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## **Belly Casts and Placenta Pills: Refiguring Postmaternal Entrepreneurialism**

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### **Biographical notes**

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Maria Fannin is Senior Lecturer in Human Geography in the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol, UK. Her research focuses on the social and economic dimensions of health, medicine and technology, particularly in relation to reproduction and women's health. She has conducted research on commercial cord blood banking, conceptualisations of hoarding and exchange in the tissue economy, and feminist geographical approaches to a 'bodily commons' in a post-genomic age. She is currently carrying out research on the value attached to human placental tissue in the biosciences, medicine and alternative health practices. Her work has appeared in *Body & Society*, *Feminist Theory* and *New Genetics & Society*.

### **Abstract (200 words)**

This paper takes at its starting point the idea that maternalism and entrepreneurialism are necessarily antithetical as Julie Stephens (2012) argues in *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking*. Building on scholarship which shows how motherhood has become commercialised and commodified in contemporary culture and how mothers are increasingly constructed as consumers (Tyler 2011; O'Donohoe *et al.* 2014; Hewitson 2014), we extend this field by investigating how mothers who are providers of services to other mothers and pregnant women are negotiating neoliberalism and entrepreneurialism. Through an empirical

investigation of birth and parenting entrepreneurs – including hypnobirthing classes and placenta pill businesses – in Bristol, UK we argue that our self-employed participants were building community and care economies within neoliberal modes of self-production, thus suggesting a more complex and ambivalent relationship between entrepreneurialism and postmaternalism. We suggest that the experiences of women entrepreneurs or ‘mumpreneurs’ offer insights into how the spaces of work might be, counter to Stephens’ characterisation, places of negotiation and struggle for the politics of feminism, rather than sites of ‘anti-maternalism’ or the ‘forgetting’ of maternalism. Moreover, our participants’ accounts were strongly shaped by feminist ethics of care thus challenging the representation of such services as therapeutic postfeminist technologies of self-work.

**Key Words:** postmaternal, maternalism, entrepreneur, neoliberalism, self-care, community, social enterprise

## Introduction

Julie Stephens (2012) argues in her book, *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory and Care*, that we live in ‘postmaternal’ times. In her view, postmaternal thinking disavows the importance of mothering and dependency as legitimate concerns for public policy-making. To be postmaternal is both to be free of the obligations and dependencies associated with mothering, as well as to render illegible the demand for public policies that specifically support women as mothers. Stephens seeks to show how maternalism, as both an embodied materiality as well as a gendered approach to policy making, has diminished in value and political authority. The decline of the post-WWII welfare state is also a ‘degendering’ of policy initiatives, maintained by the ‘normative idea of self as both genderless and autonomous’ and embodied in the abstract figure of the worker or the citizen-subject (Stephens 2012, 22). Feminist movements have also been transformed through this period. Accusations of essentialism continue to make discussions of pregnancy and mothering difficult to navigate, in effect obscuring a critical aspect of the gendered dimension of embodiment from critical discussion. Political activism, and in particular feminist activism, Stephens suggests, no longer calls for the recognition of states of ‘interdependency.’ Furthermore, as Stephens demonstrates in her reading of contemporary writers’ narratives of their feminist mothers, feminism’s second wave is characterised in cultural memory as the rejection and overcoming of the maternal condition.

For Stephens, the disappearance of policies aimed at women as mothers is part of a broader devaluation of the state’s maternalist role of caring for its citizens and subjects in favour of entitlements linked to women’s formal participation in the labour market, for example, in the establishment of welfare-to-work programmes. Stephens characterises work by drawing on the figure of the professional career woman either with no caring responsibilities or whose corporate work is facilitated by technologies such as the breastpump. Stephens thus aligns work and being an employee as anti-maternal: ‘In the popular imagination second-wave feminism is still “linked with the glorification of market work and the devaluing of family work”’ (2011, 26, citing Williams 2000). She cites this popular imaginary of the relationship of second-wave feminism to work to argue that such characterisations presume an alliance between paid work and feminist goals for liberation that obscure ‘maternal forms of selfhood’ and the extension of the ethics and practices of mothering into wider social and political spheres (35). Yet by setting up the memory of a ‘degendered’ feminism as pro-market work and against the maternal, what gets obscured are the complex ways in which women make claims not only as mothers but as mother-workers.

This risks ignoring the dependencies that also characterise relationships at work, and the presence of maternal identities, practices and bodies in workplaces.

This paper takes at its starting point the complex relations between maternalism and entrepreneurialism, as a way of generating dialogue with Stephens' characterisation of contemporary political economies and cultures of postmaternalism. We explore this through a discussion of interviews with women whose working lives embody the in-between spaces of work and care that Stephens' suggests are less visible in contemporary public cultures. Stephens argues that what is needed to redress the devaluation of the maternal in the contemporary period is a 'regendering' of the public sphere in which a maternalist ethics of care for vulnerable others, including the vulnerability of the environment and the embodied transformations that accompany mothering, are recognised as the basis for a potentially more affirmative political culture. We consider how the relations of care that Stephens suggests are crucial for regendering public cultures might be reread into the workplace. The experiences of women entrepreneurs or 'mumpreneurs' who ambivalently inhabit the spaces of work and care offer insights into how the spaces of work might be, counter to Stephens' characterisation, places of negotiation and struggle for the politics of feminism, rather than sites of 'anti-maternalism' or the 'forgetting' of maternalism.

