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Educating Mother: Examining the relationship between childrearing and childrearing pedagogy in 21 st Century Britain

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University of Huddersfield

Doctoral Thesis

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Educating Mother: Examining the  
relationship between childrearing and  
childrearing pedagogy in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain

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Jonquil Balcombe

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
School of Education and Professional Development*

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the warrant for the advice given in childrearing manuals and to understand how these books are read and used by real people. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has seen a huge expansion in childrearing advice. Searching for 'childrearing books' on Amazon UK produces over 90,000 results. Simultaneously there has been a growing political impetus to develop a universal culture of parenting expertise and advice, exemplified by David Cameron's (2016) assertion that 'we all need more help' raising children. The current trend for increasing parenting pedagogy in both the public and market spheres, rest on the premise that mothers adopt the teachings of childrearing experts, and this has a casual impact on children's outcomes. But how mothers engage with childrearing advice is under-explored.

Building on Nicholas Rose's (1999:208), suggestion that 'Parents are bound into the language and evaluations of expertise at the very moment they are assured of their freedom and autonomy', this study examines how mothers negotiate the knowledge claims and 'expertise' presented in childrearing manuals and employs critical realism to explore the mechanism's behind mothers' adoption, rejection and transformation of dominant childrearing pedagogy. This thesis departs from Rose by exploring and evaluating the emergent constructions of 'good' childrearing through a critical realist methodology. Critical realism, which combines ontological realism with the understanding that human knowledge is always conceptually mediated and situated within culture, history and society (epistemic perspectivism). Using critical realism to inform the methods and analysis allows this thesis to evaluate the warrant for current childrearing advice and simultaneously explore the it as a cultural construction.

By analysing thirty-six twenty-first century childrearing books I found there is no settled curriculum for childrearing. There is disagreement across the childrearing-pedagogy field on almost every aspect of 'good' childrearing. Science is evoked to defend the ideological claims of the manual writers, often by making claims that go beyond established knowledge. Rather than a coherent body of knowledge I found a messy dialogue between competing cultural scripts of 'good motherhood'. How mothers respond to the language of childrearing advice was explored empirically in eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with British mothers raising at least one child under eight. The research demonstrates how mothers attempt to balance contradictory scripts of 'good motherhood'. An original textual elicitation method provided insight into how the minutiae of childrearing is imbued with meaning, finding that seemingly simple questions of how the child sleeps or eats become indicative of the mother's identity as a 'good mother'. By identifying the reflective mechanisms by which mothers negotiate advice this study demonstrates how mothers develop a myriad of different reflective approaches to childrearing. This thesis finds that mothers may publicly speak the language of the dominant cultural childrearing scripts, but do not necessarily follow 'expert' advice. Mothers reported feeling pressured to perform motherhood in line with the scripts of 'good motherhood'; suggesting that although mothers do reject and resist childrearing ideas, there is an inherent risk in resistance. The mothers in this study were participating in the same broad parenting culture, but this culture does not present as homogeneous, or hegemonic, but is contextual and situated. Mothers employ mechanisms such as efficacy, ethical concern, empathy, and tacit knowledge to reject, adopt or transform salient advice within the rich, messy complexity of family relationships.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Personal rationale

I was thirty-nine when I had my first child, between then and my childhood in the 1970's the cultural landscape had changed. Children were no longer raised but 'parented' and parenting was presented as a skilled job, difficult and fraught with worry. I started to notice that every family home I visited had two things, largely absent from my childhood: firstly, a reward chart prominently on display, secondly, a library of advice manuals. I also started to notice parenting techniques in practice. Children were being threatened with counts of 1-2-3, sent to time-out and bribed into compliance. These observations made me increasingly fascinated with the advice books that inspired these parental behaviours. I found the techniques I had witnessed advocated in childrearing manuals. I found much in the books that concerned and worried me, especially the threats, bribes, and manipulation that the experts seemed to be advocating. I wanted to understand whether there was a warrant for this advice and how 'expert' opinion had been formed. Reading so many advice books I was struck by the deeply patronising tone of many of these books, and the accompanying assumption of parental incompetence. I could not reconcile the picture of family life presented with the gloriously varied families I know. I failed to recognise any real children, with their charm, idiosyncrasies, opinions, and deep love for their family and friends. I increasingly wanted to find out how these books are read and used by real people.

