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Waight, E.

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Buying for Baby: How Middle-Class Mothers Negotiate Risk with Second-Hand Goods

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The passing on of used or otherwise second-hand baby and children's goods is nothing new. Clothing, as well as toys and equipment, can barely be used by one child before growing out of them; that item now redundant for one family yet with plenty of useful life left in it for another (Gregson and Crewe, 1998). Such goods may be passed on to family or friends as 'hand-me-downs' or entered into semi-formalized systems of exchange including charity shops, car boot sales or online sale sites. The term 'second-hand' is used here to describe goods which have not been purchased brand new from conventional retail outlets but rather have already been owned and/or used by another. Whilst second-hand is the term commonly used in the UK and adopted by key authors including Gregson and Crewe (1997; 2003), in the US and other parts of the world 'thrift' is often appropriated and mirrored in the originating literature (Arnould and Bardhi, 2005; Medvedev, 2012).

This chapter draws on a broader UK-based study on the second-hand consumption practices of parents, namely mothers consuming used baby and children's clothes, toys and equipment at nearly new sales. The study explored the role of social networks in structuring attendance to the sale, as well as the social role of the sales themselves as a site facilitating bonding, learning and information flows. In addition, it included an investigation of the multiple ways in which mothers negotiate and moderate the risks entailed in consuming previously used goods through social practice, adherence to safety conventions and domestic divestment rituals. The final point provides the focus of this chapter and considers the ways in which middle-class mothers negotiate risk and enact intimacy through the material in order to benefit from the enhanced affordability of second-hand goods. Whilst conventional shopping practices have been studied extensively to date, the shift from a concern with formal retail sites to a more holistic view of consumption as an everyday practice has only occurred in the last decade or so and even then is still under-researched. Focusing on the mother as consumer as well as carer, this research addresses a gap in the knowledge of mother's co-consuming practices related to second-hand goods (Cook, 2013).

The life of an object, as well as the relationship between an individual and the object, does not begin and/or end at point of purchase. Whilst there is an increasing awareness and interest in the journey of commodities prior to retail, primarily linked to ethical concerns of worker exploitation and environmental degradation (Vitell and Muncy, 1992; Humphery, 2011) new products purchased in mainstream retail outlets are generally still not considered by consumers for their pre-purchase lifecycle. Instead, they are thought to 'begin' at the point of purchase, any history prior to that readily disregarded. As such, consumers are able to mobilise the symbolic value of commodities through the way they are appropriated post-purchase, providing a material form in which to construct and display their identities. This then means that second-hand goods, already used by another, may be seen to be tainted, contaminated or otherwise influenced by their past.

Current research into the second-hand consumer has only just touched upon how actors may edit, rationalise and justify this inscribed material biography (Gregson and Crewe, 1997; Maddrell and Horne, 2002). Instead the main focus of enquiry has been on categorising the second-hand consumer - the financially and socially excluded (Williams and Windebank, 2002; James, Brown et al. 2010), the politically/sustainably motivated (Franklin, 2011; Waight, 2013) and the vintage identifier (Palmer, 2004; DeLong, Heinemann, et al. 2005). Such work would benefit from a greater consideration of both gender and class, particularly in light of the middle-class consumer and the multiple reasons leading such a group to second-hand economies when they are not otherwise excluded from conventional retail. Indeed Gregson (2007) calls for a broader conceptualisation of consumption research; an approach that does more than simply relate consumption to production but considers the social lives of things – the sorting, divesting and disposal. In her book 'Living with Things: Ridding, Accommodation, Dwelling', Gregson (2007, p.20) states,

Where this takes us is in the direction of approaches which refuse a separation between the human and the non-human and which insist on the object-ions and object-edness of things, but which position such cohabitations within the dwelling structure itself.