We consider Stephens' argument for regendering the public sphere by examining the relationship between neoliberalising imperatives to regard the 'entrepreneur' as the model worker against the backdrop of intensive and commercialized mothering (Duberley and Carrigan 2012). We draw on interviews with women providing services to mothers in Bristol, UK to consider how self-employed women negotiate neoliberal imperatives to become 'entrepreneurial' subjects. Women seek to negotiate work and care in different ways, and we argue that these negotiations are themselves sites of ethico-political struggles. The work of care for the women we interviewed is intimately bound up with concepts of mothering, not only in terms of the relationship between a mother and her child but also through the kinds of 'public' instantiations of mothering that Stephens suggests have disappeared. These include efforts to create communities, to recognise interdependencies, to work for reasons other than purely market-driven competition and to engender caring for self and others in one's own work. These ways of navigating the 'postmaternal' condition of neoliberal economies and cultures suggests the building of alternative spaces within neoliberal modes of self-production, an effort contemporary theorists of capitalism suggest needs more critical attention (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010, McRobbie 2013).

This article focuses on interviews carried out with seven women in 2016 in Bristol who advertise their services on parenting websites, noticeboards in community centres as well as through word-of-mouth. They offer a range of complementary therapies, including hypnobirthing, pregnancy yoga, doula services, postnatal fitness training, alternative therapies, creative workshops and other forms of 'care' work for pregnant women and mothers. Our study thus addresses an empirical gap in the literature on the care sector that tends to focus on childcare and elderly care. For almost all of the women we interviewed, their primary form of paid labour was self-employment. One also worked in the NHS as a midwife. Contact was made by email or phone and one or both of the researchers carried out interviews. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed and pseudonyms assigned to research participants. Six of the women interviewed were also mothers and ranged in age from early 30s to early 50s. Some of the interviews were carried out while women's children were present, including one of the interviewer's daughter. Five of our participants had a child under three years of age at the time of the interview and two were still on maternity leave. Most of our participants' journeys towards motherhood were intimately connected with the development of their business. Their businesses were either motivated by their new

experience as mothers or developed in anticipation of becoming pregnant. One participant did not have children but explicitly talked about how she imagined herself as a mother.

All but one of our participants lived with a partner at the time of the interview and those households relied on other sources of income from that of their business, either through their other employment (such as one interviewee, Claire, who was a part-time NHS midwife) or their partner’s employment. The only exception was Abbie, whose Hypnobirthing business was run jointly by herself and her partner and the sole source of income for their household. One participant, Ellen, did not have a partner when she started her business as a personal trainer but did receive some financial support from her parents; her current partner works and contributes to their household expenses. Five of our participants had transitioned to becoming self-employed in the last five to ten years following a period of re-training and had occupied jobs in Sustainability and Arts Management, Investment Banking, the charity sector, and as teachers and press officers (see table below). The alternative maternal economies they were building through their self-employment were facilitated to some extent by a male breadwinner household model. Several participants discussed that the more modest household income incurred by them choosing this type of self-employment was a joint decision with their partners.

The aim of our interviews was to gain a better understanding of the experiences and views of women involved in what we identify in this article as birth and parenting economies and cultures in Bristol. We are interested in better understanding the intersection of mothers’ self-employment with their involvement in the particular ‘maternal economies’ oriented around pregnancy, childbirth and early infancy. We asked women about the origins and motivations of their work and about the challenges they faced, their personal experiences as well as their views of the kinds of services available to parents and families in the Bristol area. We also asked questions about the everyday geographies of their spaces of work, whether they were home-based, involved aspects of social media or other digital technologies, and whether they took place within a particular area within the city. We were interested in the extent to which women, if they were mothers, identified with the literature or discourse of the ‘mumpreneur’ and whether they had made use of any business-orientated training or support available for self-employed workers or entrepreneurs. We suggest the mumpreneur who combines caring work with entrepreneurial activities or self-employment offers one way to explore the relationship between public cultures of the ‘maternal’ and neoliberal imperatives to become an ‘entrepreneur of the self.’ Our analysis thus presents a more ambivalent and complex relationship between entrepreneurialism and postmaternalism.

**Table 1. Participants’ paid work activities**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Description of activities</b>
Sofia	Yoga teacher, massage therapist, birthing community organiser
Abbie	Yoga teacher, hypnobirthing
Rachel	Personal trainer, postnatal training
Ellen	Personal trainer, postnatal training
Claire	Pregnancy yoga teacher, midwife
Helen	Shiatsu practitioner and placenta

	encapsulation
Natasha	Creative workshop facilitator and photographer

### **Maternal Economies and Postfeminist Mumpreneurs**

This article contributes to three interconnected debates about transformations to contemporary motherhood: the conceptualization of the commodification of motherhood, the study of mumpreneurs and care businesses, and debates about the difference between ‘self-work’ and ‘self-care’ in the postfeminism literature. Scholars interested in the economic dimensions of maternity have pointed to the growth of classes, services and products associated with pregnancy, birth and parenting as evidence of how contemporary cultures of motherhood in the UK and elsewhere are increasingly commodified and commercialised. Pregnancy, in this light, constructs mothers as singular kinds of consumers (Tyler 2011; O’Donohoe *et al.* 2014; Hewitson 2014). The products and services listed on Bristol social media parenting sites do seem to invite women to participate in ‘consuming motherhood’ (Taylor *et al.* 2004). Diane Negra (2009, 7) discusses this increasing fetishisation of the maternal within popular culture as a ‘master narrative’ of post-feminism. She argues that ‘retreatism’ – or the ‘pull back of affluent women to perfected domesticity’ – falsely ‘presents the habits, interests and desires of the wealthy as universal’ (9) thereby reinforcing classed exclusions. These consumption practices are part of the broader cultural ideals in which middle-class women are viewed as the ideal mothers: able to devote significant amounts of time to their children’s educational and personal success and to practice ‘intensive’ parenting, involving both emotional and financial commitments to parenting well.