### 1.1 Rationale

"Discourses of childhood are central to the way we structure our own and others' sense of place and position. They are part of the cultural narratives that define who we are, why we are the way we are and where we are going." (Burman, 2008:67)

Childrearing manuals present discourses about childhood to parents. The study of a culture's childrearing manuals illuminates narratives about what children are and how they should be. Childrearing manuals are purposeful, they are written to inform childrearing practice; as such they can be regarded as pedagogic texts. Sociologist Nikolas Rose (1999:208) theorises that childrearing manuals are part of governmentality, linking political power to claims of expertise and the formation of the self:

'the family is simultaneously allotted its responsibilities, assured of its natural capacities, and educated in the fact that *it needs to be educated by experts* in order to have

confidence in its own capacities. Parents are bound into the language and evaluations of expertise at the very moment they are assured of their freedom and autonomy.'

This study examines how mothers negotiate both the claims of knowledge and expertise presented in childrearing manuals, exploring the ways that mothers are bound by the language and evaluations of 'expert' childrearing advice. In *Making Modern Mothers* Thompson et al (2011:126) suggest 'engaging with advice is not simply a matter of discovery or fact finding; it is also about finding a position for oneself within maternal culture.' This study identifies how 21<sup>st</sup> century British mothers position themselves within childrearing culture.

My study develops the example of Sharon Hays (1998), who conducted an analysis of childrearing books by the dominant childrearing gurus of late twentieth century America, the paediatricians Thomas Berry Brazelton and Benjamin Spock and the British psychologist Penelope Leach; juxtaposing the analysis against interviews with mothers. My study develops this approach, examining twenty-first Century childrearing manuals available in Britain, and interviews with British mothers, there by establishing how mothers negotiate the dominant advice; strengthening understanding about how parents engage with childrearing ideas.

In her analysis of American mothers' relationship with 20<sup>th</sup> century manuals Sharon Hays (1998:52) found that 'there is not direct correspondence between what the manuals advise and what mothers and parents actually think, say and do'. Parenting manuals are of interest as a reflection of the dominant cultural models of raising children (Hays,1998; Mechling, 1975; Hardyment, 2007). Childrearing manuals can be used to provide insight into the 'values of a dominant group' (Stearns, 2003:19), as such they provide clues to both the fears and ideals connected with childrearing at a given time and place: 'Childrearing advice manuals, as the behavioural products of manual writing beliefs and values may be powerful evidence of a modern consciousness.' (Mechling, 1975:126). The values explicit and implicit in the childrearing manuals express fears about how children are raised and ideals about how children ought to be raised. Mothers potentially receive these messages and respond to them in their own childrearing practices, but quite how mothers respond is open to question.

An explanation is offered by Stearns (2003:19) who suggests although a direct correspondence between childrearing and childrearing manuals cannot be supposed, these books are bought and read, and parents are 'likely to assimilate some of the material presented to them.' Rameaker and Suissa (2012: vii) propose a subtle assimilation of the claims made by childrearing manuals beyond practical reproduction of advice, it could be 'that claims made about and on parents can eventually become claims that are made by parents themselves, as parents gradually come to see themselves in

the ways implied by the predominant languages of parenting.’<sup>1</sup>

Nikolas Rose (1989:133) extends this argument to include Foucauldian ‘governmentality’, this theoretical stance relies on a Foucauldian reading of human beings which asserts ‘Individuals are the vehicles of power’ (Foucault, 1980:98) and that ‘knowledge’ claims serve to create ‘discourse’ in favour of the prevailing forms of domination. Rose suggests since the late nineteenth century there has been a ‘socializing project’ involving ‘the incorporation of expert doctrines for the government of children into our own free will’. This viewpoint would see child rearing manuals as one form of the ‘technologies for the government of the subjectivity of citizens.’ From this standpoint mothers would assimilate and reproduce the dominant ideas about childrearing; acting as voluntary, self-regulating conduits of the values of the dominant class. He suggests this happens through mothers internalising the ‘images of normality generated by expertise’. Mothers ‘act upon themselves’, in response to a dominant cultural discourse of good childrearing, bringing themselves ‘into alliance with the aspirations of authorities’ (Rose:1996:160).

