



Becoming Respectable: Low income young mothers, consumption and the pursuit of value

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3 **Becoming Respectable: Low income young mothers,**
4 **consumption and the pursuit of value**
5

6 *Abstract*
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9 Teenage mothers find themselves caught between two discourses: the irresponsibility of
10 youth and the responsibility of motherhood. We unravel some of the complexities
11 surrounding the performance of socially approved 'good mothering', from a social position of
12 restricted resources. We demonstrate the relevance of Skeggs' (1997) notion of respectability
13 in order to forge a deeper understanding of how young, low-income new mothers seek to
14 secure social value and legitimacy via the marketplace. We identify a number of consumption
15 strategies centred around identification and dis-identification, yet we recognize that young
16 mothers' careful marshalling of resources, in relation to consumption, risk being misread and
17 could leave young women open to further scrutiny and negative evaluation, ultimately
18 limiting their opportunity to secure a legitimate maternal identity.
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32 **Keywords:** Teenage mothers, Low income consumers, Identity, Dis-identification,
33 Consumption
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37 *Statement of contribution*
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40 We contribute to work on less privileged consumers, specifically the consumption and
41 associated value-accrual of low-income young mothers. We explore how young women
42 negotiate teenage motherhood (and its associated stigma) and when faced with a social
43 position of constrained resources and choices, seek to achieve a legitimate, valued maternal
44 identity via identification and dis-identification consumption strategies. We frame our
45 understanding using Skeggs' (1997) notion of respectability and our exploration of young
46 women's consumer behaviours sheds light on issues of class and value within the realm of
47 consumer and transformative research and marketplace interactions.
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3 **Becoming Respectable: Low income young mothers,**
4 **consumption and the pursuit of value**
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9 *...Now that I'm a mum, I don't want to be known as a child, even though I am, if you get*
10 *me. I prefer looking older than I am and feel more older than I am. I know I have grown*
11 *up quite quick with what I've been through, I've had to, I've had no choice... And I just*
12 *want to feel that I'm older, not feel that I'm young and that people are going to look*
13 *down at me because I'm a kid myself and I've got a baby and start doubting me,*
14 *thinking I'm going to be a bad mum and everything. I want to feel more comfortable, I*
15 *want to feel that people are not going to look down at me but you do get funny people*
16 *round here.....I just get them bad days where I feel like a bad mum. I feel really crap*
17 *and I feel like a bad mum. But then after I've calmed down, I start thinking well how*
18 *can I be a bad mum? She's got expensive nappies, baby wipes, and her milk isn't cheap*
19 *either.*
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31 [Debbie, age 17]
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34 **Introduction**
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37 Debbie's narrative illustrates the dilemma facing young mothers caught between the
38 discourses of the irresponsibility of youth and the responsibility of motherhood. Debbie's
39 story firstly hints at the often judgemental discourses around young mothers and how Debbie
40 seeks to counter views that she is too young to be a responsible mother. Secondly she
41 illustrates the drive by a young, low-income mother to prioritize her baby's needs; and thirdly
42 her narrative demonstrates the emphasis she places on expensive consumption in her drive
43 towards respectability, in order to realize her goals of achieving a valued personhood
44 (Skeggs, 2011, p.503).
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3 There are a number of studies within health, sociology and youth studies (e.g.
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5 Duncan, 2007; Ponsford, 2011; SmithBattle, 2000, 2005, 2006; Wilson & Huntington, 2005;
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7 Yardley, 2008) which focus on motherhood in a range of socio-economic circumstances and
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9 social positions. Apart from notable exceptions such as Hamilton and colleagues' research,
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11 there have been few studies focused on the consumption experiences of low-income families
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13 and mothers in marketing (Glass, Hamilton & Trebeck, 2013; Hamilton & Catterall, 2006;
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15 Hamilton, 2012). We explore how young women on low incomes respond to the challenges
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17 of mothering within the socio-economic and cultural contexts of their lives as new young
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19 mothers Our argument revolves around young mothers' positioning between two discourses:
20
21 the irresponsibility of youth and the responsibility of motherhood (Breheny & Stephens,
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23 2007) and how their 'public performance of oneself as a "subject of value"' (Skeggs &
24
25 Loveday 2012, p.475), operates within the confines of an identity that has become
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27 delegitimized and understood as abject or value-less. Whereas for many women, their social
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29 position is reinforced by motherhood, for younger women with more limited resources, the
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31 intersection of their age with motherhood sets up a contradictory and more threatening social
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33 position. We briefly review research on motherhood and consumption, alongside the work of
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35 Beverley Skeggs (e.g. 1997; 2011).
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41 **Literature Review**

42 *Motherhood in the UK and the context of young mothers*

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47 Motherhood is celebrated in many women's identity projects, and it is regularly
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49 positioned as 'women's supreme achievement' (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991, p. 9) and
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51 a 'dominant, expected and glorified marker' (Martin, Schouten, & Stephens, 2006, p. 257).
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53 Yet views of motherhood are not always positive. Wilson and Huntington (2005) identify the
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55 'good/bad mother dichotomy'; mothers who fail to meet normative expectations become
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3 positioned as deviant and unfit parents (p. 61). Dispute centres on the right age at which to
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5 become a mother, with contemporary views prescribing the ideal child-rearing ages as
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7 between 20 and 40 years old (Phoenix et al., 1991). Age can, therefore, outweigh the
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9 significance of motherhood as a potentially celebrated status; illustrated in our example by
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11 Debbie's desire not to be seen as a child.
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14 Much criticism stems from a social construction that positions adolescent mothers as
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16 in the process of developing maturity, which is assumed to limit their mothering skills
17
18 (Breheny & Stephens, 2007); society, young women and their children are all positioned as
19
20 victims (Duncan, 2007, p. 307). This critique often derives from the choices that mothers are
21
22 presumed to have made; younger mothers have chosen 'early motherhood', a path that is out
23
24 of step with the 'middle-class script' (SmithBattle, 2005) that involves planning around
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26 education, career/income, finding a partner and then becoming pregnant. However, as
27
28 Duncan (2007) points out, this view ignores the fact that many of these women are already
29
30 'off script' having experienced childhood poverty, lack of academic success, temporary and
31
32 low-paid work. Early motherhood compounds these disadvantages and escape from poverty
33
34 becomes more unlikely (Graham & McDermott, 2006, p. 22).
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38 Academic approaches to understanding early motherhood have been criticised. For
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40 example health literature tends to focus on the negative outcomes of early motherhood and
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42 teenage pregnancy is understood as something to be assessed and managed (Breheny &
43
44 Stephens, 2007). However, more recent academic studies have questioned these negative
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46 assumptions and focused more on the positive aspects for younger women of having children,
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48 making them 'feel stronger, more competent, more connected to family and society, and more
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50 responsible' (Duncan, 2007, p. 316). Mothering can provide an important catalyst for
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52 maturity, lending women a sense of purpose and meaning (SmithBattle, 2000, p. 35).
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54 Teenage mothers, themselves, position motherhood as a route to maturity (Banister, Hogg, &
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3 Dixon, 2012; Breheny & Stephens, 2007; McDermott and Graham, 2005; SmithBattle, 2005,
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5 2006; Yardley, 2008). And Duncan (2007, p. 313-315) argues that any links between
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7 outcomes are based on correlation rather than causation and do not take account of the
8
9 opportunities that young women see as offered by teenage parenting.
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11 12 *Consumption and motherhood*