Research in this field also notes the emergence of the ‘Yummy Mummy’ as a cultural phenomenon that tightly knits maternity with consumption, as the good mother is represented as an intensely acquisitive and corporate consumer subject (Littler 2013). Yummy Mummies are described as affluent ‘older mothers, who have established a successful career before embarking on a family [...] influenced by the celebrity mother culture [and] willing to spend significant money on themselves, as well as insisting on the highest quality goods for their family’ (Allen and Osgood, 2009: 5). As Jo Littler notes (2013) the figure of the Yummy Mummy has an ambiguous relationship to the stay at home mother: while in some of the novels she analysed working in the public sphere is simply abandoned, in others the former career woman goes back to work part-time or from home. In this figure, a very specific configuration of motherhood (occupied by white, heterosexual, middle-class women) is being celebrated as a desirable identity, one that embodies female choice, autonomy, consumerism and aesthetic perfection (Allen and Osgood 2009). These observations of the contemporary cultural and economic presumptions surrounding middle-class parenting are reflected in local birth and parenting cultures and economies in Bristol.<sup>1</sup> Consuming such an array of products

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<sup>1</sup> In Bristol, mothering and pregnancy have generated a local economy and culture that is reflected in the wide range of services and products available for pregnant women and new mothers. The Bristol forums for two popular online parenting networks, Netmums and Mumsnet, include notice boards and advertisements for a range of classes, products, therapies, and other services aimed at pregnant women and new mothers. These include hypnobirthing, antenatal classes, pregnancy and newborn photography studios, placenta encapsulation services, baby swim classes, sensory classes, mother and baby yoga, prepared baby food companies and women’s fitness classes. The services being marketed to pregnant women and new mothers offer enrichment, leisure and health related activities. They offer ways to fill the time of maternity leave and avoid isolation for

and services aimed at pregnant women and new mothers requires access to financial resources and presents motherhood as a singular experience to be documented, memorialised and experienced as a time to invest heavily in the cultivation of one's child's cognitive and sensory abilities.

In this paper, however, we focus less on the representations of aspirational motherhood found in these consumption spaces, and more on the narratives of women providing these products and services. Their work as 'entrepreneurs' in the space of consuming motherhood, as we will demonstrate below, points to important tensions in the formation of neoliberal subject positions like the 'Yummy Mummy' and their alternatives. Our examination of the activities of the maternal and birth entrepreneurs we interviewed illustrates how they both participate in the increasing commodification of the maternal experience but sometimes challenge it by seeking to build alternative maternal economies. We ask, to what extent does mothers buying 'care' from other women result in a different kind of commodification of mothering and birth? Do they constitute attempts to make up for the familial knowledge and support that urban middle-class women often lack (Davis 2008)? 'Markets' and other spaces of consumption around mothering are increasingly differentiated, as we discuss below. Our research demonstrates how scholars need to stay attuned to the ways in which consuming motherhood encompasses both purchasing care and taking part in community building.

Angela McRobbie (2015) notes that invoking the ability to follow one's passion and work flexibly may also hide processes of exploitation, in which self-employment acts as a form of labour marginalisation and is part of the feminisation of labour. Indeed, there is a burgeoning field of research on mumpreneurs which identifies the growth of small businesses by mothers as evidence not just of women trying to find work that fits their caring responsibilities but as underpinned by transformations and constraints of the labour market for working mothers:

The move from conventional employment to this new situation...is of course a move to precariousness consistent with the general thesis of the feminization of work. The larger narrative of neoliberalism here is that of creeping privatization, exclusion and the personalization of responsibility for dealing with circumstances – retirement, caring responsibilities, unemployment and under-earning – which formerly warranted support from a welfare state' (Taylor 2015, 185).

The decrease in forms of conventional employment that are less compatible with caring and the emergence of new forms of flexible, 'family-friendly' work also represents the emergence of new forms of precarity, where working for yourself results in exclusion and low status on the margins of the neoliberal economy (Wilson and Yochim 2015). The literature on self-employed care workers suggests that this growing sector of women's employment presents difficult employment conditions, such as low pay and concerns over one's health (Anderson and Hughes, 2009).

The literature on 'mumpreneurs' also highlights how one's identity and knowledge as a mother is central to some women's entrepreneurial work: mumpreneur businesses [tend] to offer a product or service that is associated with family and motherhood. Rather than providing flexibility around the running of the distinct domains of work and home, the doing of maternal entrepreneurial femininity represents the establishment of an explicit link between motherhood and entrepreneurial activities (Duberley and Carrigan 2013; Ekinsmyth

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women who may be temporarily out of the workplace; in the process re-making early motherhood into an experience to be consumed.

2011; Lewis 2010; Nel, Maritz, and Thongprovati 2010). Thus the mumpreneur's focus is on what will not only fill a market gap but also connect to women's traditional caring responsibilities of looking after home and children (Lewis 2014, 120). This figure can also be read through a postfeminist lens: 'maternal entrepreneurial femininity explicitly and visibly incorporates both masculine and feminine aspirations and is held out to women as something which is "progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine"' (McRobbie 2009, 57 in Lewis 2014, 1856). The literature on mumpreneurs highlights that women are forging new ways of doing business by following a business model that doesn't necessarily prioritise profit and are motivated by the desire to help others and contribute to their community (Nel *et al.* 2010). Mumpreneurs have been described as creating a subculture of female entrepreneurship in unconventional economic spaces including family and community (Ekynsmith 2011).

Our study contributes to these discussions based on a distinct subset of 'mumpreneurs' who provide care for pregnant women birthing and new mothers, rather than products or services for their children. Our discussion of our participants as self-employed care workers also contributes to moving the debate about care work beyond the established assumption of hostile worlds — where markets contaminate and erode care (England 2005; Zelizer 2005) and where care is coopted by market forces. Moreover, research on 'care entrepreneurs' (Gallagher 2014) identifies important tensions in combining care work with entrepreneurialism. The constitution of idealised entrepreneurial subjects, who are seen as capable of operating in a competitive environment, allows little space for the 'messiness' of the relational work of care.