Consumption in the home becomes a broader practice shaped by sorting, mending and cleaning. Intimately moulded by familial structures, domestic ideals and habitual routines, consumption then, according to Warde (2005, p.137) is, 'not itself a practice but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice'. This sentiment is mirrored in Miller's (1999; 2004) work as he positions consumption as a practice of care, something we do as an act of devotion or even sacrifice when faced with the responsibility for shopping on behalf of the household. This is the approach taken for my own research which positions the consumption practices of mothers within the broader practices of care embedded in the parenting role. Mothers consume on behalf of their children in order to provide such care, love and provisioning, the act of consumption itself situated as a social practice. Cook (2008) describes this motherly consumption as 'co-consuming', as women consume on behalf of another, negotiating and prioritising the needs of both her child and herself. In this manner motherly consumption cannot be regarded as a subjective, singular practice but as bound within a complex web of social norms, expectations, anxieties and desires. Second-hand shopping, as an intimate and 'risky' practice, offers a wealth of opportunity for investigating such norms and anxieties.

In the UK societal changes have influenced these norms and expectations with increased emphasis on the professionalization of parenting and the boundaries constituting that of the 'good' parent (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). The scope for new parents' support networks have also altered as the middle-classes find themselves living further from established friends and family, having moved away for education and work (Edwards and Gillies, 2004). Indeed one in ten UK households move every year and our lives are increasingly dispersed both geographically and across networks (Cass, Shove et al. 2005). As such support networks too are more dispersed with less weight on the local community who traditionally provided a platform for localised shared provisioning. Not only have hand-me-downs long been part and parcel of family life, passing down clothes and toys from older to younger children both within and across family ties, in the more distant past used clothing of all types were a valuable commodity and commonly traded door-to-door (Lemire, 2005).

In contrast, second-hand retail sites are now generally considered unconventional and informal. Whilst some are situated within purpose-built shops, others are placed temporarily in alternative spaces – a playing field in the case of car boot sales, and school or village hall in the event of nearly new sales. Existing literature might chart these spaces as ‘alternative’ retail sites, but informal exchange networks are deeply embedded in the history of society itself, as previously described. Of course, rather than trading from door to door, those wishing to rid of redundant goods now have a number of options available for disposal. Some of these channels are hidden through informal exchange networks and social ties and increasingly, facilitated by online networks. Others are more visible like the charity shops which have become increasingly professionalized, encroaching on the thoroughfare of the British high street (Maddrell and Horne, 2002). Studying mothers at nearly new sales, Clarke (2000) uses the term ‘trafficking’ to describe the movement of children’s wear from one family to another, colloquially suggesting an ‘underground’ form of consumption. Indeed such term is loaded with precarity, connoting a form of provisioning that requires skill and labour, and is antithetical to conventional channels of consumption.

The precarious nature of second-hand goods is embedded in the unknown; we do not know where that item has been, who has been using it and whether it is fit for purpose. Risk is an inherent part of purchasing second-hand, and all second-hand consumers have to weigh-up this perceived risk. Second-hand goods by their very nature have a past, and are therefore inscribed with biographies that consumers must negotiate in different ways (Gregson and Crewe, 2003). These perceived risks are closely linked to cleanliness, both physical and envisioned, as well as a lack of product guarantee that the product is fit for purpose. In contemplating the intimacies of consuming charity shop clothes, cleanliness and indeed the threat of disease, is cited as a particular problem for potential consumers. A focus on bodily narratives relates to the way in which consumers view second-hand clothing as previously worn by another - the ‘safest’ clothes are those worn furthest from the body (Brooks, Crewe et al. 2000). The theme of risk and anxiety is particularly pertinent when considering the practice of consuming on behalf of someone else, bringing to light further moral debates inscribed in the practice of consumption (Afflerback, Carter et al. 2013; Cairns, Johnston et al. 2013).