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15 Maternal identities have attracted increasing attention within marketing (O'Donohoe, Hogg,
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17 Maclaran, Martens, & Stevens, 2013). Prothero's (2002) introspection about her consumption
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19 choices in approaching parenthood was followed by other studies concerned, broadly
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21 speaking, with examining how women develop a valued maternal identity (e.g. Carrigan &
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23 Szmigin, 2004; 2006; Jennings & O'Malley, 2003; Miller, 2013; Patterson & O'Malley,
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25 2013; Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006; VOICE, 2010a; 2010b). These prior studies focused on
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27 middle-class participants from 'socially appropriate' maternal age groups who often fitted
28
29 within the 'celebrated' ideal (Phoenix et al., 1991) of motherhood. But how do women
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31 outside these normative maternal identities accrue value?
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37 Debbie's narrative suggests that consumption choices can provide her with important
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39 reassurances regarding her abilities as a good mother. Lawler (1999) positions working class
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41 women's concern with material things as political because of what it can represent: exclusion
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43 on the grounds of class and a yearning for legitimate cultural capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1987). If
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45 the working classes are excluded from many accepted routes to legitimate personhood, where
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47 does this leave young working class women when they transition to the potentially valued
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49 motherhood identity? Omitting younger, working class, low income women from marketing
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51 and consumer research studies focusing on the importance of consumption in women's
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53 maternal identities risks misrepresenting the wider socio-cultural context of what it means to
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55 be a mother in contemporary society (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). This study seeks to
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3 partially redress this balance and develop understanding of how young women, socially
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5 positioned as low income and working class, perform identity work through consumption.
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8 *Maternal identity work and class*

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11 Faircloth (2013) emphasises the importance of considering mothering as identity
12 work in order to ‘highlight the active processes by which identity is constructed’ (p.31).
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14 There is a particular need for younger mothers to carefully manage their maternal
15 identity work given their place at the intersection of motherhood, age and usually a
16 lower social position (due to their limited resources). The interaction of different
17 identity categories can result in complex and contradictory social positioning and
18 associated identity work, contrasting with the reinforcing social positioning of middle
19 class new mothers. Younger mothers are, therefore, vulnerable to stereotyping,
20 stigmatization and deviancy discourses (Arendell, 2000), which largely focus on their
21 assumed universal incapacity to do a good job (Ellis-Sloan, 2014).
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34 Sociologists have problematized the ‘normalcy’ of middleclassness in the dominant
35 symbolic order (Lawler, 2005), suggesting it fails to recognise working class value systems
36 (Skeggs, 2004). Whereas in the past poverty and privilege were discussed primarily in terms
37 of equality and wealth distribution, these debates have been reframed and now focus
38 primarily on questions of individual life choices and conduct; the socially excluded are no
39 longer seen as victims, but rather as failures in self-governance who have made poor life
40 choices (Gillies, 2005). A number of critical social theorists see New Labour in the 1990s as
41 a turning point, involving a pathologisation of working class parenting whereby those who do
42 not fit with normative citizenship become scapegoats or ‘revolting subjects’ (Tyler 2013);
43 this is also reflected in more recent policies and the language of austerity which distinguish
44 between the deserving and undeserving poor. Some New Labour initiatives, such as Surestart
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3 and parenting classes, implied that working class parents needed to be taught how to raise
4 middle class children (Gillies, 2005). The popular press regularly feature women's maternal
5 identities with particular attention paid to female celebrities' maintenance of a glamorous,
6 groomed and composed image through pregnancy and motherhood. Captured by the term
7 'yummy mummy' (O'Donohoe, 2006), this aspirational and somewhat mythical status
8 provides a stark contrast with a range of alternative stigmatised maternal identities. Negative
9 maternal identities pertaining to younger women are exemplified by the Vicky Pollard
10 caricature that appeared as part of a popular BBC comedy show 'Little Britain' (Tyler, 2008)
11 and widely adopted terminologies such as 'chav' and 'pramface' (Nayak & Kehily, 2014).
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24 In our opening example, Debbie is aware that she is being 'othered' an interpretation
25 which reflects middle class identity work whereby 'looking down on people' is used as an
26 important point of differentiation; that is 'not being the repellent and disgusting 'other''
27 (Lawler, 2005, p. 431). In Skeggs's (1997) work around working class women, respectability
28 is understood as one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class; it is positioned as an
29 aspirational standard, essential for the pursuit of social value and legitimacy. Skeggs's (1997)
30 theorisation owes much to Bourdieu's (1986) ideas around economic, cultural, social and
31 symbolic capitals; which also reflect other feminist sociologists' discussion of class as linked
32 to practices as well as its relational nature, involving "differentiation and exclusion... and...
33 active identification" (Levine-Rasky 2011, p. 246). Skeggs (1997) identifies the limited
34 opportunities that working class women have to access or increase capital assets (p. 9) when
35 compared with a more easily available positive working class male identity (p. 74) and notes
36 that those women positioned as abject lack opportunities for symbolic challenge (Skeggs &
37 Loveday, 2012). Skeggs' argument around resources resonates with the cultural lens that
38 Anthias (2005, p. 33) applies to interpreting social position as involving different levels of
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3 resources (e.g. Bourdieu's capitals) while 'social positioning' is about how we contest and
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5 challenge these social positions (Levine-Rasky, 2011, p. 247).
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8 One of the important strategies proposed by Skeggs (1997), in the pursuit of
9 respectability, is dis-identification; what Skeggs (2011) terms a defensive claim for value.
10 Working class women use dis-identification in order to distance themselves from stereotypes
11 of working-class femininity, which might incorporate consumption practices associated with
12 clothing, leisure activities, homes and women's bodies (Skeggs, 1997, p.95). However, this
13 understanding incorporates a belief that working class women wish to 'pass' as middle class,
14 and class is therefore presented as a 'structuring absence' in women's search for
15 respectability (Skeggs, 1997, p. 95). In later work, Skeggs (2011) took a slightly different
16 stance. She builds on Gillies (2005) and depicts motherhood as a contested ground wherein
17 working class mothers take a discerning approach to their quest for respectability. While they
18 did not want to identify as working class, given the associated stigma, the women in her study
19 also rejected the middle class position due to its 'lack of care for others' (Skeggs, 2011, p.
20 504). The women in Skeggs's study therefore sought to shape the form that respectability
21 took, producing alternative (local) circuits of value (Skeggs, 2011). Skeggs (2011) is,
22 therefore, critical of Bourdieu's (1987) analysis of value-accrual, suggesting it does not allow
23 for the formation of personhood and value for the working classes; those with the 'wrong'
24 capitals. While the middle classes are seen to protect their interests through processes of
25 'symbolic boundary-marking' and exclusionary practices around high culture, Skeggs (2011)
26 suggests that a more refined understanding of person-value would incorporate an appreciation
27 that 'different material conditions offer different possibilities for value accrual' (p. 509). An
28 example of alternative means for value accrual (e.g. in the site of motherhood) is the
29 relevance of care, (Skeggs, 2011). Care is understood by the women in Skeggs (1997) to
30 involve 'hands on' practices of care. This understanding allows working class women to
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3 engage in social positioning against middle class women who 'farm out' their children and
4 are, therefore, understood to behave in an 'uncaring, unnatural and irresponsible' manner
5 (Skeggs, 1997, p. 71). In this case value is generated through social connections and
6 the prioritisation of others (their children) as opposed to 'investments in distinction and self'
7 (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 487).
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15 Skeggs' (1997) understanding of class combined with consumer research into the
16 consumption experiences of low income women (e.g. Glass et al., 2013; Hamilton &
17 Catterall, 2006; Hamilton, 2012) provides us with a starting point to explore how young
18 women on low incomes work towards the achievement of a legitimate maternal identity. Our
19 study is framed within wider social and political debates and in particular, discourses around
20 motherhood and young mothers. We identify research gaps, firstly concerning the lack of
21 insight into how younger mothers, faced with resource constraints perform identity work
22 through consumption, as they seek to identify themselves with the responsibility and
23 respectability associated with motherhood; and secondly the relative absence of the
24 perspectives and voices of young mothers themselves about their experiences of identity
25 work as they manage their search for respectability via the marketplace (McDermott &
26 Graham, 2005).
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45 **Methods**