Our final contribution concerns how we can characterise the type of care work performed by our interviewees for others and to what extent it represents 'self-work'. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011) have argued that women are positioned as the ideal neoliberal subjects: 'To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen' (9). This injunction to transform themselves becomes particularly visible with regard to the management of the body and sexuality, but also in the language of empowerment, aspiration and self-expression in the world of work and motherhood (Gill and Scharff, 2011). We are interested in adding nuance to this discussion by drawing attention to how popular cultural invitations for mothers to 'pamper themselves' and to be 'body confident' contrasts with our participants' attempts to equip women with knowledge about their bodies and time for self-care which may be more consistent with a feminist politics of mothering critical of neoliberalism's empowerment rhetoric. We show how for those providing such 'technologies of transformation' to maternal subjects, taking up neoliberal subjectivity isn't necessarily equated with depoliticisation, the repudiation of vulnerability and dependency and the internalisation of competition, but rather is characterised by a feminist ethic of care.

### **'But how do you measure success?': narrating self-employment**

In this section, we discuss how women described becoming self-employed, their orientations to the 'figure' of the entrepreneur or mumpreneur in their own work, and the efforts they took to generate income from their work. Their perspectives resonate with much of the critical literature on women entrepreneurs and 'mumpreneurs.' Women may describe the motivation to become self-employed in terms consonant with notions of self-fulfillment, passion and a calling towards more meaningful work, but struggle with the precarious nature of self-employment, the financial uncertainty and dependence on partners or others for support, and the tension between their work and caring for children (Ekynsmith 2011; Lewis 2010).



Reflecting on the difficulties of being self-employed, Helen, who works as an alternative therapist, doula and placenta encapsulator, said:

I've been self-employed since 2002 I think. No, 2003, since I qualified. I would say it's definitely difficult to make a living out of it. Yes, the first 10 years when I was only doing that, just treatments and teaching, I was struggling to make ends meet. Now I find the placenta pays well and so that helps me in terms of feeling a bit more secure. Yes, I would say it's mainly whether you're going to make enough money for everything.'

Other women spoke about the uncertainty of whether their business would survive when they first began, and of relying on a partner's income or redundancy pay from their previous job to support the initial period of self-employment.

Well, I did it really gradually because my partner had a full-time job at the time. I started the business just before I gave birth to my first child. That was quite a challenging time but because I ran my classes from home, to start off with, there weren't really many costs involved. It's something that I'd built up gradually. I didn't put on loads of classes at once and built it up as we went along (Abbie).

Claire also described working part-time in order to spend more time with her children, sharing childcare with her partner, also self-employed, and making do with less: 'very minimal camping holidays and a moderate life.'

Women approached the label and identity of entrepreneur with circumspection, and often disidentified with the identity of entrepreneur or mumpreneur. For example, Helen said 'I don't use that term "entrepreneur," but yes, I'm definitely self-employed. Yes, I feel I've got my own business. Yes, I don't use that word though. It feels a bit grand...or a bit business-like.' When asked whether she had heard of or participated in any activities organised for 'mumpreneurs,' Abbie replied:

I've heard of it. I'm familiar with it. I guess it's what I would be classified as but it's not necessary what I think of myself as. These days women are looking for more diverse and flexible ways to combine looking after kids and working, but I think it's definitely a fine line and it's not necessarily the easy option that people may think it is. Just things like going on holiday. Who takes care of all the booking and the enquiries that are coming in every day? Things like that. So I know quite a lot of women who've gone into their own businesses, and they've said it's not necessarily given them the lifestyle balance that they were looking for.

This distancing from the identity of mumpreneur also took the form of comparisons between their work and others who were more 'entrepreneurial.' Abbie continued:

Abbie: I also know lots of women entrepreneurs, who've taken it to a much greater level than me. They're much more motivated by business success, but because I wanted to be at home a lot with the kids that's always been the...

Interviewer: the balance?

Abbie: Yes. So I think every woman is different. They have their own set of goals or values in life. They arrange their lives accordingly to that.

The majority of our participants when asked about the future of their business responded that they wanted to 'keep things ticking over' so that they could carry on earning enough and caring for their family rather than prioritising expansion and growth. Helen struggled to find the right balance between her earnings and offering services to other women:

Again, we were talking about, as a mum, providing those kind of services, it's too much now because it's taking too much of my time. Because of that it's hard to give discounts because then I feel I'm giving everything and I've got nothing left for myself, and so you don't want to do that either. I think as a therapist you need to be able to give from a place that is comfortable and sustainable...I used to do that. I used to give discounts to people, but then I would just literally barely earn anything.

Interestingly their accounts highlight how the cost and availability of childcare and the lack of adequate maternity pay are particularly challenging as self-employed workers in small businesses. They lack the provision women who work in bigger organisations benefit from, organisations some of them left hoping for more freedom.

Our participants both identified and dis-identified from the label mum/entrepreneur suggesting an ambivalent relationship with a particular type of business identity, especially its explicit gendering. Few felt comfortable with a predominantly profit-driven model of business and instead wanted to make enough money to live on, and to develop their work in relationship to other values:

I am always amazed that I have been self-employed for such a long time because I am the most...I am a very organised person, I have to say, I have done a lot. Before I used to do lots of PA [personal assistant] work for other people so I am good at admin stuff but I am definitely no good with money in terms of financial stuff. And doing my tax return is always a big mission every year and marketing is horrible, I am just terrible. So I am always amazed in how, you know, because I have been so busy how it has happened. I guess people say that when you put your heart into what you are doing, you receive a lot back. So that is probably from a yogi place - an honest yogi place of being - that I have I have run my business. But I definitely don't feel I am an entrepreneur (Sofia).

