 2009b).

Chapter Eight - Conclusion

Introduction

This research has explored the consumer practices of a group of young mothers in the city of Bristol. It has stepped outside the confines of the usual policy and academic debate, exploring young motherhood at the interface with consumer culture. Drawing on the literature that demonstrated the important role that consumption played in the lives of both mothers and young people the study set out to explore consumer practice as a productive area of investigation with low-income young mothers, which would also fill a gap in work on motherhood and consumption and contribute to scholarship on youth and consumption and low-income consumers. Using a qualitative mixed methods approach the research has provided an in-depth account of the lives of young mothers from an original angle, exposing important cultural and practical aspects of their lives and experiences as they made their way in the world as new mothers. In this final chapter I want to summarise the main findings of the research and to reflect on the extent to which my research questions have been addressed. I also consider the overall contribution the research makes to scholarship in the field and the implications for policy and practice. The chapter closes by suggesting some prospective areas for further research and analysis.

Key findings

This research began with an initial stage of desk-based study which mapped the media tone around teenage pregnancy at the time of research. The

findings from this media analysis were described in Chapter Four and were expected to provide something of a landscape against which participants' consumer practice could be read and understood. Indeed much qualitative work had demonstrated how young mothers were acutely aware of the canonical narratives that circulated about teenage motherhood and that the social stigma attached to early fertility had real impact in terms of how young women experienced maternity and carried out their maternal practice (Kirkman *et al* 2001, McDermott and Graham 2005, Hirst *et al* 2006, Alldred and David 2010). I was interested in exploring what this might mean in terms of participants' consumer practice and so as part of this investigation I set out to map the media representation of teenage pregnancy and parenting at the time of research. This piece of work was expected to contribute to an understanding of something of the context in which participants lived their lives and indeed carried out their consumer practice.

Although much scholarship in the field of teenage motherhood had described how negative stories about teenage pregnancy and parenthood were prominent in the media, my own analysis of online news reporting, carried out at a specific point in 2007, uncovered quite a different story. I noted a relatively soft tone in operation around teenage pregnancy and parenting, which I have argued was influenced by the more sympathetic approach New Labour took to the 'problem' in comparison to previous governments. Mention of teenage pregnancy and parenting in the press was invariably in the context of proposed improvements to sex education or access to contraception and there were few stories explicitly about the perils of teenage pregnancy or the immorality of teenage mothers themselves. Stories that did depict teenage mothers were broadly positive, presenting an 'against the odds narrative' with young mothers, (and sometimes their partners), described as overcoming the

obstacles to follow the accepted routes to success through education and work (Wilson and Huntington 2005, Arai 2009a). It was suggested that New Labour's approach to teenage pregnancy which saw teenage mothers as the victims of 'social exclusion' was absorbed into this media landscape and the TPS focus on improving sex education and access to contraception seemed to lead the debate about teenage pregnancy in the press. I described how during the implementation of the TPS New Labour actively used the media to focus the debate and to promote the core aims of the strategy. It was in their interest to limit the sensationalist and salacious coverage of matters related to the TPS in order to encourage support for their approach, which addressed the still very divisive and emotive issues of adolescent sexuality (Hoggart 2003) and extended state support to teenage mothers.

While I described a relatively 'polite discourse' in operation around teenage pregnancy and parenting in the press at the time of research, I also laid out how there was a negative undertone that ran through these stories. Moreover, my findings revealed how the admonishing of teenage pregnancy and parenthood was much more vociferous in other media spaces. I observed how anonymous online spaces provided members of the public with a licence to self-publish and have legitimated their scorn about teenage mothers and a sector of society who apparently choose early motherhood and welfare dependence over work. I argued that in the two popular websites I observed, teenage motherhood was associated with a welfare scrounging, tasteless underclass otherwise known as 'chavscum'. In these spaces it is the 'chav teenage mum' who becomes symbolic of this disparaged class and it is upon her body that a new and acidic form of class disgust is most profoundly condensed. It was suggested that the 'polite'/'impolite' dichotomy was repeated in television programming related to teenage pregnancy and