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48 We report findings from interviews with seventeen women (table 1), recruited via a
49 National Health Service (NHS) antenatal service for younger women (below the age of
50 twenty) in the north of England. Informants were interviewed twice; once during the third
51 trimester of pregnancy and once during the early months of their baby's life. Unfortunately,
52 despite a number of attempts to contact them, four of the original seventeen participants
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3 could not be traced for the second interview, reflecting the transient nature of some of their
4 living arrangements. The researchers adhered strictly to University and NHS ethics
5 committee guidelines. Prior to interviewing, all informants were briefed about the nature and
6 aims of the study, such that they were able to give fully informed consent to participate.
7 Informants received a small gift (vouchers) to thank them for their participation.
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14 For the first interviews, the women's ages ranged from 17 to 19 years; 14 of the
15 women were in a relationship with the father of the baby, one was in a relationship with a
16 man who was not the baby's father and two of the women were single. Eleven of the women
17 had been in education when they became pregnant, while four were employed (e.g. catering,
18 childcare), and two were unemployed; many were living in temporary accommodation, and
19 between three and five of our informants were officially categorised as homeless either prior
20 to, or at the time of, the first interview (see table 1 for further details).
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31 Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in length, with the average interview
32 lasting one and a half hours. An interview guide was prepared with a number of topics/issues
33 concerned with informants' lived experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Rather than
34 adhering strictly to these topics, as far as possible we pursued a conversational style in the
35 interviews. Field notes were written immediately after each interview. These field notes were
36 typically descriptive and focused reflections that might not be adequately captured within the
37 interview data (e.g. living conditions).
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48 Our approach to data analysis reflected hermeneutic concerns (Thompson, Pollio, &
49 Locander, 1994) in order to engage with individuals' lived experiences, whilst recognising
50 that these interpretations and understandings reflect 'broader cultural viewpoints that are
51 implicitly conveyed through language' (p. 432). We pursued a part to whole strategy whereby
52 our initial understandings were developed through an iterative process which involved
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3 moving backwards and forwards within and between informants' data (Thompson et al.,
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5 1994). Initially within-case understandings were forged across informants' transcripts and
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7 field notes. Transcripts were read and re-read in order to identify patterns, themes and higher
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9 levels of abstraction (Spiggle, 1994). A wide number of themes emerged as part of this
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11 process (such as body image, lifestyle changes, support structures, perceptions of health
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13 services). Attention then moved towards performing a cross case analysis. We moved back
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15 and forth between the data and literature in order to refine understanding, a process that
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17 reflects both emic and etic concerns, in order to further develop analytic categories. It was at
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19 this point that our particular interest in women's social positioning and classification as
20
21 young mothers, and the impact this has on their navigation of consumer culture emerged, and
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23 our approach developed from open coding to something more akin to axial coding (Strauss,
24
25 & Corbin, 1998). All authors then re-reviewed the analytic categories, revisited the data, and
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27 wrote an agreed interpretation of the data, including the primary and secondary themes that
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29 were uncovered.
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Table 1: Table of informants