With this in mind, this chapter focuses on the negotiations and risk reduction strategies practiced by middle-class mothers as they engage in consuming second-hand baby items, negotiating parental responsibilities and obligations with the desire to protect the ‘pure’ child (Clarke, 2007). Crudely put, existing literature situates the second-hand consumer in one of two camps; the ‘excluded consumer’, whose financial and/or social restrictions lead to exclusion from conventional retail sites, and everyone else. The latter type, the agency-driven consumer, is led to alternative second-hand retail channels for a host of social, cultural, financial, political or ethical reasons (Williams and Windebank, 2002; Guiot and Roux, 2010). Whilst interesting, this chapter does not focus on why, if they can afford new goods, middle-class mothers purchase second-hand goods for their children. Rather, it focuses on how they negotiate bringing such goods into use within the domestic sphere. Consumption has long been considered in light of class (Lunt and Livingstone, 1992; Bourdieu, [1979] 2010) and so too has parenting (Klett-Davies, 2010). Class remained central to this study as the nearly new sales used to recruit interviewees were themselves organised largely by middle-class volunteers for middle-class parents. The

notion then, of the interviewees not aligning to the 'excluded consumer' demographic but being rather more agency-driven remains central to the analysis of consumption-divestment practice within the sales and at home.

Whilst the sales are used by fathers as well as mothers, with many attending as a couple, mothers were selected for the interviews as they remain the primary consumer decision maker within the home, particularly with regard to caring for children. 30 mothers were interviewed, accessed through the nearly new sales aligned to the UK's largest parenting charity. Interviewees varied in age group from 20-24 to 40+ with nearly half being aged 30-34. Two were first time expectant mothers, the others all being mothers to one or two children up to the age of ten. Two thirds were educated to degree level, with six holding postgraduate qualifications, significantly higher than the UK national average of 38 per cent graduate attainment for working age adults (ONS, 2013). All interviewees were white British apart from one participant who was of Turkish origin.

### **'Good' Second-Hand Stuff and 'Good' Mothering**

The nearly new sales were organised by local branches of NCT (formerly National Childbirth Trust) and the three UK branches/sales sampled to recruit interviewees comprised a suburb of a large Midlands city, an affluent historical Southern city and a more socially diverse naval town on the South Coast of England. Alongside the interviews ran a broader ethnographic study where I conducted participant observation at fifteen nearly new sales over the course of eighteen months. Generally the nearly new sales are held bi-annually across the UK through local branches and held in schools, church halls or leisure centres on a Saturday or Sunday. Whilst NCT members are offered early entry to shop, the sales are open to all, enabling members of the public to buy and sell maternity, baby and children's goods in what is considered by the attendees to be a highly efficient setting. Indeed in an age of increased geographic mobility for the middle-classes, the sales offer a useful route of exchange for parents within the community to pass on used children's goods (for a small charge). Whilst the nearly new sales provided a point of access, many of the mothers used the sales as one of a range of channels to acquire second-hand goods. The transcripts focus in part on the sales, but also on broader provisioning practices for acquiring goods through family and friends, at charity shops and car boot sales and through online classified advertisements.

Very little academic research has touched on nearly new sales, the most notable being Clarke's (2000) ethnographic study on a nearly new sale run by a North London mothers' group (not NCT). Clarke locates the sale as an 'ostensibly middle-class enterprise' even though the participants recruited are women living on low incomes (but who, according to Clarke, pursue middle-class values). Indeed the sales are positioned as the alternative to NCT, stating that 'whilst many mothers in the ethnographic study happily embrace the liberal endeavours of the NCT the legacy of formal mothering advice stands as an anathema to most women involved in the nearly new sales'. The discussion of NCT at all indicates the centrality of NCT in the lives of middle-class mothers, whether or not they partake in the services offered by NCT (such as antenatal classes, nearly new sales or breastfeeding support) or subscribe to membership. NCT nearly new sales offer a stand-alone service for the benefit of local parents (in addition to being a fundraising endeavour). In this regard the sales do attract a more diverse socio-

demographic than the antenatal classes NCT are renowned for, but they are still a largely middle-class venture, a characteristic certainly shared and shaped by the volunteers. As many of my findings within the locale of the NCT sale support that of Clarke (2000) it would be superfluous to make much for the case that the sales used for this study differ to that studied by Clarke had it not been for the impact of the institutional association of NCT on pacifying parental anxiety.