Rose’s (1996) concept of a socialization project may give a partial explanation to the relationship between mothers and childrearing manuals. This study extends these ideas to address both the underlying mechanisms and the ongoing battle of ideas between childrearing manual writers and commentators (Hardyment, 2007; Rankin, 2005); exploring a range of possible motivations of human behaviour (Smith, 2015) regarding childrearing. This study builds upon Rose’s work through analysis of the language of childrearing presented in childrearing manuals and empirical evidenced-based research with mothers who read the manuals; exploring the nature and extent of engagement and acceptance of the ‘images of reality generated by expertise’ (Rose, 1989:133). ). Whilst accepting Rose’s ‘socialisation project’ as a contributing mechanism, this study finds that mothers’ negotiation of childrearing pedagogy extends beyond technologies of governance. As I will demonstrate, although it might be the case that childrearing manual writers wish their readers to internalise the ideas presented, they may not necessarily achieve this. Nor do the many childrearing manuals available present a unified ideology or episteme; although it is possible to identify dominant arguments, scripts and themes, as I will demonstrate, dominant childrearing ideas are messy and contradictory. The childrearing manuals are idiosyncratic, each version of an approach reflecting the individual experiences and interpretations of the authors (Hardyment, 2007). I conclude that childrearing manuals can be understood as messy arguments of persuasion for different conceptions of the ideal parent/child relationship; arguments which can be assimilated or resisted by mothers.

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<sup>1</sup> My research will look directly at how mothers relate to the ‘language of parenting’. Examining levels of assimilation, and resistance.

### *1.1.1 Neoliberalism as a problematic explanation*

An example of why I choose to resist accepting a view that childrearing pedagogy reflects a single dominant political discourse is demonstrated by the trend to evoke 'neoliberalism' as an explanation of childrearing practice. Rose (1989:123) suggests 'the child' as a target of reformers has become 'inextricably connected to the aspirations of authorities.' Sociologists such as Hendrick (2016), Tyler (2013) and Jensen (2018) argue that the current aspirations of the authorities carries a 'neoliberal' agenda with an emphasis on choice, competition, and individualism. It may be possible to pick out instances where these values are apparent, for example, Hendrick (2016:294) cites Diana Baumrind<sup>2</sup>'s emphasis on 'reciprocity' and 'conditionality' as neoliberal values. But, as I will demonstrate, it is difficult to claim they are dominant within the childrearing pedagogy. Hays identified 'intensive mothering' through analysis of the child centred parenting manuals by Spock, Brazleton and Leach who belong to a 'progressive' and left-leaning political landscape. Hays (1998:65) notes that these authors 'are explicit in articulating their belief that appropriate child rearing is in opposition to the behaviour that is appropriate in the outside world.' The rejected behaviours include efficiency, rivalry and focus on money and position. Hays suggests these books are moral treatises containing an 'underlying moral condemnation of impersonal competitive, market relations and a celebration of the importance of caring for others.'