While Claire described her orientation towards her work as 'bumbling around' and herself as 'not a businesswoman particularly,' she also spoke eloquently of how her work as a yoga teacher 'is about *sangha*, is about community. It's about building community.' It is a form of work that cannot be easily described as profit-motivated, but it is work that seeks to generate value, and not only for the worker herself. Claire continues:

I think it's really important bringing people into their bodies. I really like the practical aspect of *asana*. I really like trying to build communities. There's nothing better than if I've taught a yoga class and then all the women are chatting at the end or I bump into them in the street a couple of days later. The same with the antenatal classes that we teach, or I facilitate. I don't feel like people learn that much particularly. I just like people getting together.

Generating a different kind of value and questioning what constitutes the success of her business was something that Natasha described in response to whether she identifies as an entrepreneur:

No, not at all. No. No, that's for someone who makes money, I don't make any bloody money. Maybe when I've made some money maybe I'll start thinking of myself like that. No, no. Like I said, I've got a glorified hobby. I've got a good idea and, yes, it would take a lot more to get it to the point where it's a successful business, but how do you measure success? (Natasha)

These accounts highlight dimensions of the existing literature on self-employed women and 'mumpreneurs:' some of the women we interviewed might be described as 'under-employed' given their pursuit of part-time rather than full-time self-employment. They also drew on gendered narratives of 'women's work' as a 'glorified hobby' and

appeared to ‘choose’ not to take their work to the next level. But these narratives also challenge dominant ideas of what constitutes economic value and suggest efforts by women to participate in the growth of alternative economies, economies that value *community* and question conventional measures of success. Such a model of self-employed subjectivity is rarely reflected in current entrepreneurial research that positions women as failed or reluctant entrepreneurial subjects (Ahl and Marlow 2012).

Inextricable from these narratives that recount the lack of job security involved in becoming self-employed, especially at the start, were accounts of living their passion and helping others, as we discuss in more detail in the next section. Similar to the young entrepreneurs in the Berlin fashion industry Angela McRobbie (2013) discusses in her work on new social enterprise, the women we interviewed sought to navigate the ‘self-employment bureaucracy’ to generate support for each other’s work and to find ways to put other values and other ‘ways of being’ into practice. Our participants attempted to create a maternalist culture in their work, a project that was both hindered and facilitated by their self-employed status.

### **(Post)maternal community economies**

Most of our participants saw ‘community building’ and bringing women together to share experiences in a culture where motherhood is isolating as an important part of their work. Here we find Angela McRobbie’s idea of ‘radical social enterprise’ and J. K. Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies framework helpful to make sense of how women combined employment with their ethico-political motivations. In McRobbie’s discussion of immaterial labour and the growing numbers of women becoming small-scale creative entrepreneurs, she proposes a renewal of radical social enterprise, co-operatives and collectives that would reconnect creative labour to its radical roots which she locates as directly linked to social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. She writes:

I argue for a more historically informed perspective which pays attention to the micro-activities of earlier generations of feminists who were at the forefront of combining forms of job creation with political activity (eg women’s book stores and publishing, youth-work or ‘*madchenarbeit*’, child care and *kinderladen*) under the auspices of what would now be called ‘social enterprise’ (McRobbie 2011, 60).

For McRobbie these are not just examples of women combining work (and motherhood) with activism but of the possibility of establishing a radical politics of the workplace within the culture of the small enterprise: ‘The women who set up these kinds of ventures were multi-taskers *avant la lettre*; they also inhabited the long-hours culture and were more than passionately attached to their work’ (2011, 76).

Interestingly, for some of the women we spoke with this is not a practice located in the past where the connection between women’s work and feminist activism needs reviving, but rather very much part of the contemporary life/work configuration of this generation of women in their mid-thirties to early fifties. This highlights the significant continuities between their community building practices and the feminist tradition of consciousness raising groups of the 1970s and beyond. Our participants wanted to build a community of women that could support each other through the transition to motherhood and they articulated this desire as one of the main motivations for their work. As Sofia, a pregnancy yoga teacher, describes:

There has been lots of tears, there has been lots of laughter and problems that arise – especially in the last trimester women can get a bit stressed if they are over the due date. So the fear of being induced and the fear... And we just bring it all in and this way we create a community. And as I said my intention

was to create a community of women that was the most important thing for me more than like anything else. I wanted all the women could create a network and then support each other.

Moreover for a few of our practitioners community was also mentioned in relation to building a professional community of birth and postnatal workers that could support one another. This was enabled by a childbirth group Sofia established in 2013 in Bristol. Here she describes how the group works both as a space for women to share birth stories but also as an opportunity for other self-employed postnatal workers to network and meet potential clients:

We decided to set up a free group for Bristol. And it has been amazing, like, really incredible. So the group is free – we only ask for donations to cover the cost of the rental room because we don't get it for free and to buy teas and stuff. And every month there is a topic that have [inaudible] to all the groups but we can change it. Topics can be like place of birth, it can be the first hour after birth. It can be options in birth, having or not having a doula – all of these kind of stuff...And it is all about really giving women options – women and men because this group is lovely because loads of them bring their partners which is really nice because apart from the NCT [National Childbirth Trust] courses there are no other courses they can go to – well, unless they pay obviously for hypnobirthing, you know, things like that. And, yes, so for me it has been a way obviously to create a bigger community of the birthing community in Bristol. So my own connections and networking. Also to be able to offer to my students – okay you want to encapsulate your placenta. My friend Helen does this or my friend Rebekah does this. Or, do you want an independent midwife? Emily is a consultant...So the [group] for me has been this. And also obviously now that I have had my son, it has also helped me so much to hear all these stories. It has been amazing. Because when we think about positive birth, lots of people think a straightforward two hour laboured birth but it is not. We have had incredible powerful stories of women being in 72 hours and still finding the power and positivity. And wanting to come and share their story.