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parenthood, but I also drew on Tyler's (2011) more recent work to demonstrate how the 'impolite' discourse has been noted in and may be seeping into a growing genre of 'teen mum TV'. My suggestion was that while the press may take a softer approach to teenage pregnancy, a vicious discourse has emerged vociferously around teenage pregnancy in other media spaces where young mothers appear as the epitome of the white and feckless working (or workless) class at whom the most extreme form of class disgust is directed. It was this image it was suggested that remained dominant in the cultural landscape, which, although reconfigured in terms of a new class figure, seemed more consistent with older ways of looking and thinking about teenage pregnancy and motherhood as characteristic of a sullied underclass. The manners it seemed had been lost somewhere in between these two mediums. It was one of the interests of this study to explore how participants experienced the contemporary representation of teenage motherhood and how this might relate to their maternal material practice. My findings in regard to this are outlined below.

In Chapter Five, the first of three empirical data chapters based on my fieldwork, I addressed one of the study's core research questions concerning the availability of financial resources and how participants' consumer practice was mediated by their material circumstances. I provided an in-depth account of the sources of income participants had available to them, looking at benefit entitlements and contributions from fathers and family members as well as other more irregular forms of income. I illustrated some of the constraints participants faced in terms of access to money, as well as the level of support that many received from the social networks they were embedded in. I described how, despite the support mothers often received from family and friends, money was always tight, creating feelings of anxiety and stress among

participants about their ability to provide adequately for their children. Of those living independently none would have met the Minimum Income Standard for 2008 (Bradshaw *et al* 2008), the year the bulk of the research was carried out[59]. For the young women under the age of sixteen access to money was particularly restricted, creating relationships of reliance on parents – a situation that was less that satisfactory for most of the younger participants, but one for which they were obliged to be grateful. These younger women lacked autonomy in terms of what they were able to buy and had to be considerate to family budgets. They were enveloped within the finances of their families, making it hard for them to break away financially when they were able.

In this chapter I also outlined how, despite the material circumstances, of the young mothers in this study, buying for children was a priority and an important part of their caring work, which involved the development of a sophisticated knowledge of the product world for the new baby, the employment of a range of budgeting strategies, shopping around and the skilful negotiation of markets. Providing well for children also relied on the sacrifice of participants' own consumer needs and youth identity projects. In contrast to the narrative present in contemporary consumer culture (see Kehily 2009 and Chapter Two), participants bought very little for themselves and embarking on maternity represented an end to 'me-me' time rather than a time for self-indulgence. Maternity seemed to represent a release from the pressures of participation in youth culture and from the confines of femininity.

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[59] The research was carried out across from October 2007 and to July 2008, the bulk of contact with participants taking place in 2008. 2008 was the first year the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a minimum income standard for Britain.

Participants emerge as pragmatic and considered consumers who budgeted hard, made sacrifices and shopped around for their purchases. They made informed assessments about the items needed and where and how best to acquire them and the physical work they could do. The budgeting strategies and approach to buying for children that these young women adopted enabled them to participate in the practices of caring consumption and to act as good consumers and able providers by supplying 'stuff' for children on a budget. In this chapter I also described how the act of focussing finances on children, while a practical necessity, also allowed these young women to moralise their position and locate themselves as 'good mothers' who put the needs of their children first. In some cases their own *selflessness* was contrasted with the more *selfish* practice of investing in your own appearance as a mother. Although it is the working-class women who may often be associated with a preoccupation with appearance – lots of make up, lots of jewellery and big hair - (Skeggs 2004) these young women locate a trivial preoccupation with 'the look' of the self in maternity with older, more affluent women. While consumer culture increasingly demands that mothers invest in their appearance and do not 'let themselves' go in pregnancy, this discourse does not speak to these young women. For them maternity involves complete devotion to the infant and it is through their non-consumption for the self and their focus on the 'needs' of their infants that they create value around themselves as mothers. It was also suggested that these young women may have had high investments in normative ideals of motherhood, which privilege the needs of children over those of mothers, given their location as young poor mothers who may suffer stigmatisation and have few other routes to achieving a sense of self-worth. It is through their maternal practice and role as carers that they develop a sense of achievement and worth around the self (McDermott and Graham 2005, Skeggs 1997).