Name ¹	Age ²	Partnership status	Living arrangements ³	Work/study status ⁴
Lucy	18	Engaged to father of baby	Lives with fiancé in rented house	College (childcare)
Jenny	18	Single	1. Homeless (living in a shelter) 2. Council/social housing with partner	College (catering)
Rosanna	17	Has partner (not baby's father)	1. Homeless/ mother and baby unit 2. Council/social housing with partner	College (access to employment course)
Debbie	17	Has partner (father of baby) but very difficult relationship.	1. Classified as homeless, but staying with mother 2. Lives with partner in council/social housing, pregnant with second child	On incapacity/welfare benefit
Tina	17	Has partner (father of baby)	1. Lives with parents 2. Lives with partner in rented house	College (childcare),
Darlene	17	Single (very problematic/violent relationship with baby's father and his family)	1. Lives with mother in rented house (homeless immediately prior to interview) 2. Lives with sister in own council house	College (dental nurse)
Amy	17	Has partner (father of baby)	1. Lives with partner in rented house; homeless immediately prior to interview 2. Lives with partner in rented house in new area	College (hairdressing)
Pamela	19	Has partner (father of baby)	1. Lives with partner in rented house 2. Lives with partner in another rented house	Employed (waitress)
Justine	19	Has partner (father of baby)	1. Lives with parents; 2. Lives with parents (and partner)	Employed (care assistant)
Leah	18	Has partner (father of baby)	Lives with partner in rented house	Waitress & college (childcare course)
Tamsin	18	Has partner (father of baby)	Lives with partner in his parents' home	College (childcare)
Olivia e	17	Has partner (father of baby)	Lives with parents	College (childcare)
Jade	19	Has partner (baby's dad)	1. Lives with parents 2. Lives with baby in council/social housing	Employed (child care assistant)
<i>The following informants were only interviewed once: just prior to the birth of their child</i>				
Steph	19	Complicated relationship with father of baby	Lives alone in friend's house (rented)	Employed (waitress)
Bethany	17	Has partner (father of baby)	Lives with partner in rented house	Unemployed
Laura	17	Has partner (father of baby)	Lives with parents	College (equine)
Amber	17	Has partner (father of baby)	Lives with partner in rented house	College (general studies)

¹ All names have been changed (mother, baby, partner)

² Age at first interview

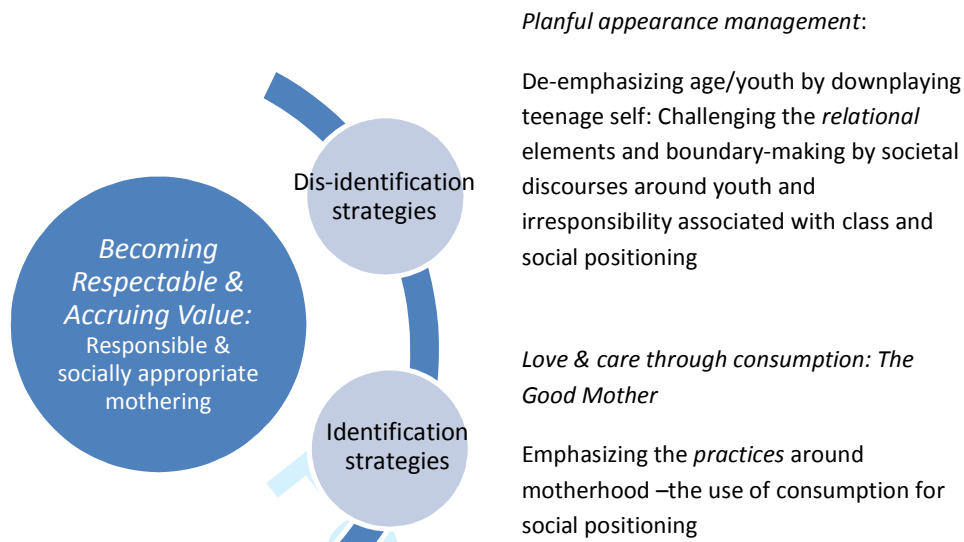
³ First (1) and second (2) interviews (if different)

⁴ Most of our informants had given up work/college/study on discovering they were pregnant and were receiving benefits at the time of the first interview, but this was their last occupation/course of study prior to becoming pregnant

Findings and interpretation:***Becoming respectable: consuming towards responsible and socially appropriate mothering***

We began this paper with an extract from Debbie whose words encapsulate some of the issues faced by young mothers (e.g. surveillance and judgement, conflict between age and mothering status, lack of confidence in mothering abilities), and a sense that the marketplace presents an opportunity to support or demonstrate how (well) she is doing as a mother. Embedded in Debbie's story are two main approaches used by women to alleviate the conflicted status of young mothers, achieve respectability (Skeggs, 1997) and become a subject of value (Skeggs & Loveday, 2012). These two approaches emerged from our data, yet are presented briefly here to help readers navigate the findings (figure 1). On the one hand young women seek dis-identification from the (perceived) flawed label of teenage mother. Consumption is key to this endeavour and helps young women to adopt an alternative, more mature positioning – as a capable or good mother – essentially a means to perform respectability to a range of different audiences, some more public (e.g. wider community) than others (e.g. family, friends and peers). In addition, consumption serves the function of aiding women in the demonstration of love and care which is central to the role of the good mother (identification strategy). So, in Debbie's case the purchase of expensive baby products provides support for her attempts to be seen as a good mother. We frame these strategies within the sociology literature in order to contribute to understandings of how issues of class should feature within understandings of marginalised consumers' attempts to secure legitimacy via the marketplace, essential in their attempts to secure a valued maternal identity and social positioning.