It is difficult to portray the scripts of intensive mothering and 'good mothering' that permeate childrearing pedagogy and policy as a simple expression of neoliberal ideology. Scepticism about drawing on neoliberalism to explain childrearing mores is needed for two reasons. Firstly, appeals to a neoliberal hegemony as an explanation do not address *how* mothers negotiate and interpret the dominant advice and cultural expectations of motherhood. Secondly, the term 'neoliberal' is nebulous and slippery (Dunn, 2017). Clarke (2008:135) argues that the term 'Neo-liberalism suffers from promiscuity (hanging out with various theoretical perspectives), omnipresence (treated as a universal or global phenomenon), and omnipotence (identified as the cause of a wide variety of social, political and economic changes).' The imprecision of the term means that adult-centred behaviourist childrearing can be condemned as neoliberal by Hendrick (2016) (because of its premise of conditionality), and the reflexive child-centred childrearing, which Hendrick positions as a defence against neoliberalism, can be questioned by Jensen (2018) as reinforcing neoliberal ideas of individualism and choice. This is an example of conceptual sprawl by which branding ideas as neoliberal risks becoming little more than a shorthand for disapproval. As Dunn (2017) argues, although different uses of the term may point to real phenomena, rather than illuminating the

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<sup>2</sup> Diana Baumrind is an influential American developmental psychologist most known for her work on 'parenting styles'.

subject the overuse of this term can obfuscate the relationship between social practices and their underlying mechanisms. This study resists evoking neoliberalism, or other unifying ideologies, as an explanation for childrearing, preferring to examine the mechanisms of adoption, transformation and resistance to dominant ideas.

### 1.1.2 Childrearing Pedagogy

This study reconceptualises childrearing manuals as ‘childrearing pedagogy’, recognising the desire inherent in the texts to teach parents how to raise their children. The manuals present curriculums for childrearing and methods of learning such as practice, and reflection. They claim that the application of this pedagogy has a predictable effect on childrearing, and children. This study explores how mothers negotiate the claims and curriculums of childrearing pedagogy.

In *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing*, Stearns (2003:20) places childrearing manuals ‘within a larger capitalist framework in which people were encouraged to recognise lacks that could be ameliorated by buying some product’<sup>3</sup>. Despite the number of parenting books on the market, one of the concepts most often used to sell these books or promote parenting pedagogy is that children do not come with instructions (for example see Mewes, 2012: viii) or that parenting is an important job for which there is no training<sup>4</sup> (as in Gordon, 2000:2; Webster-Stratton, 2005:17). Stearns suggests the increase in parenting-advice manuals and classes in 1920s’ and 1930s’ America ‘reflected deep concerns on the part of experts that many parents did not know their job and that parenting was hardly a natural act, save in the most rudimentary biological sense’. This same concern can be detected both in the recent proliferation of childrearing advice, but also in the political desire for increased parenting advice as a form of social pedagogy. When prime minister, David Cameron (11/1/2016) suggested that parenting education is beneficial to all parents and announced that ‘the Life Chances Strategy will include a plan for significantly expanding parenting provision’. More parenting guidance was presented by Cameron as a universal need:

In the end though, getting parenting and the early years right isn’t just about the hardest-to-reach families, frankly it’s about everyone. We all have to work at it...As we know, they don’t come with a manual and that’s obvious, but is it right that all of us get so little guidance?

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<sup>3</sup> It may be that this marketing ploy has been partly instrumental on the building perception that parents cannot cope without expert guidance, resulting in Cameron’s (2016) assertion that every parent needs help (Jensen, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> The idea that there is no training for parenthood negates any idea that parenting training occurs informally. It denies the idea that older children and teenagers have some responsibilities for children in families and communities, or that parents learn from their own parents and exposure to other parents in family and friendship groups.

Similarly, at the beginning of this century the Chief Executive of Parentline<sup>5</sup> (Braun, 2000)

argued that:

A massive culture change is needed, so that the wider community starts to recognise that parenting is very hard work; that most parents find it difficult from time to time; that they want to do the very best they can; and that asking for help is a sign of strength, not a weakness.

Parenting is thus imagined and presented as a complex and difficult task, that needs expert guidance; not only does this difficult job need to be learnt, but it needs to be taught.