Chapter Six of the thesis primarily addressed my research interest in how media representation impacted on the experience and consumer practices of participants. An important finding described in this chapter was that it was not the media discourse that I had identified in Chapter Four that concerned these young women and impacted upon their everyday lives, or indeed their consumer practice. It was rather the local 'public' – experiences with professionals or the 'gaze' of an anonymous other in the 'non-places' of modernity – that were relevant to their experiences of maternity. The rather abstract and distant media discourse was of relatively little importance compared to the experience or feeling of direct hostility from sonographers, people in shops, on buses, at doctor's surgeries or peers and it was not the media that these young mothers were in dialogue with when they resisted 'stigma' but their local communities, their mothers and their school friends.

In this chapter I also described how for the young women who took part in the study material goods played an important role in demonstrating maternal competence in the context of a felt sense of public visibility and condemnation. In particular it was the adornment and presentation of infants that played a crucial role in displaying their ability as mothers and dressing infants well and ensuring that they were clean and tidy to go into the outside world was a priority. It was here that participants resisted stigmatisation and re-imaged themselves as respectable carers and mothers. Material culture was thus not only important in terms of the practice of caring for children but also in displaying the ability to care to 'others' (see also Skeggs 1997). Motherhood was a public as well as a private act for these young women and by presenting infants well they attempted to ensure their status as 'good mothers',

something, as was commented on above, that was particularly important for these young women given their location as young poor mothers.

Creating the right 'look' was important, yet presenting infants appropriately did not necessarily rely on the purchase of expensive name-brand clothing, but the ability be able to select and assemble baby clothing appropriately. Participants presented themselves as un-swayed by brand and were reticent to spending large sums of money on babies - something they suggested was futile as they attempted to win status as responsible mothers and consumers. Branding, however, became salient at certain moments and around particular objects and it was important to these young women that baby clothing was brand new and second-hand shopping for baby clothing was taboo. There was an apparently contradictory manoeuvring between participants wanting to claim the respectability associated with being a 'thrifty' and a responsible mother and having the 'right' baby stuff to 'fit in'. Their consumer practice was rule bound and transgressing boundaries potentially risked the consequences of being designated a 'tramp' or an inadequate parent. Avoiding the purchase of second-hand clothing and ensuring that babies had the 'correct' brands worked to protect both children and mothers from the associations of poverty and to demonstrate participants' ability to provide well for children and acquire the right markers of baby style. Indeed (as was also argued) the style of babies was important and reflective of the mothers' own taste and youth identity. In this chapter I also drew attention to the way in which, despite the value they hold in their local context, these young women's felt investments in forms of conspicuous consumption may be read through dominant systems of social value as frivolous, too consumerist and crass.

In the final data chapter, Chapter Seven, I provided an original account of two areas of maternal material practice that participants described in research activity. This chapter outlined the common social practice of giving gifts to babies and the meaning that was imbued in different presentations. Giving gifts to babies was analysed as an important form of contemporary gift giving, which enabled the expression and constitution of social relationships between babies and their social networks. The process of making maternal memory through the collation of 'baby stuff' was also explored, demonstrating the intimate and affective relationships participants had with baby objects. The practice of giving 'mum' jewellery and having the names of babies tattooed on mothers' bodies emerged here as two of the few sites where the young mothers in this study made their maternity visible through the consumption of objects for the self. This represents a particular form of maternal material self construction, however, built around the expression of maternal devotion and a relationship to a child. It is not a form of *'shallow'* self investment that, as was touched upon above and in Chapter Five, these young women shunned, and it exists outside contemporary consumer markets for the new mother. Drawing on arguments made in Chapter Five, it was suggested that the points at which these young women engage, or indeed do not engage, with consumer culture, express their devotion to their children and represent a particular kind of 'self project' which demonstrates their position as dedicated mothers for whom it is their children and their relationship to them that matters, not their own appearance.