Figure 1- Becoming Respectable: Value accrual and the good mother identity



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3 ***Strategies of Dis-identification: Planful appearance management***
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6 Historically, appearance has been understood as an important cultural marker; ‘the
7 means by which women were categorised, known and placed by others’ (Skeggs, 2004,
8 p.100) and part of the boundary making that marks class as relational (Anthias, 2005). Our
9 informants seemed aware of the classed nature of femininity and the importance of clothing
10 as a means to demonstrate ‘respectable’ femininity (Skeggs, 2004). Given their conflicted
11 identity status (as *young* mothers), and informed by discourses of appropriate and normative
12 maternal identities, women used consumption choices around appearance and self-
13 management to display a more mature image centred on the avoidance of negative imagery.
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24 ***Planful appearance management: The public presentation of the good mother***
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27 Certain styles of clothing were associated with young women by our informants, but
28 were not deemed respectable attire for mothers. Jenny explains how her clothing and
29 appearance has changed since becoming a mother; reflecting an effort to present herself in
30 such a way that she (and a wider societal audience, the local community) will consider
31 appropriate.
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39 I just cover up a lot more now. I don’t wear all the low-cut tops and stuff that I
40 used to...if I was going round in low-cut tops and skimpy skirts and stuff...
41 pushing the pram...people are going to look at me you know... I wore make-up
42 before and I don’t wear as much now because I used to wear all brightly coloured
43 eye-shadows and stuff like that but now I just stick to my browns and my golds
44 and stuff. [Jenny, I2⁵]
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57 ⁵I1 and I2 refer to the first of second interview
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3 Jenny purposefully manages the potential conflict between age and motherhood, seeking to
4 privilege the practices associated with mothering, by changing her appearance to reflect an
5 image she feels is more suited to parenthood. In describing how she adapts her clothing and
6 make-up, Jenny indicates an understanding of what she needs to do to present an 'acceptable'
7 maternal identity. Her narrative reflects the concern demonstrated by Skeggs' (1997)
8 informants who sacrifice a concern with 'fashion' for the sake of 'middle-class respectability'
9 (p. 85); modesty is understood as 'central to the formation of middle-class femininity'
10 (Skeggs, 2004, p. 100), and thus an important boundary marker for social positioning. Jenny
11 is relearning feminine practices. She is using her new consumption practices of clothing and
12 appearance to dis-identify from the category of youth (cf. Skeggs' [1997] participants' denial
13 of working class forms of femininity), aiming to 'mask' (Hamilton, 2012) her youthful
14 appearance, or at the very least deflect attention and contest a less favourable social position.
15 Developing a revised version of femininity allows Jenny to avoid risking standing out due to
16 exhibiting the 'wrong' tastes. Her efforts reflect the disparity between adolescent attributes
17 and indicators of *good* motherhood (Breheny & Stephens, 2007). Her concealment of
18 sexuality (e.g. adopting more modest styles of clothing, neutral colours) hints at an
19 embarrassment about her fertility, which combined with her relative youth becomes a
20 signifier of shame (Nayak & Kehily, 2014). However, the juxtaposition between her teenage
21 self and the pram (a tangible marker of motherhood) she is pushing emphasises her youth and
22 sexuality. This *incompatible* juxtaposition (child/adult role) has been picked up in popular
23 vernacular and media, whereby 'pramface' is used as an insulting term to refer to young
24 mothers, or even those who look like they could be young mothers (Nayak & Kehily, 2014).
25 Jenny seeks to 'pass' (Goffman, 1963) by constructing a more *normative* maternal identity,
26 through concealing the attribute which, in this context, leaves her most open to stigma and
27 discrimination – her youth.
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3 Jenny's concern with managing her youthful appearance contrasts with the
4 idealisation of youth found in other contexts (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). With the
5 intersection of age and mothering status (as identity categories), she no longer has society's
6 permission to experiment with fashion, colour and skirt hem lengths as she is now in the fast
7 lane to adulthood (Graham & McDermott, 2006; Yardley, 2008). In pursuing a valued
8 personhood, she has become focused on the need to fit in with society's conception of what a
9 (good) mother should look like. Jenny's response to this potential stigmatisation is to
10 appropriate items and meanings associated with acceptable mothering.
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21 Other informants reflect similar concerns in their choice of clothes, in order to assume
22 respectability in the eyes of others. These appearance management efforts also reflect the
23 impact of informants' cognitive age, the age they feel, rather than their chronological age
24 (Guido & Amatulli, 2014). A number of our informants reported this disconnect: '...even if
25 you're sixteen/fifteen, once you're carrying a baby you're not a child' [Pamela, I1]. Our
26 informants were aware of the signals they transmitted in their personal choice of dress and
27 performed in line with a discourse which equated teenage motherhood with bad mothering
28 and did what they could to distance themselves from what they saw as the typical image of a
29 teenage mother, in order to seek a more respectable, legitimate and valued mothering status.
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42 ***Planful appearance management: (Not) dressing baby (in)appropriately***
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45 Our informants' concern with appropriate appearances extended to their babies. In the
46 two extracts that follow, informants draw on the negative discourses surrounding young
47 people and clothing choices, in order to seek differentiation from other young people in the
48 area in which they live, applying social categorization knowledge within the in-group (Park
49 & Rothbart, 1982) and creating boundary markers to resist negative social positioning.
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3 I don't want him [her baby] in like tracksuits and stuff like that... because a lot of
4
5 lads round here nowadays wear their tracksuits and I think it just looks tacky.

6
7 [Jenny, I1]

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9
10 My friend's got her son sort of like a fake Nike tracksuit and I don't like it... he
11
12 just looks like a little chav [laughs], I don't like it. [Tina, I2]

13
14
15 Jenny and Tina function as active subjects, seeking to distance themselves from the
16
17 stereotypical consumption choices of white working class youth (Nayak & Kehily, 2014). For
18
19 these participants, awareness of the chav identity myth (Cocker, Banister & Piacentini, 2015)
20
21 informed attempts to forge distinction from negative youthful images of motherhood; an
22
23 attempt to gain respectability and value through identity distancing (Skeggs, 1997). Certain
24
25 items (e.g. tracksuits) and specific (generally sports) brands of clothing emerged as associated
26
27 with the chav image, and while they were favoured by some young women others specifically
28
29 channelled expenditure in order to differentiate themselves from this potentially stigmatising
30
31 identity (Tyler, 2008; Nayak and Kehily, 2014). This illustrates the importance of the
32
33 audience; these young mothers were effectively *othering* their peers in order to mark
34
35 themselves out as different, not *that* kind of teenage mother. Women practised dis-
36
37 identification (Skeggs, 1997) in order to pass as 'implicitly respectable' (Nayak & Kehily,
38
39 2014, p. 1337), which necessitated setting up boundary markers of inclusion and exclusion.
40
41 Yet in so doing, our participants partially accept the chav label as applicable to their peers or
42
43 the 'lads round here' (Jenny) and become engaged in the policing of the *distasteful*
44
45 consumption choices of *other* younger mothers (Bourdieu, 1986). In addition, through their
46
47 emulation of what they perceive to be higher-cultural capital consumption (i.e. *not* chav),
48
49 they implicitly support and uphold normative middle-class standards of mothering (Lawler,
50
51 2005), signalling the importance of the relational elements associated with class and their
52
53 own social positioning.
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3 ***Identification strategies: demonstrating love and care through consumption***
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6 In the opening extract, rather than looking to her competencies as a mother in line
7 with markers of intensive mothering, (Hays, 1996), Debbie turns to her interactions with the
8 market for proof that she is doing a good job as a ‘competent carer’ (Nayak & Kehily, 2014).
9 Debbie’s reliance on expensive products to achieve respectability stems from her feelings of
10 being under surveillance (Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier, & Pyett, 2001; Ponsford, 2011),
11 recognition that she risks being judged and criticised for failing to provide for her baby
12 adequately. Her focus on specific categories – nappies, milk and wipes – demonstrates an
13 emphasis on core items associated with everyday baby care. They are also categories where
14 clear brand leaders (and associated advertising spend) exist, and consumption takes place in
15 public environments where the threat of surveillance is highest. She addresses a range of
16 audiences here; her own family, friends and peer groups, but also the wider community gaze
17 (e.g. in the supermarket checkout queue). The focus on comparatively low individual cost
18 items (but with a cumulatively high spend) could indicate an attention to items that offer her
19 the highest returns with regards to identification; effective (identity) signalling yet with a
20 comparatively small outlay.
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40 ***Brands as providing positive identity markers***
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43 The prioritisation of expensive brands was most noticeable in decisions around the
44 purchase of nappies (Ponsford, 2011). The vast majority of our informants chose to buy the
45 more expensive branded nappies (i.e. *Pampers* and *Huggies*), which they interpreted as
46 providing the best for their children, deflecting signs of poverty and signalling that the baby
47 is being well cared-for.
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3 We buy in bulk [*Huggies*], so they're not that expensive when you buy in bulk. I
4
5 don't really look at any of the other ones. We were in between *Pampers* and
6
7 *Huggies* because we like to get her good ones. [Lucy, I2]
8
9