Sofia's account of her involvement in setting up this group in a gentrified alternative neighbourhood of the city may not reflect the dominant birth and maternal culture but it offers insights into how neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivities overlap and cohabit with 'earlier' forms of women's health activism, including consciousness raising about natural birth. The more openly entrepreneurial or business-minded of our participants whose work centred on fitness or creativity said they did not have enough time for networking or that the networking they did through a local mumpreneur group was not always successful, in any case the kind of community building they did was more about women getting together to share information and resources. This suggests that the link between women's reproductive health and feminist activism has partly facilitated the growth of more radical social enterprises. Interestingly the lack of maternity leave McRobbie (2011) identifies as a significant deficiency in creative workers' work rights was also an issue highlighted by some of our participants; they would receive only statutory maternity pay during their maternity leave and have to organise cover for their classes/services during their absence from work to ensure they would not lose their base of clients when they returned from leave.

Community building was not just restricted to their employment and these participants mentioned communal childcare either through childcare swaps or co-ops as one of the ways in which they managed to 'afford' to work:

The older I get the more I think actually human beings are supposed to be part of extended-family network. We're not supposed to be in these little isolated

Pods on our own. That's the other thing that you do when you're a working mummy, is you make friendships with other mummies. When I was on my days off I'd be like Julie Andrews. (Laughter) I'd have about five kids with me because I was returning childcare favours. In fact the girl who's coming to stay, she's a single mum as well. I had her son three days a week. I used to cycle home with him on the back of my bike from primary school. I believe in communal parenting as well. I say to people, "Please tell off my children if they're misbehaving. That's fine. Don't pussyfoot about. Just get on with it." I suppose, yes, you make extended family networks, don't you? (Claire)

Community economies connected our participants' professional and personal lives, so that their professional relationships were not entirely separate from their home lives and that of their children's. Some women who perceived the problem of affordable childcare as a political rather than an individual problem used some form of communal childcare. The fact that a lot of their work happened in their own homes (two participants had a therapy room at home) also facilitated such alternative arrangements.

The women we spoke to enacted a social enterprise ethos for their business through their insistence on the affordability of their service and their attempts to reach a more diverse demographic than the middle-class women who constitute their main clientele. Participants did this in different ways either by providing discounted services on requests (Abbie, Helen), seeking government funding to run pregnancy yoga classes (Claire) in disaffected parts of the city or becoming involved in charitable work with mothers who suffer from postnatal depression (Natasha). This was often mentioned in response to our question about who their typical clients were. The socio-economic inequalities amongst mothers and the cost of their services was something they critically reflected on although what was considered affordable varied considerably. Claire spoke of offering lower-cost services: 'I don't mind doing things for not very much, but I don't like doing things for nothing. I don't get paid very much to teach pregnancy yoga. I get a flat rate for a local yoga studio. I'm in service. I've got a life of service. That's what I do.'

In their efforts to organise alternative approaches to economic sustainability, the women we interviewed used the language of 'creating community,' signalling ways that their work is not motivated solely by increasing the market share of their businesses. Their working lives are also organised around caring responsibilities - caring for members of their families or with an ethos of care for their clients - and rather than viewing this as a failure to live up to neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency and the exhortation to become autonomous subjects of markets, we interpret their work as an effort to generate other non-capitalist or alternative economies. Indeed, efforts to build community through work and the combination of unpaid housework with socially responsible enterprise can be generatively understood as instances of alternatives to capitalist economic practice within what J. K. Gibson-Graham have called a 'diverse economies' framework.

From this perspective, women's efforts to combine paid work with a broader ethos of community building and care aren't add-ons or marginal to neoliberal capitalism, but become distinctive sites of ethical struggles (Gibson-Graham 2008). The postmaternal community economies described in this section suggest that women's ongoing efforts to balance an ethos of community building, unpaid care work, paid self-employment as well as non-market childcare swaps are both symptomatic of the decline of the welfare state's provisions for social support *as well as* experiments in forging different ways of living. The radical social enterprises being forged here were similar to the ones McRobbie describes as belonging to London in the 1970s (2011) or to contemporary Berlin fashion designers (2013). We suggest that the connections between feminist activism and health/body work also facilitated such an explicitly community-based form of enterprise. The community building which was at the

heart of our participants' work illustrates how an analysis of postmaternal thinking needs to include the tight connections between women's paid labour, their activism and how they care for their families within the same space, rather than characterising work and care as located in separate spaces.

### **Self-care, self-work**

Our research illustrates how our participants are creating spaces for women to self-care, acquire reproductive bodily knowledge and receive care from other women. Our participants explicitly stated that this was because mothers often lack time and resources as carers themselves. Self-care featured through different practices and vocabularies including physical exercise, spiritual balance/energy, creativity, or being connected to one's body. While such practices of self-care could be read as symptomatic of therapeutic cultures where care of the self is a requirement of the neoliberal citizen, in our interviews the imperative to 'self-care' was often described by practitioners as a place of education, connection and new knowledge rather than the premise of an ideal autonomous citizen healed through self-work as heralded by Nikolas Rose (1989).

There were important distinctions in the type of self-care provided and its aims: some explicitly encouraged women to gather together and build communities as a form of support, others had a more individualistic vision of how self-care would be empowering (this was more the case for the postnatal fitness and hypnobirthing businesses). This is similar to Meredith Nash's analysis of Australian pregnancy fitness classes, which highlighted their role in the surveillance and discipline of women's pregnant bodies amidst moral panic about maternal obesity (2012). We suggest here, contra Stephens, that this form of maternal support is neglected in her argument which focuses on maternal and elderly care. We interpret our participants' accounts of their work as connected to a long feminist genealogy of women providing care for other women, both in the sense of emotional support and of equipping women with knowledge about their bodies, especially their reproductive capacities (Boston Women's Health Collective 1973). At the same time, therapeutic cultures themselves are entangled with postfeminism as self-regulation and self-work are key characteristics of the new sexual contract (McRobbie 2008; Gill 2008).