Participation at the NCT nearly new sale is structured in large part by social networks, which in turn are situated in fixed networks established through NCT and subsequent parenting networks. Many parents become involved in other aspects of NCT as an expectant or new parent in order to establish a local support network. A trusted association to NCT is the first point I wish to make in suggesting ways in which mothers negotiate risk, whether it is safety or health risks to the child, or threats to the mother's self-identity. Mothers choose the nearly new sale over other forms of second-hand retail in order to minimise the risks invoked by consuming second-hand goods because they are engaging in such action as part of a group. Indeed Bourdieu ([1984] 2010) relays the claim that geographical space is never socially neutral; the sale is thus a field attracting a particular social group; in Bourdieu's terms, those sharing a similar habitus. This, I argue, leads to the notion that the used goods at the sale have come from a home similar to the home of the consumer, because the field itself is attracting a homophilous group, thus creating a greater degree of trust and familiarity with the goods. This is implied by Erin,

I don't really buy clothes from charity shops, they look a bit more manky and dusty. The ones from NCT look like they've just come from somebody's bottom drawer, they've not been up in the loft and they don't look like they're at the end of their life (Erin: married, 40+, full time mother).

Erin implies that because charity shop clothes look more 'manky and dusty' they are not suitable, as presumably they are deemed to be unclean or unhygienic. Despite this, she still recognises that clothes from the NCT sale have come ambiguously from 'somebody'. She does not know who, but in her mind they are clothes that have been cared for. The generalized nature of the comment further suggests that she is drawing more on supposition and fixed personal beliefs because in actuality few charity shop clothes are 'manky and dusty' as they have become increasingly professionalized in recent years (Horne and Maddrell, 2002). Indeed other interviewees talked of positive charity shop experiences. Furthermore, having volunteered at the nearly new sales myself, unpacking, sorting and repacking the goods, the quality of items varies greatly. Rather than quality being consistently high, it seems more likely that good quality items can be found simply due to the sheer volume of goods available. The notion of quality then comes from a range of sources, not least the name itself 'nearly new sale' but also embedded in the association to NCT and its position as a trusted name working to support parents.

### **Divestment and Hygiene**

An excluded consumer has little choice over the way in which he/she procures goods. Indeed a characteristic of the excluded consumer is a desire for new goods halted by an economic, and to a lesser extent social, exclusion from such first-cycle retail channels (Williams and Windebank, 2002). In contrast, the interviewees included in this study were all employed, on maternity leave or financially supported

by their partner whilst they took a career break. They were well-educated and interviews were conducted in their nice, middle-class, homes. Their motives for consuming second-hand goods are therefore more complex, with more options and essentially a plethora of choice. These mothers are driven but not restricted by a thrift normativity (everyone is looking for a bargain). Therefore the advantages and disadvantages of consuming a previously used object must be negotiated on a case-by-case basis with mothers responsible for providing the best for the family whilst making resources go further. Rationalisations for consumption practices ranged from personal negotiations of risk using habitual divestment rituals, to compliance with wider norms and conventions. These negotiations centre on the fact that all used goods have an embedded previous history, a biography a new owner cannot access. A number of respondents recognised and commented on the fact that they were more comfortable in taking used goods from someone that they knew rather than a stranger. Tina, a first-time expectant mum, was one of those respondents, she said,

Baby bedding I'm sceptical about. I've been given some by my friend but that's only because I know her. My mum bought me a second-hand Moses basket but it had only been used twice.  
(Tina: married, 20-24, dental nurse)

Tina tried to justify her acceptance of these items by saying that she knows where they have come from, or in the case of the Moses basket, that it had only been used twice by another family. Presumably this means it has not been used enough to be permanently tainted or contaminated by a previous owner. Tina was the most closely aligned to the 'excluded consumer' demographic of all of the interviewees. As a young first-time parent on a reasonably low salary her narrative was littered with the need to be 'resourceful'. She acquired many items second-hand but direct from family and friends rather than through unknown channels. Tina is an example of a mother's first tentative step into the vast second-hand economy of children's things and as such it is of little surprise that she lacks confidence. As Kehily and Martens (2014, p.239) state,

The new parent of today is confronted with a myriad of products that are designed to "safeguard", "guide" and "monitor" the young child and ensure its well-being.