10 Lucy discusses the careful management of resources (e.g. buying in bulk, looking out for
11
12 offers) which emerged not only as an essential skill, given her challenging financial situation,
13
14 but also provided important signals of 'responsible' or more adult parenting. Being a good
15
16 mother meant rising above personal financial circumstances and providing well for your
17
18 child.
19
20

21
22 She's got everything, I always make sure she's got nappies, milk, food, clothes, the
23
24 lot, baby wipes, I always make sure she's got everything before I get anything. I
25
26 always have done and always will. [Debbie, I2]
27
28

29
30 Debbie's careful allocation of resources and attempts to do the best for her child fits with
31
32 notions of prioritisation and selflessness which are essential for a caring identity (Skeggs,
33
34 1997) and the demonstration of care through consumption (Pugh, 2002). Babies' needs were
35
36 prioritised and met and if there was nothing left over mothers would 'go without' (Darlene).
37
38 This is in stark contrast to the self-centred behaviour often attributed to young mothers
39
40 (Breheny & Stephens, 2007) and fits more closely with Miller's observations concerning the
41
42 selflessness of contemporary (new) mothers (1997) and Skeggs' (1997) emphasis on the
43
44 caring self as a key signifier of respectability.
45
46
47

48 The consumption choices (e.g. focus on branded goods) of Debbie and Lucy function
49
50 within working class value systems and successfully signal respectability to their peers, both
51
52 as signifiers of quality products and a mother's commitment to her child. However, middle
53
54 class women do not face the same pressure of negative evaluation on the grounds of
55
56 consumption and level of expenditure, and their ability to meet the needs of their children in a
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1
2
3 financial sense is not questioned, they are able to seemingly cut corners yet achieve a valued
4
5 personhood. Skeggs (2011) emphasises the relevance of varying material conditions in
6
7 understanding the 'different possibilities for value accrual' (p. 509) or the social positions
8
9 described by Anthias (2005). For younger mothers a demonstration of adequate financial
10
11 means is necessary as it is often assumed that they have insufficient income to provide
12
13 adequately for their children; consuming branded goods is perceived as an efficient way to
14
15 dispel such assumptions and to challenge and contest the associated social positioning of
16
17 being an inadequate mother.
18
19

20 21 *Reframing second hand goods and accepting financial constraints*

22
23
24 A point of complexity emerged around the acceptability, or otherwise, of second hand
25
26 goods. For some women the use of second hand goods, particularly in the area of baby
27
28 rearing, was perceived as an admission of failure, reflective of a lack of responsibility in
29
30 planning and inadequate financial resources to provide for the baby and give it the best start
31
32 (Ponsford, 2011), a measure of 'a fitness for motherhood' (Nayak & Kehily, 2014, p. 1341).
33
34 In the following example, Debbie finds herself unable to associate second hand goods with
35
36 the demonstration of love and care through consumption.
37
38

39
40
41 My mum wanted me to get a second-hand pram and I didn't want a second-hand
42
43 pram because I thought well someone else has used it, it's horrible and no, I just
44
45 don't want it. [Debbie, I1]
46
47

48
49 In contrast, second-hand items could reinforce a positive image of being prepared for
50
51 motherhood, reflecting an adult and practical approach to managing the careful allocation of
52
53 limited resources (in line with a strategy of identification). Distinction was often made
54
55 between those items with a known history (e.g. hand-me-downs from friends), and those
56
57 where the history is unknown (Ponsford, 2011). This contrasts sharply with alternative
58
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1
2
3 contexts (e.g. some middle-class consumers) where second-hand goods are re-positioned as
4
5 vintage or chic thrift shop finds, reflecting rich histories (as part of the appeal) and creativity
6
7 and expertise on the part of the shopper who has managed to hunt down such finds.
8
9

10
11 Darlene discusses the imagery conveyed by pram choices, and suggests that her choice of
12
13 a second-hand but 'decent' pram will contrast favourably with the prams that 'other' young
14
15 mothers tend to use.
16

17
18 I think when you have a pram, it tells you about the person.... I've noticed a lot of
19
20 young girls don't really have nice prams. [I: When you say it tells you about the
21
22 person, what do you mean?] Like cheap.... Because you can get a pram nowadays
23
24 for £120 brand new, one of them prams that I've just been telling you about.... But
25
26 I wouldn't have been able to afford a decent ... a big ... well I wouldn't have been
27
28 able to afford a brand new pram, do you know what I mean? The one that I
29
30 wanted, it was like £600-odd and I wouldn't have been able to afford that. So I
31
32 just got one second-hand. [Darlene, I1]
33
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35

36
37 In highlighting her consumption practices, Darlene differentiates herself from 'other' younger
38
39 mothers; there is an interplay of strategies of identification (realistic assessment of her financial
40
41 situation and sensible decision making) and dis-identification at work ('a lot of young girls
42
43 don't really have nice prams'). Darlene consumes in relation to an audience (young mothers)
44
45 who will read quality in the same way that she does. She prioritises the type of pram (cf.
46
47 Thomsen & Sørensen, 2006) and its original price, and positions the second-hand nature of the
48
49 pram as of lesser importance
50
51