The empirical chapters in this thesis have thus broadly addressed the overarching research questions that were set out at the beginning of this project which asked what and to what extent participants consumed for themselves and their children and the meaning and emotion participants

attached to 'baby stuff'. In the next section I consider in more fully the contribution that my work makes and address my final research question regarding what a study of the consumer practices of young mothers might bring to policy and practice.

Key contributions

This research has revealed the significance of consumer culture for the young mothers in this study and the kind of 'work' that objects performed in their lives. I have argued that material culture provides an important resource for the enactment of caring projects; for protecting both mothers and infants from negative attention; for the establishment of familial relationships and for the recording of special childhood moments. Consumer culture was described as an important site through which the young women in this study practised and displayed their mothering. I have also outlined some of the anxieties and struggles young mothers face in terms of their ability to be able to provide sufficiently for children as well as the work that is involved in ensuring children have what is 'needed' and to 'look good' to go out in public. For the young women in this study consuming for babies has been laid out as an intricate task that requires the acquisition of specialist consumer knowledge and much planning and foresight. For it is an activity that carries much weight for mothers and one that is rule bound and replete with social meaning, upon which the ascription of maternal status and social inclusion and exclusion sits heavy. It is an activity charged with affect, filled with anxiety, anticipation, pleasure and satisfaction that invoked consumers' own childhoods. My work testifies to the importance of consumer culture in the lives of participants and the focus on consumption and the 'close up' methodology draws attention to important aspects of the experience of young mothers as well as skills and

resources that are often absent from accounts of teenage motherhood. I have highlighted something of their cultural practice, the meaning they attribute to motherhood and how maternal projects are enacted as well as some of the practical and representational difficulties they struggle to negotiate as low income young mothers.

The study represents a challenge to popular narratives about commoditisation in late modernity, broadly contributing to studies on consumer and material culture that emphasise the agency of consumers and omnipresence and value of 'things' in contemporary lives. The research, therefore, has something to contribute in terms of contemporary debates about the nature of consumer culture. Indeed this work demonstrates that consumer culture is not necessarily 'bad' and that it has an important place and does important work in modern everyday lives. The research also 'speaks back' to debates about the irresponsible and 'disordered' consumer practices of the working class (Griffin 1997), illustrating the reality of consuming on a limited income and the careful budgeting and planning that goes into buying for those with less access to financial resources, as well as the significance and meaning that are attached to the very material objects that become the subject of ridicule and scorn.

My work provides insights that contribute to an understanding of the lives and experiences of young mothers and 'ways of looking' that may be useful for academic work on young motherhood but can also inform policy and practice.

There may be things to take away from my discussion of the poverty, for example, that young mothers face and the relationships of dependence that younger mothers in particular find themselves in. Might it be appropriate for

younger mothers to receive more independent finance? It most certainly makes sense for young mothers aged sixteen and seventeen to receive the same benefit entitlement as older mothers and this is something that the YWCA have been fighting for some time. For practitioners, my research also offers ways of reading and understanding the 'needs' of young mothers in terms of consumption. Considering and having some sensitivity about the importance of the role of commodities in young mothers lives and the anxiety that they can feel about their lack of financial wherewithal and their ability to provide for their children may be important for those who are working with young mothers. The discerning narrative about consumption that practitioners often corroborated (and participants regularly had to negotiate) (see Chapter Four) was perhaps unhelpful and dismissive when getting all the 'right stuff' for babies was an important part of participants' caring and protective work. There was a definite sense among some practitioners that 'excessive' spending on babies was unnecessary and something that these young women should avoid. Lessons on budgeting for a new baby focussed strictly on buying the necessities for a baby and avoiding all the fancy, 'unnecessary' extras while budgeting classes did not include saving to buy special outfits or shoes for babies, for example. This might seem quite incompatible in a context where abounding maternity and baby markets promote endless 'precious little things' for babies. Teaching personal finance to young mothers might also usefully draw on the budgeting and shopping experience and expertise of other young mothers themselves, making use of and affirming their competence as mothers and consumers.