The rhetoric of parenting advice used by the commercial world in order to sell baby goods is one of a number of external stimuli eliciting anxiety in new parents. Mothers spoke openly about the anxiety they felt as a first time mum and how this manifest in wanting to buy everything new and in keeping the young baby away from dirt, germs and harm. Anxiety was found to reduce over time though, and parents on their second or third child were more likely to acquire far more items second-hand. Indeed, Tina had only attended one nearly new sale to date, buying just a couple of items for herself rather than her unborn baby, including an unworn maternity swimming costume. Having investigated what the sales were about, she expressed a desire to return after the baby was born, when we might expect her to then purchase objects for the child. Tina recognised the process of cleaning as a way to rid of any potential threat embedded in second-hand goods. She continued,

I have bought second-hand bottles but I have bought brand new teats. The bottles were used by my godson and they've been sterilised. I'm a dental nurse so I know how the sterilisation works

Emma Waight

so I know that they are going to be clean but I wouldn't buy second-hand teats or second-hand dummies even though I know they're going to be sterilised but that's just something I wouldn't buy second-hand.

Tina goes on to say that she plans to breastfeed her baby so bottles will not be used regularly and as such there is no point buying new ones when second-hand ones were available so readily from a known source. Here we see Tina's wage-work role as a dental nurse shaping her mothering practices, however, despite understanding the scientific process of sterilisation, she still cites teats and dummies as unsuitable for second-hand consumption. We might suggest this is due to the physical bodily contact between the teat and the baby's mouth, embedded not just with notions of hygiene but also with the intimate relationship between the teat and the mother's breast. The bottle or dummy can be regarded as a direct extension of the mother. The unsuitability of second-hand bottles was a common narrative of the interviewees; if the mother cannot feed her child directly herself then only the best (new) substitute will do.

Despite a suggestion in existing literature that second-hand clothes can be seen to harbour "traces of disease, death, sex and other bodily functions" of previous owners (Horne and Maddrell, 2002, p.50) all of the mothers interviewed had dressed their child/ren in second-hand clothes, thus implying that parents do not have an issue with dressing their child/ren in clothing previously worn by another. Clearly, the mothers interviewed had all participated in nearly new sales and as such we would assume they are intent on consuming at least some goods second-hand. There were however, varying limits to this practice, as described by Melissa,

I think clothes wise. It's a daft way of differentiating but anything that's going directly onto his skin so sleep suits, vests. Two reasons, one I'd rather know that they're fresh, pristine, and also muslins as well are something I'd bought new, and also for what they cost brand new in the shops, supermarkets always do good deals on bundles of vests whatever. They are something I always buy first hand (Melissa: married, 30-34, environmental consultant).

Melissa's comments match that of a number of interviewees for whom items like vests and sleep suits are so inexpensive to buy first-hand that the financial gains of buying second-hand does not justify the risk of clothing the child in something unknown or potentially contaminated. Her practice is not as 'daft' as she cites. As young babies are seen to be particularly messy, such intimate items are commonly disregarded as suitable for second-hand exchange, indeed they often end up in the bin. One mother even described the practice of exchanging used undergarments as 'a bit gross'. This aligns with much of the work by Gregson and Crewe (2003) who found that the safest second-hand clothes are those worn furthest from the body. Mothers are therefore more likely to buy outerwear as second-hand baby clothing rather than intimate wear.

Yet, whilst intimate clothing has more contact with the skin, outerwear has more contact with the outside world. This is a characteristic recognised by mothers, but not as another challenge to negotiate in regards to risk and hygiene as we might expect. Instead, situations offering greater opportunity for external contamination are seen as the perfect place to utilise second-hand clothing. These situations



Emma Waight

include going to nursery school and playing in the garden, as described by Gina (co-habiting, 40+, civil servant) who believes that second-hand clothes are well-suited to dirty activities and help her to relax as a parent, 'If she's playing out in the garden and it gets stained, I don't start worrying about it'. This suggests that she buys clothing of little financial and/or symbolic value for such outdoors activities in order to avoid such value being diminished through contamination with dirt.