52
53 In coming to terms with accepting second hand items, women embarked on a process of
54
55 repositioning items as fit for consumption. Here Jenny describes her mother's advice to accept
56
57 second-hand items.
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3 My Mum turned round to me and said you want to take anything that you get
4 given because you know, if you don't have the money to get it, then you're
5 bugged basically. So anything that anybody's wanted to give me, anything, I've
6
7 bugged basically. So anything that anybody's wanted to give me, anything, I've
8 just took it...At the end of the day, it's things for her. I see it as people have given
9
10 it to her, I don't really think of it as second-hand. [Jenny, I1]
11
12

13
14 Jenny's approach is legitimized by her mother and provides acknowledgement of her difficult
15 financial position. She identifies the prevailing needs of her child and positions the goods as
16 gifts to her daughter, which she accepts without question. In framing the items as 'gifts',
17
18 Jenny implies that she is acting under obligation, rather than 'choice'. She side-lines some of
19 the negative connotations sometimes associated with second-hand items, such as poverty, and
20
21 prioritises her baby's needs in such a way that is necessary to achieve respectability.
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28
29 Using an alternative repositioning strategy, a wicker baby basket is re-framed as a
30 family inheritance. The terminology adopted – 'heirloom' - captures Tina's emotional
31 attachments with the item and its endowment with positive meanings, including tradition and
32 sentimental value.
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38 I've got a wicker basket, which... it's sort of like a family heirloom sort of thing;
39
40 I was in it when I was a baby and my sister's been in it and it's 43 years old
41
42 because my Dad was in it when he was a baby. [Tina, I1]
43
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46 In constructing the cot as a family heirloom, Tina is also able to reject the potentially
47 stigmatizing associations of accepting second-hand goods. The reframing of second-hand
48 goods – e.g. as gifts to the baby, family heirlooms, and as savvy ways to give children the
49
50 best within a budget - speaks to the various ways teenage mothers negotiate their identities
51
52 using counter narratives, their need to justify the choice to consume second hand goods,
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1
2
3 create alternative routes to value accrual (Skeggs & Loveday, 2012) and respond to varying
4
5 audiences (e.g. peers, family, others) with potentially different class infused value systems.
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10 11 **Discussion**

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14 We explored how young women negotiated teenage motherhood (and its associated
15 stigma) and when faced with constrained choices, worked to develop a valued mothering
16 identity. Skeggs' (1997) notion of respectability, as well as her later work which encourages
17 fuller understandings of the formation of value-accrual and personhood in alternative material
18 conditions (Skeggs, 2011), framed our understandings of issues of class and value within the
19 realm of consumer research. Our opening story featured Debbie, who, in questioning her
20 proficiency as a mother, reveals the importance she attaches to choices around consumption
21 and expenditure and their role in value accrual. Debbie navigates consumer culture and
22 prioritises her spending in such a way that highlights her social positioning and classification
23 in society. Skeggs (1997) identifies respectability as a concern only for those who do not
24 have it: 'it is rarely recognised as an issue by those who are positioned with it, who are
25 normalised by it, and do not have to prove it' (p. 1). Yet those who lack respectability are
26 identified as lacking in social value (Skeggs, 1997); value that is accomplished through the
27 assignment of legitimacy (McKenzie, 2015). While motherhood is marked as a particularly
28 important site for value production, teenage mothers are often positioned as subjects without
29 value (e.g. Tyler, 2008; Nayak & Kehily, 2014): 'abstract and irresponsible, ungovernable,
30 dirty white, pointless and useless... a drain on the nation' (Skeggs, 2011, p.502). This
31 illustrates how something of value (motherhood) can become illegitimate (McKenzie, 2015)
32 and how complex and contradictory the effects on social position and social positioning can
33 be when multiple structures intersect (Anthias, 2005; Brah & Phoenix, 2004). In our case we
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3 focused on the intersection of age and motherhood within a sample of young low-income
4 women, yet we acknowledge that the picture is more complex than this focus suggests. This
5 focus could be usefully widened to incorporate more consideration of other socially and
6 culturally determined structures such as gender, education, work and marital or relationship
7 status, reflecting that individuals are positioned at the intersection of multiple identity
8 structures and categorisations, which can bestow advantages and disadvantages on
9 individuals' social position (Gopaldas, 2013). Our interpretation is based on this group of
10 young, financially constrained young women yet, for example, a young woman from an
11 obviously middle class background and/or with family support/independent financial means
12 may be perceived differently and therefore experience motherhood differently.
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26 Our findings demonstrate support for Skeggs and Loveday (2012) and the importance
27 of developing class-based understandings of value. We identify two main consumption
28 strategies employed by young women in order to adopt (mothering) performances worthy of
29 respect from the dominant social order. Firstly, women practice distancing from the potential
30 threat of the teenage mother, akin to the dis-identifications of working class women in
31 Skeggs' (1997) study. The stigma associated with teenage motherhood seemed to be present
32 both within informants' direct circles and also when exposed to additional audiences – for
33 example while out shopping in the city centre. Secondly, women aim to amplify love and
34 care through consumption (Miller 1998) - a strategy of identification (with good/ socially
35 appropriate mothering). This understanding of good mothering seems to be primarily
36 informed by our informants' families and local communities (not withstanding high
37 marketing spend by many brands), hence the focus on branded goods such as nappies, that
38 many young women have seen their mothers use. This emphasis contrasts with the reported
39 disdain for materialism expressed by the middle class mothers in Miller (1998). These two
40 overall consumption strategies (identification and distancing) contribute to women's identity
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3 work (Faircloth, 2013), allowing young women to demonstrate their competence in providing
4
5 for their infants, a move towards respectability. The young women in our study pursue
6
7 legitimation which necessitates a repositioning or reimagining (Nayak & Kehily, 2014) of
8
9 themselves; the pursuit of value via respectability despite their exclusion from the many
10
11 forms of capital that have previously been presumed necessary for value accrual (Bourdieu
12
13 (1987).
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16
17 We provide support for Ponsford's (2011) findings, that material culture and
18
19 consumption potentially provide value to young mothers; both as a means to demonstrate
20
21 competence as a parent but also to deflect potentially negative evaluations of poverty or a
22
23 presumed inability to adequately provide for their children. In some cases women attempt to
24
25 'pass' (Goffman 1963), through constructing an acceptable, more conservative and normative
26
27 (and therefore potentially legitimate), maternal identity (e.g. through presentation of self).
28
29 But their consumption also makes acquisitive claims for value, a means through which these
30
31 young women can demonstrate a caring self (Pugh, 2002; Skeggs, 1997). This focus on
32
33 consumption as caring could provide an example of women generating alternative notions of
34
35 what it means to be a 'subject of value' and demonstrates the complexity of young women's
36
37 identity work given that value is 'what matters to people' (Skeggs & Loveday, 2012, p.475).
38
39 Women face the challenge of performing to a range of audiences with varying notions of
40
41 value (e.g. differing interpretations of sports brands). This tension has been picked up
42
43 elsewhere (e.g. Wilson & Huntington, 2006) and is reflected in the derogatory use of the term
44
45 *chav*, used to demonstrate excessive consumption yet aesthetic impoverishment (Hayward &
46
47 Yar, 2006). There is a danger that in seeking to demonstrate respectability (Skeggs 1997) to
48
49 one audience (e.g. peers) some young mothers try, yet fail, to enact scripts associated with
50
51 higher cultural capital, akin to the challenges faced by other lower cultural capital informants
52
53 (Ustuner & Holt, 2010). Our findings, therefore, illustrate the challenges of communicating
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2
3 by consumption due to different understandings of value (Skeggs & Loveday, 2012). While
4
5 some consumption practices may be legitimised within the context of their peer group, young
6
7 women could be left open to further scrutiny and negative evaluation by society, whereby
8
9 their consumer behaviour and consumption practices may be *publicly misread*, given middle
10
11 class value systems which assert that money should not be wasted on expensive possessions
12
13 (Ponsford, 2011). Further to this potential misreading of consumption signals, low-income
14
15 women are susceptible to branding and advertising, as they struggle to consume to be a *good*
16
17 mum, and this could risk increasing their vulnerability in the marketplace (Baker, Gentry &
18
19 Rittenburg 2005).
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23