### *1.1.3 The problems with the verb 'to parent'*

I refer to 'childrearing pedagogy' rather than 'parenting pedagogy'. The word 'parenting' is not an innocent description. The word represents a recent change in the conception of childrearing and the parent-child relationship, as Harry Hendrick (2016:291) notes, 'In the shift from being a mother or father who rears children to becoming "a parent" who does "parenting", the parent-child relationship has been covertly redesigned.' In twenty-first century Britain it is in common usage, mainly coupled with a modifying word (for example, good, bad, positive, optimal, abusive), demonstrating that parenting is framed as an activity that can be judged, and improved upon. The word 'parent' has turned from a noun, a description of a relationship, into a verb<sup>6</sup>; as Suissa (2006:72) suggests this reflects the increasing construction of childrearing as an active task, rather than a relationship:

By 'doing things' for their children constantly, parents are encouraged to see themselves in a functional role; parenting becomes a task. It is not the complexity of this task, nor its terrifying significance for our children's development, that is the problem, but the fact that it is conceived as a task at all.

Richard Smith (2010:360) explains: "'Parenting' suggests a functional task performed by one or two adults and done to children more or less effectively' and 'does not tend to depict the relationship with one's child as an easy or comfortable one'. Jennifer Howze (2009:90) worries that the current emphasise on 'parenting skills' has 'turned parenting into a set of tasks and decisions that have to be done "right" if we are to fulfil our role as "proper" parents [...] in some ways it alienates us from our

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<sup>5</sup> Parentline was a state-endorsed helpline offering support and information for parents and carers, it is now rebranded in the UK as Family Lives. as <https://www.familylives.org.uk>

<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'the philosophy of perfect parenting' appeared in 1918 in the Washington Post, and the verb gained currency with the 1970 publication of Dodson's "How to Parent: A complete guide for parents based on a revolutionary 'common sense' approach to child psychology" (Smith, 2010)

children.'

By reducing the child-parent relationship to a skill set (Lee, 2014) or a 'a set of orientations' to 'being or becoming a particular kind of self' (Jensen, 2018:102) childrearing is framed as something that needs to be learnt and can be taught by experts (Furedi, 2008; Lee, 2014). As Ramaeker and Suissa (2012: xv) state, 'the currently pervasive term 'parenting' epitomises the particular understanding of childrearing and the child-parent relationship as pervaded by scientific knowledge and the need for expertise.'

Following Ramaeker and Suissa, in this study I use the word 'parenting' to denote the dominant conception of childrearing as a task pervaded by the need for expertise, and a claim to 'scientific' knowledge; but use the phrases 'child-parent relationship', 'childrearing', and 'raising children' to include aspects not suggested by the dominant term 'parenting'. Throughout this study I use the term 'childrearing pedagogy' to describe expert led advice to mothers across varied platforms, such as childrearing books, social media, websites, television, parenting classes and contact with professionals. This is distinct from informal (from family and friends), experiential or tacit learning about motherhood and childrearing.

#### *1.1.4 Parenting and 'Expert' Knowledge*

The term 'parenting' represents a process of rationalisation, where tacit knowledge has been displaced by expert knowledge as private relationships are formalised (Furedi, 2011). The rise of the parenting expert and the professionalization of child rearing has built to the extent that line between parent and professional blurs and parents are expected to professionalise themselves (Williams 2009; Lee 2007; Bristow, 2009; Ramaeker and Suiza, 2011). Arguably this is a centuries old process. Doctors had used foundling hospitals to experiment with daily child management since the 18th Century, publishing their findings for use in domestic settings (Hardyment, 2007). Most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century research into childcare performed and cited by Holt, Watson and King were in institutional settings, characterised by the absence of mother-care. Inevitably the demands of institutional care placed a greater emphasis on routine and organization than mother-care traditionally required (Apple, 2006). The same process can be seen today when techniques devised by professional nannies (for example Frost, 2005; Ford, 2006; Mewes, 2012) are repackaged as advice to mothers, and techniques used to help severely deprived or troubled children are presented as general parenting advice for example Webster Stratton's (2005) *The Incredible Years*.