Although not exhaustive the initial piece of desk-based research I carried out on the representation of teenage mothers as part of this project also makes an important contribution to the academic understanding of contemporary

representation of teenage motherhood and how this may change over time in line with broader political and cultural trends, as well as the impact new media forms may have (Arai 2009a). My work has also provided a detailed understanding of how young mothers experience and interact with stigma on a 'local' basis which may contribute to work on the experience of being a young mother. Although the professionals in both research settings were aware of the 'stigma' young mothers faced and often designed classroom and group activity around this, this study provides a concrete example of how young mothers feel and respond to negative judgement and underscores the need for services and professionals to adopt a non-judgemental approach when working with young mothers. Educational initiatives that enable young mothers to discuss and challenge negative representation also seem very relevant in this context.

This research fills something of a gap in the literature on young motherhood and consumption by providing an account of the ways in which a specific group of mothers who are young and often poor interact with and use consumer culture. The research makes contributions to scholarship in the area of youth and consumption as well by providing some understanding of the impact that motherhood might have on the consumption patterns of young people and how youth identities may fade or be re-worked when one becomes a mother. In addition, the research adds to a body of work on low-income consumers illustrating how young poor mothers manage on limited incomes and the investments they make in consumer culture. New scholarship in the area of British Family Studies (Heath *et al* 2011) may also draw something from the research in terms of understanding aspects of family practice and display around consumption.

Areas for further research

Work in the field on motherhood and consumption is limited (Taylor 2004) and although this study contributes to this area of scholarship by focussing on a group of mothers whose consumer practice has been unexplored, I would suggest that there is still much work to be done in this area. A focus on consumption offers rich insights into the workings of family life and there may be scope for understanding how other older, more wealthy, same sex, disabled, black or Asian mothers engage with consumer culture and how commodities are implicated in maternal practice and the displaying of family, particularly as markets for pregnancy, the new mother and the new baby abound. It might also be very informative to understand how the significance of commodities in the lives of mothers has changed over time by excavating the role of consumer culture for mothers of previous generations. I think there is also scope to take the present research further by embedding it other areas of literature. The anthropological work on women and dress for example might bring new insights to understanding the intricacies of dressing babies. The scholarship in British Family Studies on family practice and display is also under-explored in the thesis and I think there may some scope to engage further with this work in order to embed and understand the fuller implications of the research. The role that fathers play in terms of buying and providing for infants has also been sidelined in the thesis, as the research focussed on mothers and most participants were living as single people. The contribution of fathers has thus only been understood through mothers and the parents of mothers as the main providers and buyers for children. The literature on consuming for babies and children is also centred upon mothers. It might, however, be worthwhile exploring fathers' roles and experiences in terms of consuming for babies and children. What kind of responsibility do they take

for buying for children? Do they harbour similar anxieties to mothers? What work might material culture perform for fathers? Finally, I would suggest that my reflexive engagement with the research process might also provide important insights for other researchers. This might be an area that could be explored in more depth to inform those using similar methods and approaches to research.
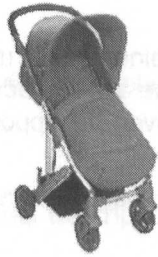
Appendix one

Method	Methodological Reasoning
Participant Observation	- Give participants the opportunity to get to know me - Encourage participation in other aspects of the research - Begin building up a picture of participants' consumer behaviour and other aspects of their lives - Use data to inform later research activity
Activity based focus groups	- Begin to focus data collection on research area - Make the research experience interesting and engaging for participants - Allow participants to choose methods they feel most comfortable with, including those with poor literacy. - Provide something different to the usual pedagogy - Use as an opportunity to encourage participation in photo-elicitation exercise
Photo-elicitation exercise	- Access more in depth accounts of meanings and attachments to consumer culture and material goods - Make the research experience interesting and engaging for participants - Allow participants to choose methods they feel most comfortable with, including those with poor literacy. - Provide something different to the usual pedagogy
Shopping exercise	- Deepen and enrich analytical interpretation - Make the research experience interesting and engaging for participants - Allow participants to choose methods they feel most comfortable with, including those with poor literacy. - Provide something different to the usual pedagogy
In depth picture of participant's consumer practice	