Our participants enacted a version of self-care that acknowledged the importance of resources such as time, support from a practitioner, and knowledge about one's body. This suggests an important distinction between self-help and self-care, as this type of self-care doesn't just reproduce the dominant psychological discourse that 'one should work on oneself' but recognises that care involves a set of material resources and relationships. Beyond educating women about their bodies, a strong motivation for our participants was to teach women how to care for themselves in the sense of having time either for physical exercise, relaxation, or creative pursuits. One pregnancy yoga teacher who describes her work as 'mothering for the mothers' highlights this:

Well we get these two weeks where you have your husband or partner at home and maybe if you are lucky you get some help like my mum came for two weeks and it was amazing. But it is not just that it is not about me, it is about wanting *to re-educate women to self-care*. You need self-care because only by taking care of yourself can you take care of a child. And all I see most of the – even the groups they are for babies. It is all about babies. We need to look after the mothers – I think – a bit more and especially after the birth. (Sofia)

Here Sofia is articulating the difficulties mothers have in feeling entitled to self-care. Interestingly she makes the link that women need to care for themselves so they can take care of their children, thus invoking a maternalist rationale for self-care. Similarly Natasha talks

about running creative workshops with women as a way to provide caring spaces of respite from the intensity of motherhood:

A lot of women just say they just wanted to be creative. They just wanted to do something that was either for themselves, or, B, they just wanted to actually just get creative and have some time for themselves. Even with a little nurturing, is the word that comes most out of the feedback. Nurturing and lots of people just saying inspiring. I don't think they mean that I'm inspiring, I think they just mean like they feel inspired to be creative. They're like there, in this role that we're in, which is hard bloody slog being a mum, and actually it's kind of like, "Oh, look there's something over here and I can possibly achieve this thing, possibly, whilst I'm breastfeeding. Whilst I'm being a mum."

Self-knowledge was a significant way in which our participants described the motivations for their work. They wanted to equip women with knowledge about their bodies-including how to prepare for birth and how to recover postnatally. For all but one of our participants self-care was connected to taking care of one's body, including the necessity to be patient with regard to postnatal recovery. Indeed some of our participants played an active role in mitigating the dominant cultural imperative many postnatal women feel to return quickly to a pre-pregnancy body by sharing their knowledge:

I think, you know, as I said so many, yes, so many mums say, "Well I wish I knew." And, "I wish I'd known this beforehand." So many don't know that really you should give it six weeks and you really should wait. If you have got any pelvic floor issues just don't put it under any more pressure...I think, "Have your little baby. Enjoy the first six weeks of your baby and then start thinking." C-sections they are still mending for six months and to try and get through to them, "You're still mending within. Everything is still changing whether you've had a C section or not everything is still going in." So that is really an interesting side is the whole psychological – I need to get my body back. I just want to get my tummy. And I just say, "You will not be back to how you ever were. You will always have that little slight post-natal tummy, little skin." And it is, "Oh my God, how long?" And that is always the question. How long will it take for my tummy to come back? And my split abs to come back?" (Rachel)

Articulating the impossibility of getting one's pre-pregnancy body back shows how practitioners criticised the dominant representation of post-pregnancy bodies that quickly spring back into shape.

The way our participants emphasized having time to receive care illustrates the importance of recognising the resources women need to self-care. For one of our participants, a Shiatsu therapist, self-care is also about receiving care and support from other women, including its embodied aspect:

I'm sure you know that just to have the space for yourself, as a gift to yourself and not to have the baby with you demanding your attention, so that you have this space, even if it's just for an hour. You've got 100% just for yourself. (Laughter). You don't need to think about your partner, your kid and all of that. The main job of a therapist is to listen and just to provide that space where, they feel cared for, they feel listened to in a non-judgemental way. Then to be touched and to be helped like that. I want to find a way to be strong enough to do that because it's amazing. Also, Shiatsu, I think it's one of these rare treatments that actually help you recharge your batteries. It's not just about helping you to relax. It's much more than that. (Helen)

While helping mothers regain their energy can be seen as a typical example of mothers being required to perform more self-work, the place of the therapist in guiding this process suggests a type of care that requires both time and bodily connection, as well as empathy.

The way our participants discussed self-care jars with other feminist engagements with how neoliberalism works on women's bodies. Specifically, Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2015, 340) describe how what they call 'the feminist technology of confidence' demands that women constantly self-regulate to work on their bodies and selves and 'is (ostensibly) about self-love, not self-hate, self-assurance not insecurity, building the self, not self-harm, positive image not self-criticism.' Using evidence from advertising and self-help manuals such as *Lean In* they argue that confidence culture is a distinctive expression of neoliberal and postfeminist culture that encourages women to turn inwards to solve external problems. Interestingly the idea of confidence itself was altogether absent from our interviewees' accounts, and instead the 'old-fashioned' vocabularies of care permeated their accounts. Some of our interviewees are performing a different kind of body and soul work from the ones discussed by Gill and others, suggesting that an exploration of postfeminist subjectivities needs to deploy a wider range of methodologies. Indeed much of the critical literature on this topic is dominated by analyses of self-help manuals, makeover television shows (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008) and psychic labour (Salmenniemi and Adamson 2015) as archetypal representations of postfeminist neoliberal culture, yet our conversations with postmaternal entrepreneurs suggest a more complex entanglement between care and self-work.

Our participants were acutely aware of how the self-care they advocated required material resources (time, cost of the service, practical knowledge): they challenged the idea that women already have the resources within themselves to feel well and acquire self-belief. This suggests that discourses of 'feminist self-care' significantly shaped these practices and work subjectivities. The growth and intensification of experts on emotion such as therapists, psychologists and human resource professionals who draw upon a range of 'technologies' of emotion so that therapeutic ways of thinking have now moved out of the counselling room into new social arenas such as the workplace (Swan, 2008) is reflected in their accounts. However, the type of self-care provided by our participants foregrounded the physical self and emphasised connections. We argue that these particular 'technologies of self-care' were less individualizing than suggested by some of the literature that sees such therapies as forms of self-work.