#### *1.1.5 Mothering or Parenting*

The word 'parenting' also hides the gendered nature of much childrearing. It obfuscates the reality of who shoulders the prime responsibility for raising children in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain and whom is



being addressed by the advice. While fathers may be increasingly targeted by expert advice, mothers still perform most of the childrearing tasks, and are more likely to reduce their paid employment in favour of child-care (Dermott, 2018; Gillies, 2007; Crittenden, 2010; Pedersen, 2012; Senior 2014). Although I recognize that fathers<sup>7</sup> raise children too, childrearing books are written primarily for mothers since within the cultural logic of current British childrearing mothers are held primarily responsible for raising children (Hays, 1998, Gillies, 2007, Jensen, 2018). Childrearing manuals can be placed within a tradition of advice to women which orientates women towards domesticity by making knowledge claims about the nature of women and children (Ehrenreich & English, 2005).

## 1.2 Critical Realism as a Philosophical Underlabourer

By employing critical realism as a 'philosophical under-labourer' (Bhaskar, 2016:1-2) for this study a clear distinction can be made 'between the natural world as it really is and our changing conceptions of it' (Gorski, 2013:664); that is the intransitive realm of being (ontology) and the transitive realm of knowledge (epistemology). My study of childrearing will contain intransitive objects of study which are part of the 'the natural physical world, independent of thought' (Alderson, 2016:171), and transitive elements such as, our perceptions, discourses, and theories about the world. The rival transitive theories of childrearing may differ, but the intransitive objects of study, the child and the mother, remain constant. The intransitive object remains the same regardless of the fallibility of our knowledge (Gorski, 2013). As Alderson (2013:20) explains: '...it is about critically recognising that real existence (ontology) is separate from thought and imagining (epistemology). Real children, for example, exist independently beyond researchers' concepts and analysis and data.'

This study starts from the premise that people are sometimes 'motivated by real, internal subjective entities, such as desires, beliefs and emotions' (Smith, 2015:94). Critical realism invites the possibility that motivations are not simply products of social interaction and normalization, or reducible to a power dynamic. It is possible that subjective entities such as a mothers' emotions towards her child would lead her to reject some normalised aspects of childrearing. Critical realism attempts to improve our knowledge of the real by adjudicating rival accounts and making justified truth claims about reality based on research findings and retrodution<sup>8</sup>. Different theories of childrearing can be evaluated as more or less truth-like, and their knowledge claims interrogated (Sayer, 2000; Maxwell, 2012)

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<sup>7</sup> The cultural logic around fatherhood is distinct from the cultural logic of motherhood (Faircloth, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Simply put retrodution is a thought experiment, achieved by asking the question 'what would the world have to like for this to be true?'

### 1.3 Thesis Overview

This study will draw on ideas from a range of disciplines, connecting work in the natural and social sciences to create a broad picture of how childrearing is imagined and defined and negotiated. I shall examine the ideas behind childrearing pedagogy from three viewpoints from within the childrearing discourse, the critics and academics (chapters two to four), the childrearing pedagogy (chapters six to eight), and mothers raising children under eight years old (chapters nine to eleven). By examining the ideas expressed from these viewpoints, and the way the ideas interact, this thesis shall investigate how childrearing is imagined and defined in twenty-first century British childrearing discourse.

The literature review, chapters two to four, explores how childrearing is presented within the childrearing advice discourse and how knowledge claims are utilized within childrearing pedagogy to sustain, justify and defend the childrearing advice. Throughout these chapters I will use examples from twenty-first century childrearing books<sup>9</sup> to demonstrate the relationship between the content of the books and the surrounding discourse.

Chapter two explores the childrearing pedagogy discourse, examining how childrearing pedagogy has been critiqued and explored, embedding this study within the discourse. I examine and question the influence afforded to childrearing pedagogy as an instrument of social pedagogy to shape childhood, child outcomes and future citizens. I conclude that within the discourse the validity and efficacy of childrearing advice is a matter of faith, with little robust evidence to support the claims made. I suggest a need for further analysis of current childrearing pedagogy and mothers' negotiation of the knowledge claims, and cultural scripts of childrearing.