Table 2. Methods and reasoning

Baby Belongings

You are invited to take part in a research project that explores the meaning and importance that young mums attach to their own and their babies' belongings.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is entirely up to you and I would suggest that you take time to have a good think about it. You may like to discuss with a parent, teacher or partner. You may take part in some bits of the study and not others, if you prefer.

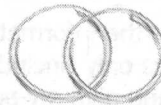**Can I change my mind about taking part?**

Yes, of course. You can change your mind about taking part at any time without giving me a reason. You can also withdraw any of the information you have provided whenever you wish. My contact details are on the bottom of this form. You can also contact me via a staff member at the Meriton.

Any questions or concerns?

Call me, Ruth Ponsford Tel: 07793 081157 or email: r.ponsford@open.ac.uk or my supervisors, Dr Mary Jane Kehily Tel: 01908 659260 or email m.j.kehily@open.ac.uk

Professor Rachel Thomson Tel: 01908 654246 or email r.thomson@open.ac.uk.

Objects and belongings form an important part of our modern everyday lives. The things we buy, swap and receive have special meaning to us and often say something about who we think we are and how we want to be seen by others.

This study aims to explore the kind of importance and meaning young mums in Bristol attach to the possessions they keep, wear and use. I want to find out:

What belongings you keep for yourself and your child?

Where, when, how and why have you acquired these things?

How do you choose these items?

What do these items mean to you?

Why are they important to you?

What do you think they say about you?

This leaflet gives you information about my study to help you decide if you would like to take part.

Who am I?

My name is Ruth Ponsford. I am a student researcher from the **Open University** in Milton Keynes. This project is being carried out as part of my course.

What will it involve?

Taking part in two group discussions. These will be filmed by one of the people in the group so I can review them and remember what you have said. Taking photos of items that are important to you and bringing the photos in to tell me what the meaning of those items is for you. I will record our discussion so I can remember what you say.

What will you do with the information I give you?

I will use the information you and the other participants give me in a report that will be submitted as part of my course. Your information may also be used in published reports about the research and presentations at conferences. I will not include any of the photos or visual images you provide if you do not want me to.

Will my name be used?

No. You will choose a name to use so that you can say what you like without anyone knowing it is you.

Is it confidential?

Yes. All information you give me will be treated as private and confidential and stored in a safe place.

What's in it for me?

You will improve your discussion and presentation skills, and the work we complete together may be displayed and/or accredited by your teacher or exam board. You will receive a copy of all the photos you take and you may also enjoy having the time to reflect and talk about things that are important to you.

Appendix three

CONSENT FORM

Title of project: Baby Belongings

Name of researcher: Ruth Ponsford

Please tick box

1. I confirm that I have read, Ruth Ponsford has explained, and I understand the information leaflet dated **September 2007** for the above study. I have had time to think over my decision to take part and been given the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time by contacting Ruth Ponsford. ☐

3. I agree to take part in these parts of the above study: ☐

    o Focus groups

    o Auto photography exercise and interview ☐

    o Shopping trip (for some participants only) ☐

    (add initial and date if different to below)

4. I understand that the information I provide as part of this study will be used for research purposes only (including research publications, reports and conference presentations), and give my permission for my data to be used in this way, subject to anonomyity procedures. ☐

5. I understand that the any information I provide is confidential and that Ruth Ponsford will ensure that I cannot be identified in any subsequent writing or presentation. ☐

6. Subject to the anonymity procedures, I give Ruth Ponsford permission to quote any of my words used in my conversations in research publications, reports and presentations. ☐