24 It is clear that young women feel the need to deflect attention from their youth, given
25
26 the stigmatising effect of the intersection between age and motherhood. However, there is a
27
28 danger that in doing so, the normative middle-class ideal of motherhood is upheld and
29
30 privileged. In this sense consumerism and the marketization of motherhood contributes to
31
32 existing social barriers which prevent young low income mothers from feeling valued beyond
33
34 their peer group, in the production of positive mothering identities (Glass et al., 2013). From
35
36 a Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) perspective (Mick, Pettigrew, Pechmann, &
37
38 Ozanne, 2011), the motherhood ideal needs to be challenged and dismantled in order to
39
40 support low income mothers and for *alternative* maternal identities to emerge, be accepted
41
42 and celebrated, allowing young mothers to be positioned as subjects of value (Skeggs &
43
44 Loveday, 2012) and legitimised (Tyler, 2013). There is also the danger that instead, the roles
45
46 associated with the *good* mother will continue to expand (Hays, 1996; Furedi, 2008) so that
47
48 an *acceptable* or *good* maternal identity becomes increasingly distant from the realities of
49
50 young or low-income women. Activities and experiences (e.g. baby massage classes,
51
52 swimming lessons and music classes) are likely to be far beyond the reach of the young
53
54 mothers in our sample, yet these more experience-based expenditures and time spent with
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2
3 parents are known to make more of a contribution to children's development and well-being
4
5 (Ipsos MORI & Nairn, 2011) than the consumption and display of goods and its equation
6
7 with good parenting. Very recent debates highlight the importance of the first five years to
8
9 child development through play (Malik, 2013) and from a policy perspective it is important
10
11 that this message reaches young and low income mothers, but getting that message across
12
13 could risk stigmatising young mothers further and projecting vulnerability, which in itself can
14
15 cause harm and denigration (Baker et al., 2005).
16
17

18
19 Given that many of our informants' interactions with older adults (outside the family)
20
21 are likely to be with professionals in support capacities (e.g. health, housing and social
22
23 services) it would be naïve to claim that we successfully dealt with perceived power
24
25 imbalances or all fears associated with presumed authority or disclosure (Ellis-Sloan, 2014)
26
27 in our research approach. This may have impacted on the detail of some of the responses, and
28
29 provided a reason to present 'a self that did not tap into negative stereotypes' (Ellis-Sloan,
30
31 2014, p.4). There were also a number of challenges associated with keeping track of our
32
33 informants, many of whom were living in temporary accommodation at the date of the first
34
35 interview (see Table 1). While work in rural studies points towards links between residential
36
37 locations and middle class performances of class and gender (Butler, 2007; Savage, Bagnall
38
39 & Longhurst, 2005; Stockdale 2010), our sample seemed very mobile (or even 'placeless');
40
41 while we followed one set of voices we lost track of a small number of our participants. We
42
43 may have inadvertently prioritised the voices of those women who were more likely to
44
45 engage with normative ideals of motherhood and who were largely successful in their
46
47 attempts to work towards a legitimate maternal identity (e.g. increased stability in their living
48
49 situations; engagement with the NHS teenage midwifery service), as opposed to those who
50
51 had less opportunity to mobilise the necessary resources and had lower levels of social capital
52
53 (Bourdieu, 1986). Our study suggests the need for a careful and detailed reading of what
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3 might initially be seen as ‘homogeneous groups’ and the development of understandings that
4
5 reflect the socially embedded nature of consumption experiences (Askegaard & Linnet,
6
7 2011).
8
9

10 We recognize that in our roles as researchers we offer interpretations based on our
11
12 lens and location (e.g. class) and our access to different forms of capital and knowledge
13
14 (Skeggs, 1997). However, we believe we have progressed towards forging an understanding
15
16 of the consumption experiences of these women living in very different circumstances from
17
18 many of the consumers featured in earlier consumer research studies (e.g. Thompson, 1996).
19
20 Glass et al. (2013, p. 207) refer to ‘cultural fraud’: the encouragement (through upward
21
22 comparisons) of aspirations and goals that are unhealthy because they are unattainable, which
23
24 in legitimising particular identities and versions of personhood reflects a form of symbolic
25
26 violence (McKenzie, 2015; Skeggs and Loveday 2012). The element of sacrifice that is so
27
28 core to contemporary models of motherhood (e.g. Hays, 1996; Miller 1998) is played out in
29
30 these young women’s narratives via the prioritisation of consumption around the baby and
31
32 informs an emergent mothering identity: ‘young mothers re-image themselves as respectable,
33
34 good providers and “good mothers”’ (Ponsford 2011, p.556). Yet it is this very act of re-
35
36 imaging and the counter narratives (Arsel & Thompson 2011) which are forged, that could
37
38 leave young mothers with low incomes open to exploitation by marketers (Baker et al., 2005;
39
40 VOICE 2010a). The very pursuit of value and respectability and women’s commitment to
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42 prioritizing socially acceptable mothering, via consumption practices, may have the effect of
43
44 marginalising young women further, within the market place and wider society.
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