In chapter three I examine the claims to childrearing knowledge, finding that there is little robust evidence to support many of the claims made. Science and research are misrepresented within childrearing discourse to justify ideological positions and close debate. Chapter four explores cultural scripts of 'good motherhood' identified in the academic literature, including intensive motherhood (Hays, 1998), concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth (Lareau 2003), sensitive mothering (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989), parental determinism (Furedi, 2008), and 'parenting out of control' (Nelson, 2012).

Chapter five explains the methods and methodology used in this study, and its philosophical underpinnings of critical realism; detailing my textual elicitation approach to researching childrearing

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<sup>9</sup> A fuller analysis of childrearing manuals is provided in the analysis of the childrearing manual data in chapters six to eight.

discourse and the analytic method of identifying causal mechanisms.

The next three chapters use thirty-six twenty-first century childrearing manuals as data to produce a new empirical understanding of the dominant discourses of childrearing pedagogy. Chapter six explores the childrearing pedagogy past and present. Finding a crowded and contradictory field, this chapter examines how beliefs are presented as advice to parents; forming an ongoing dialogue between opposing views of the what children are and how they should be. I conclude by bringing together the elements that form the dominant cultural scripts of motherhood in twenty-first century childrearing manuals; identifying two dominant and incompatible scripts 'sensitive motherhood' and 'control of the chaotic.' Chapter seven contrasts two childrearing authors, Skeznay (2010) and Palmer (2009, 2015) to examine how childrearing advice constitutes arguments about what children are and how they should be, showing how the conceptualisation of childhood informs the cultural scripts of 'good' motherhood'. Chapter eight explores the language of childrearing advice, demonstrating how the two cultural scripts intersect and borrow ideas and language from each other, in a messy battle of persuasion. I end by identifying how the two cultural scripts are presented in the childrearing pedagogy.

The next three chapters examine the data produced through interviews with eleven British mothers with at least one child under eight. Chapter nine explores how mothers' source childrearing knowledge and their relationship with childrearing advice. Chapter ten identifies the mechanisms of adoption, rejection and transformation of childrearing advice; showing that multiple evaluative mechanisms are in play, resulting in varied interpretations and application of the dominant childrearing techniques and ideas. Chapter eleven explores how mothers negotiate the language of childrearing advice, finding that although there is a common language of childrearing the interpretations and meaning vary, and childrearing style is not homogenous or shared across twenty-first century British childrearing culture.

Chapter twelve concludes the thesis. Reiterating the findings that mothers perform a cultural script but do not live by it; childrearing culture is participatory but not shared; mothers adopt, reject and transform different aspects, creating a myriad of different approaches. These findings problematise claims that childrearing pedagogy has a predicable effect on childrearing, and children.

## Chapter Two: The Influence of Childrearing Pedagogy on Children, Mothers and Society

This chapter examines the claims made for the efficacy of childrearing advice, and its power to transform families and influence children's futures. I begin with a brief exploration of the role of childrearing pedagogy within British Government policy discourse; concluding that across the policy documents the validity and application of childrearing pedagogy is underexplored. I then examine the presumed influence and power parenting pedagogy is supposed to hold over parents, children and society. I question the claims made by childrearing advice books that their advice is universal, 'it works' for all families and produces pro-social and happy children who will become well-adjusted adults. Considering these claims, I then examine how much influence childrearing manuals have on childrearing. By examining the cultural debate between two distinct ideologies of childrearing I demonstrate that how mothers negotiate and respond to childrearing pedagogy is under-explored, calling into question the assumption that increasing parental access to childrearing pedagogy will directly correspond to improved childrearing and better child outcomes.