Textiles are commonly thought to harbour unfavourable histories more profoundly than other goods. This is not just evident through the participants' reluctance to buy second-hand vests and baby bedding, but also through what could be considered less intimate items like stuffed toys which were often cited as something mothers would not buy second-hand. Solid items like books and plastic toys could easily be wiped clean; their history literally erased in one swipe of an antibacterial wipe. For many, washing and cleaning goods once home is part of a ritual, a process of divesting each item of its previous owner before it is welcomed into a new home. Again this practice is changeable however, and is often directly correlated to years of motherhood,

I used to get the antiseptic wipes out, put everything in the washing machine, clean everything. I think the last one, I got them home and thought, you know, they're going to play group two or three times a week with things that haven't been washed for three years. Generally I give things an antiseptic wipe over. (Erin: married, 40+, full-time mother)

Erin explained the way in which her divestment practices altered after her most recent trip to a nearly new sale. She reflects on the fact that she cannot control her child's experiences now that he spends time outside the domestic environment at play group. It is a sudden realisation and self-reflection which allows her to relinquish some of that control. She still prefers to clean goods once in the home, but more out of habit than anxiety. For some interviewees, it was the first time that they had reflected on their divestment practices. These were generally the mothers who did not have stringent divestment practices and had given little thought to the possibility of dirt or germs lurking on their new acquisitions. Therefore, in one or two cases, my questioning seemed to actually induce anxiety, a fear that perhaps they should be cleaning these goods before they are fully brought into the home. Indeed Pink (2007, p.170) states,

Individuals' actual practices of domestic consumption of laundry products, services and fresh air are processes through which they constitute their gendered identities and make moral statements about the 'right' way to be a woman.

Pink stresses the sensory experience of doing laundry, portraying it as a personal and intimate practice yet with the ability to be appropriated as a form of expression. Whilst some mothers practice divestment rituals as part of a habit to reduce anxiety, others did not see any risk attached to the second-hand object past that which is visible. For these mothers if it looks clean it is clean, and therefore poses little threat. Laura (married, 30-35, non-disclosed occupation) finds comfort from that fact that she is 'buying something off a rack' at the nearly new sale. Here, Laura is aligning her nearly new sale consumption practices to conventional retail channels. This clearly puts her at ease, aware as she is that everything has been 'worn and washed', but Laura is putting her trust in an assumed practice of washing

Emma Waight

to eliminate any threat to her child as she does not clean the items herself. Perhaps this says the most about her idea of where those goods have come from; putting her trust in the volunteers and sellers at the nearly new sale to ensure everything is clean and therefore safe.

For some then, the appearance and smell of an object as 'clean' is enough to justify its purchase and use, whilst for others a further cleansing process is required once the goods are in the home. The practice of cleaning goods could be regarded wholly unnecessary if items looked and smelt clean already. This was echoed by a number of mothers but evidenced most strongly by Karen, a keen environmentalist and moderator of her local Freecycle group,

[Once I get home] I bring them into this room and unpack the bags and just put them away. You can tell that they're all clean and ironed. They'll never be ironed again after that. You can tell that they are clean because they smell of the detergents that have been used, and the detergents I use tend to be pretty unfragranced so these smell much cleaner than our normal stuff and I don't iron so I certainly wouldn't wash them until they've been worn. I'll keep that washed and ironed smell as long as possible (Karen: non-disclosed marital status, 40+, homemaker).

Karen argues that the second-hand things she buys from the sales are actually cleaner than her normal children's clothes and she feels no need to further divest them of their previous biography. Karen feels that she understands second-hand exchange networks and for her they are part of a normalised way of provisioning, not just for her children but for herself and her home. She is proud of this practice, and it constitutes just one of a range of ethically-motivated practices structuring her consumption habits (placing importance on locally sourced food for example, as well as ethical supply chains in the fashion industry). Her commitment to ethical consumption goes further than middle-class conspicuous consumption rather, Karen aims to minimise her ecological footprint through her everyday consumption practices by making use of second-hand economies and minimising the environmental impact of her laundry routines.