7. I understand that Ruth Ponsford will gain agreement from me to reproduce each photo I provide in publications, reports and presentations. (Please refer to photo selection form) ☐

8. I understand that Ruth Ponsford will gain agreement from me to reproduce any part of film containing me in research publications, reports and presentations. (Please refer to moving image selection form) ☐

9. I agree that all data supplied by me will be securely stored within the Open University for the duration of the project, with access only to those with permission from Ruth Ponsford. ☐

10. I understand that I can withdraw all or any part of my data at any time by contacting Ruth Ponsford. ☐

11. I assign copyright in my contribution to Ruth Ponsford. ☐

12. Ruth Ponsford has explained and I understand this consent form. ☐

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Ruth Ponsford

     Date   Signature

Thank you for taking part in this study

Appendix four

PHOTO SELECTION FORM

Title of project: Baby Belongings

Name of researcher: Ruth Ponsford

I agree for the following photos to be used for research purposes as outlined below in the above project only:

Reference	Brief Description	Reproduction in research publications, reports and conference presentations (y/n)
01		
02		
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_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Ruth Ponsford   _____   _____
                                 Date   Signature

Thank you for taking part in this study

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Appendix five

Focus group participants

Focus Group	Number of participants
Focus Group One (A) - MBU	
Sadie	
Nicole	
Kate	
Ruby	
Belle	
Dina	
Cat	7
Focus Group One (B) - PRU Pre Sixteens	
Jess	
Marsha	
Josie	
Selina	
Natasha	5
Focus Group One (C) - PRU Pre Sixteens	
Kayleigh	
Chelsea	
Nadia	3
Focus Group One (D) - PRU Post Sixteens	
Cara	
Kimberlea	
Niemh	
Taylor	4
Focus Group Two (A) - MBU	
Ruby	
Cat	2
Focus Group Two (B) - MBU	
Nicole	
Clare	
Dina	
Kate	4
Focus Group Two (C) - PRU Pre Sixteens	
Faith	
Carly	
Kayleigh	
Natasha	4
Focus Group Two (D) - PRU Pre Sixteens	
Amy	
Jess	
Josie	
Selina	4
Focus Group Two (E) - PRU Post Sixteens	
Cara	
Kimberlea	
Niemh	
Taylor	4

Interview participants

Kayleigh	Kayleigh was white British and had just turned sixteen when I met her at the PRU where she was completing her GCSE's. She was fifteen when she had her son who was three months at the start of the research period. Kayliegh was living at home with her parents although she had spent a large portion of her childhood living with her grandparents elsewhere. Her parents and extended family supported her financially and she claimed no benefit independently. Kayleigh had split up with the father of her son before the baby was born and maintained a hostile relationship with him. He did not regularly contribute financially, but provided ad hoc gifts for his son. Her mother was unemployed and her father was working as a gardener at the time of research.
Taylor	Taylor was seventeen at the time of research and she recently started attending the PRU to study a Parents with Prospects course. She was black and Jamaican born and had been living in the UK for around five years. She originally lived in London with her older brother and then her boyfriend, but had moved to Bristol when she found she was pregnant to get some support from her mother who was living there. Although her mother and father were still together, her father had never followed his wife to England. He had been shot dead in Jamaica under mysterious circumstances about two years prior to the interview. Taylor's mother provided for her financially and the father of her son, who she was still in a relationship with, sent about £50 a week out of the wages he received for working in Boots. Taylor's son was three months when we met. Her mother worked irregular hours as an office cleaner.
Marie	Marie, who described herself as white British, was eighteen and her son was about four months old when we met. She was in a stable relationship and living with her long term partner in a privately rented one bedroom flat. Marie's partner was unemployed at the time of contact although he sometimes did bits and pieces of work where he could get it. He had a criminal record and Marie suggested that this hindered his employment prospects. The couple were living off about £220 per fortnight in benefits. Housing Benefit covered their rent.
Faith	Faith was nearly sixteen when I interviewed her at the PRU and was black South African. She had moved to the UK with her parents about three years prior. She has been pregnant and fourteen and had her daughter, who was only two months old when we first met, at fifteen. Faith's mother was a nurse and she was unsure what her father did for a living. I gather they may have been wealthy in South Africa as Faith spoke about having maids there. She was the only participant who did not receive the £500 Sure Start maternity grant which implies that her parents were not living on a low income. Faith was entirely financially reliant on her parents and they provided money when they saw fit.
Carly	Carly was white British and fifteen years old when she took part in one of the focus groups and sixteen when I interviewed her. She was fourteen when she became pregnant and fifteen when she gave birth to her son. She was living at home with her parents, her twin sister and two brothers. She was largely financially reliant on her parents,