Contrasting with the uplifting stories of caring for other women our participants shared as motivation for their work, a few of our participants mentioned their own lack of self-care. They saw this deficit as the cost of taking care of others or trying to work too much with combining caring responsibilities, which often resulted in exhaustion.

I wouldn't recommend what I did, personally, to other people. No because I just don't think it gives you, especially because I started it just before my first child was born, the opportunity to really relax with your child and look after yourself. So when he was sleeping, instead of me just sleeping or relaxing, I was on the computer answering people's emails and things. Then in the evening when he went to bed, instead of relaxing, I was out teaching. So it got to the point where I was looking after all these other women and I wasn't really looking after myself. (Abbie)

As a mum like you, I just know that we are knackered. We need support. Women/mothers are amazing and nothing would happen in the world (Laughter) without mothers. We need to value them and we need to look after them. I think my main passion will be to focus on just helping mothers regain



their energy and everything that they need in order to feel strong. Yes, but then it's hard because I'm knackered myself. It's like trying to go back to work in order to help other women, but actually I need it too. (Helen)

Whereas Abbie looks back on the first few years of her business with some degree of regret over both her own health and having enough time with her child, Helen later describes needing the services of other therapists to help her feel strong and make up for this 'care deficit'. This suggests that there were significant costs to being self-employed and a mother, and often the imperfect solution to exhaustion was simply to work less. Importantly even though some of our participants saw the structural problem of the lack of affordable childcare as one of the reasons for their lack of self-care and exhaustion, they seldom mentioned this when we asked them about resources that would support their businesses. In *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking* Stephens points to both ecofeminism and feminist ethic of care traditions as resources for *regendering* feminism. Similarly, the women we interviewed also drew on ecofeminist ideas and principles in their work to reconnect women to their bodies. However whereas Stephens sees the femivores from *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Hayes 2010) who abandon careers in urban environments to work on the land with their families as a form of imperfect resistance to postmaternal thinking, our participants are attempting to make maternalism central to creating economically sustainable work within consumer culture.

### **Conclusion**

We argue that Stephens' depiction of postmaternal thinking needs to take account of what happens inside mothers' working and caring lives. We suggest that we need to connect Stephens' analysis of the widespread cultural hostility to care and dependency to how maternal values appear in women's work, both in terms of the work they do and how they combine it with their caring responsibilities and ethico-political projects. The way our participants combined paid work with community activism, sharing childcare and caring for others can be seen as enactments of the feminist project of radically transforming the work and care conundrum. The way our participants' spaces of work and care and their identities as mothers and care-workers were inextricable from one another demands a more complex analysis of postmaternal economies. This echoes Lisa Adkins and Maryanne Dever's (2014) call for feminists to think of new categories that can better capture women's reconfigured waged and unwaged labour under the post-Fordist sexual contract. Moreover, the activities of nurturing others and community building in which the self-employed women we interviewed took part can also be read as public appearances of the feminist ethic of care which Stephens argues has disappeared. Given the niche sector we studied and the small number of our informants, we offer a starting point for questioning the extent to which women's experiences of work can be characterised as anti-maternal. The hostility to care and nurturance Stephens describes was absent from the maternal community economies and entrepreneurs we met but may still be part of other sectors of the labour market from which these women sought to escape. We see their attempt to combine socially productive paid work, unpaid childcare and making an economically sustainable living as challenging the entrepreneur as ideal neoliberal worker especially given the centrality of care and feminist/feminine knowledge in their accounts. These ways of navigating the 'postmaternal' condition of neoliberal economies and cultures suggests the building of alternative spaces and economies within neoliberal modes of self-production. However, it is significant that our participants building of community maternal economies was partly facilitated by their partner's or their own additional sources of income, suggesting that their location within (heterosexual) nuclear families plays an important role in their access to both not-for-profit community building and varying degrees

of insecure self-employment. Our findings echo other studies of mumpreneurs that highlights their preference for a business model motivated by the desire to help others and contribute to their community (Nel *et al.* 2010) and the development of a subculture of female entrepreneurship in unconventional economic spaces. We need more research into how entrepreneurialism, the maternal and the economic realm are intertwined and tools to analyse how categories like 'work' and 'care' are dissolving.

Our work also suggests that the ways in which Stephens identifies examples of challenges to postmaternal thinking by focusing on certain types of activism is limiting and confines her understanding of maternal politics to a narrow definition of the spaces of politics. The examples of Code Pink, the Motherhood Project and Mumsnet discussed as evidence of a reconfigured maternalism assume that women's individual and collective ethico-political decisions with regard to work and care do not count as forms of maternal activism. Such a definition misses the myriad ways in which not only our participants but mothers in general negotiate work and care in ways which often challenge the prioritising of autonomy over dependency. We found evidence of the neo-maternal activism Stephens discusses in the efforts by women to generate new relationships between work and care and to bring maternalism into their paid work. Thus our article is also a call to expand definitions of maternal feminist politics to include such negotiations and creative responses to postmaternalism.

Beyond this methodological contribution, our work adds nuance to how we can understand the imperative for women to become entrepreneurs of the self: for our participants feminist ideals and ways of working are not necessarily subsumed by the neoliberal project of the self and its accompanying technologies. The community building and body/care education central to their professional sense of self were less forms of neoliberal 'self-work' than enactments of an alternative ethos of 'mothering for mothers'. For these women the building of alternative spaces within neoliberal modes of self-production takes place within the commercialisation of birth and mothering but cannot be fully captured by the logics of commodification of these practices. The development of such alternative community economies was facilitated by their location within women's health and maternal cultures that have been and continue to be profoundly critical of autonomy as an ideal, for as Imogen Tyler (2011, 31) observes, "there is something about the maternal, understood as a relation between subjects, that troubles neoliberalism."

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