Differences in the rationalisations of mothers' second-hand consumption practices influence both what they buy and what they do with what they buy. The stark difference between Karen's narrative and that of the other mothers was her focus on being guardian of the Earth first and foremost, as opposed to guardian of her children. Mothers mediate and negotiate risk through learned-experience. Perhaps as Karen was so invested in consuming second-hand goods for her own use, the practice of co-consuming used children's goods was not such a leap. We learnt before how Tina's knowledge of the sterilisation process comforted her own hygiene practices, but the range of practices described in this chapter have attempted to show that mothers' consumption-divestment practices are not normalised.

Whilst the domestic labour entailed in care work is hidden from public view, the outcome of that labour is evidenced externally through cleanliness of the self, clothing and visible health. Laundry practices are a form of inconspicuous consumption shaped by very personal routines, but as Jack (2013, p.418) so nicely states, 'not washing is hidden, but wearing dirty clothes is visible'. Such practices of cleanliness then, are one way in which 'good mothering' can be made visible. This has been found to be a particular

concern of working-class parents, who feel the need to make visible their ability to keep a nice home and care adequately for their children. Indeed there is a symbolic and social significance of being clean, yet routines of cleanliness are rarely discussed outside the family and as such practices of cleanliness lack normative collective conventions (Shove, 2003; Shove, Pantzar et al. 2012). Instead, Pink (2007) asserts that laundry practices are intimately linked to personal identity and the sort of person one wishes to be. With this in mind this chapter has looked at three types of mother in relation to the cleansing/divestment practices of second-hand baby goods. The inexperienced young mother, keen to express her knowledge of sterilisation as a way of highlighting her understanding of the procedures of childcare; the more experienced middle-class mother, able to adjust her divestment practices over time as she becomes more confident in her agential skill to negotiate risk and; the politically-orientated mother, who with high levels of cultural capital and an ethically-motivated outlook does not construct laundry practices to be a central tenet of expressing visible notions of childcare. In this manner, consumption-divestment practices are seen as a way for mothers to construct an identity of the parent they wish to be, just as Pink posits with laundry practices more generally.

### **Safety Conventions and Governance**

It is clear that the practice of washing and cleaning alleviates concerns of hygiene and contamination in the co-consumption of used goods. Another concern of parents is that of safety, which has clear repercussions on second-hand consumption practice. Indeed Furedi (2001, p.26) says, 'Parents are bombarded with advice that demands that they create a risk free world'. Such a notion suggests parents are unable to detach themselves from the wider social norms of care which are thrust upon them from a wide range of sources. Again, co-consumption becomes simultaneously a practice of care as parents seek to find the appropriate material objects to care for and protect their child/ren. During the interviews discussions on safety were overwhelmed by a narrative of governance, realised both through NCT guidelines of what can be sold at nearly new sales and through wider recommendations from authoritative bodies. You cannot sell car seats and mattresses through the NCT sales for example, in line with official parenting advice. Nearly new sale volunteers adhere to this, priding the sales on not just offering a retail platform for second-hand exchange but on providing a service to support parents. There are ways to get around this rule however, by advertising items on a notice board at the sale. This means that such items are not sold within the locale of the sale, but indeed the process of exchange could still be facilitated by the sale.

The rhetoric of safety governance took two main guises. For some, the notion of using second-hand car seats and mattresses was personally recognised as unsafe. Their views were no doubt influenced by formal recommendations (although it would be impossible to untangle such interventions), but they displayed a sense of personal agency in choosing to follow these guidelines rigorously. For others, the boundaries of acceptability were less pronounced. These mothers were aware of the recommendations and what they should say or do, but showed greater flexibility in negotiating the risks involved. Maggie, quoted below, highlights these rules of safety governance by discussing the 'guidelines' and 'safety advice' one should adhere to as a mother,

Emma: Is there anything particularly you wouldn't buy second-hand for your children?

Emma Waight

Maggie: Well, I know the guidelines are you shouldn't reuse mattresses and car seats so I wouldn't buy those but as I said I bought the Moses basket, I'm just buying a new mattress for it. I think that's probably it, just anything that goes against safety advice I think really (Married, 30-34, full time mum).