	although she was claiming her Child Benefit independently. Carly had split up with the father of her child about a month after their son was born and they were not in regular contact. Her mother was a receptionist and her dad was a delivery driver.
Cara	Cara was seventeen when I met her and she had had her son aged sixteen. At the time of contact she was living in a council flat with her partner. Cara's family had a long history with Children's Services and all of her nine younger siblings were being 'looked after' by carers other than her parents. Cara was whiteBritish and both her and her partner were unemployed. They were receiving in the region of £200 per fortnight in benefits.
Simone	Simone was seventeen when I met her at the PRU. She was living with her partner who she had been with for nearly two years in a council property with their eight month old son. Simone had been sixteen when she gave birth. Her partner worked irregularly as a painter decorator and it was unclear what money they received as a result of his employment. Simone suggested money was tight and she was experiencing a problem with her benefit payments at the time that was leaving them short. Simone described herself as white British.
Jess	Jess was fifteen when she took part in the focus groups and sixteen when I interviewed her. She had her daughter aged fifteen and was pregnant at fourteen. Her daughter was about three months when we first mer. She was living at home with her mechanic father, who was separated from her mother, and her siblings. She was entirely reliant on her father for money and he passed on the Child Benefit he was claiming for Jess' daughter directly to Jess. Jess was still with the seventeen year old father of her child and they were hoping to move in together and get married at some point. He was unemployed at the time and was providing financially for their child on an ad hoc basis. Simone was white British.
Dina	Dina was twenty when I first met her at the MBU. Her son, who she had had aged nineteen, was a few months old. She had planned her pregnancy with her ex partner but he subsequently disappeared when she was about eight months pregnant. She suspected he had gone back to the Philippines. At the time she was living off Statutory Maternity Pay as she had been employed prior to having a baby as well as Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit. She was receiving in the region of about £150 per week. Dina was white British.
Sian	Sian was a white British woman who was eighteen at the time of research. Her daughter was around four months old. Sian was still with the father of her daughter who was currently on a training course for which he only got paid £50 per week. Sian was in receipt of Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit, which amounted to about £120 per week. Her partner contributed where he could and she also received regular gifts in the form of money, baby equipment and clothing from her father's partner.
Nicole	Nicole was just nineteen when we met at the MBU. She had her son, who was about four months old, when she was eighteen. Naomi was still with the father of her son but their relationship was strained. He worked as a builder and he and Nicole had a joint account. Nicole was receiving

	maternity allowance of £125 per week as well as her Child Benefit. Her partner was taking home about £800. Although they were by far to best off financially Nicole regularly claimed that she found money tight and had to budget hard. A large portion of their money was spent on Nicole's car. Nicole was white British.
Jamie	Jamie was nineteen and had been living in the MBU for a short while. She became pregnant wither son when she was eighteen. She was still in relationship with the father of her child who made very ad hoc financial contribution. Jamie was in receipt of Maternity Allowance, as she had worked for a period in the run up to her pregnancy, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit. This equated to about £150 per week. Jamie described herself as white British.
Jane	Jane was a white British young woman who was seventeen when we first met at the MBU and her daughter, who she had given birth to aged seventeen, was about ten months. Jane had split with the father of her daughter before their daughter was born and they were rarely in contact. Jane had a large network of supportive friends and family who helped out financially and bought many gifts for her daughter. Jane was receiving Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit which amounted to around £130 per week.

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