For some mothers, these safety restrictions came to mind first when I asked what items they would not be comfortable acquiring second-hand, whilst others began by alluding to individualised practice, such as not buying soft toys or second-hand shoes. On the whole these safety restrictions were positioned as strict regulations, not offered for subjective negotiation. In this manner the idea of using second-hand mattresses or car seats was always positioned as something you should not do with little discussion or justification for why you should not do it. Indeed it was accepted as part of the responsibility of being a parent, that said, there was the odd contradiction in this practice. In response to being asked what she would not buy second-hand, Nicole immediately says that she would not buy a car seat, before realising that she actually nearly did,

Car seats, I wouldn't buy a second-hand car seat. Although having said that we were looking into buying a car seat for my mother-in-law who has Katie one day a week. I called someone at the nearly new sale, because I don't think you can sell car seats there at the moment but they had written, privately call us and I did actually call a lady but it was the wrong size car seat, for a tiny baby, so actually I would have definitely considered buying that, I was going to have a look at it, so maybe I would have bought a second-hand car seat. Everyone says you can't buy a second-hand car seat! I think if you've got it from a trustworthy source, that's the thing (Nicole: married, 20-25, research assistant).

Nicole recognises that convention dictates not to buy a second-hand car seat because 'everyone' says it, but she is clearly open to negotiating this risk and making the decision for herself based on whether she trusts the source. Her implication here is that a stranger she has been connected to through the nearly new sale is a trustworthy source. This correlates with the theory posited earlier in this chapter that the nearly new sale is a socially homophilous locale built on a trusted association to the NCT. Nicole further justified this act by explaining that the car seat would not be used very often as it was a secondary seat for her parent's car.

All of the other mothers interviewed, said that they would only consider buying or taking a second-hand car seat from a friend or relative for whom they knew but of course, Nicole suggests that in practice this may not be the case. Whilst the overwhelming safety narrative from interviewees was an adherence to recognised safety guidelines, Nicole demonstrates that such rhetoric is pronounced through parenting practice to different degrees. Nicole was well-educated (to PhD level although not in social science), which could perhaps have played a role in her agential response to prescribed safety norms. Further research is required to entangle the full influence of class and education in the negotiations of risk concerned with second-hand goods. Her story is however a clear example of the way in which social norms structure many of the mothers' consumption practices whilst allowing for personal agency and reflexivity (both consciously and unconsciously).

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the second-hand consumption practices of thirty mothers in relation to risk negotiation and reduction. It draws on the belief that the mothers interviewed are not 'excluded consumers' but rather participate in second-hand consumption channels for a range of other financial, social, political, cultural and/or ethical reasons in order to provision for their children. By focusing on a discourse of thrift in relation to care and nurture, I have explored the way in which material provisioning becomes part of broader parenting practices. I have also aimed to show that such co-consuming practices are shaped by class, enabling mothers to construct the identity of the parent they wish to be through their consumption and divestment practices.

The narrative of risk has focused on two main themes, namely hygiene and safety. Concerns over hygiene are particularly prevalent when consuming textiles which are seen to harbour traces of previous use – bodily fluid or dirt which may contaminate the child. The intimate relationship between the material and the body is a three way process, linking mother, child and object within the practice of love and care. The focus in this regard is often on that which is visible, the practice of washing trusted to divest the object of harm. Whilst practices of cleanliness in the home are not normalised (but are influenced by social factors) the second theme, that of safety, is heavily structured by social norms and conventions. These conventions are shaped by external governance which is rarely questioned by the mothers in this study, except when they feel that they have the cultural capital to negotiate such risks on their own terms.

This chapter has focused on actual bodily risk, as mothers strive to protect and nurture the child. What it has not been able to do in much depth however, is explore the relationship between the material and the identity of the women as mothers. Reliant on parental care, children are ideal carriers of vicarious consumption, indeed some studies have found that mothers conspicuously consume through their children (Bailey 2001; Thomsen and Sorensen 2006). As such, not only do mothers have to negotiate physical (or the perceived physical) risk when co-consuming second-hand goods but we could also extend this risk to a threat against maternal identity. Indeed external contamination through the mother's intimate relationship with the material may jeopardise her position within her peer group or threaten her identity as a mother which she may wish to display as 'good mothering'.

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Emma Waight

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