### 2.1. Creating Good Citizens through Childrearing Pedagogy

Today's childcare initiatives, parenting classes and children centres are the inheritance of the social pedagogic initiatives of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As childhood historian Hugh Cunningham (2006) notes, poor parents were targeted to receive education on child rearing as a utilitarian and compassionate move to improve the lives of young children and equip them to become productive members of society. The Ragged Schools included mother and infant classes where mothers could be taught to provide 'a better upbringing for their children.' (Petrie 2003:69). In 1907 a 'School for Mothers' was opened in St Pancras to teach mothers about child rearing and health. The 1904 Committee on Physical Deterioration attempted to understand the infant mortality rate. As Mannay (2014:160) notes, despite evidence of poverty and a contributory 'lack of ventilation hot water, drainage and sanitation [...] The blame for infant mortality was placed on inadequate mothers; and the domestic ideology became central in the premise that working-class homes would become civilised by basic education'. As Rose (1989:123) observes 'Throughout the nineteenth century and our own, anxieties concerning children have occasioned a panoply of programs that have tried to conserve and shape children by moulding the petty details of the domestic, conjugal and sexual lives of their parents.'

But it was not until the New Labour Government of late 20<sup>th</sup> century (and the subsequent coalition Government of 2010 and Conservative Government of 2015) that such initiatives became a flagship

aspect of government policy. Policy has been aimed at an increasing number of children and their mothers until all parents are portrayed as needing pedagogic support with childrearing (Jensen, 2018). For example, the Coalition Government's policy report, *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives* (2011:38) states:

We want to see a culture where the key aspects of good parenting are widely understood, and where all parents recognise that they can benefit from advice and support on parenting skills... we want access to parenting advice and support once a child is born to be considered the norm.

Parental childrearing education is promoted as a method of improving contemporary childrearing, and child outcomes (McVarish et al, 2014). For example, the final report on state sponsored *CANparent* trial of universal parenting classes (DfE 2014:18) begins:

'The quality of parenting is a key issue for children's development. It is one of the main predictors of children's emotional and behavioural development as parents are the single most important influence on a child's development'

The argument for state intervention into family childrearing practice depends on privileging the child/parent interaction as a determining force beyond social structures such as class, race, education opportunities, and culture. As illustrated in MP Graham Allen's (2011: xiv) claim in the report *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*, that 'the right kind of parenting is a bigger influence on their [children's] future than wealth, class, education or any other common social factor'.

Cross -party work promotes childrearing education and early intervention (for example, Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; DfE,DWP 2011; DfE, 2013; Allen, 2013) as a means to transform society. Early Intervention is defined in the Government briefing paper Number 7647 (Powell, 2019:3). As 'a public policy approach to identify and support children and their families, to prevent problems developing later in life, such as poor physical and mental health<sup>10</sup>, low educational attainment, crime and anti-social behaviour.' This policy approach has been criticized by feminist sociologists for valuing children for their social and economic potential; privileging their futurity over their childhood (McVarish et al, 2014) as children become 'operationalised' through 'child outcomes' (Jensen, 2010:11).

In *Building Great Britons* (2015) the all-party parliamentary group, *The First 1001 Days*, state the ambition "To create children who at the end of their first 1001 days have the social and emotional

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<sup>10</sup> <sup>10</sup> In his book *Myths of Childhood*, Joel Paris (2013:190), Professor of psychiatry at McGill University Montreal, explains that although defective childrearing is sometimes a 'contributing factor' in mental illness, it is 'not by itself, its primary cause'. Parents can damage their children, but rearing practices make the most difference to temperamentally vulnerable children. Most children remain resilient, both to their parents and a broad range of adversities.'

resources that form a strong foundation for good citizenship.” One of the proposed routes to achieving this goal is through parenting pedagogy. This represents a continuation of cross party which work has promoted parenting education and early intervention on the premise that inadequate parenting produces dysfunctional adults (Edwards, 2013) ( For policy examples, see: Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; DfE, DWP 2011; DfE, 2013, Leadsom et al, 2013). Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rachad (2013:196) summarise such policy as claiming to ‘safeguard our children from such miserable futures, and our societies from such a social and economic burden.’ Which rely of a formation of social justice not as ‘tackling the causes of structural inequality, poverty, poor housing , unemployment and the like, but in managing parents in the name of the formation of good citizens.’ Failing to implement programs of early intervention and parenting pedagogy comes with dire warnings, as exemplified by the all-party parliamentary report *Building Britons* (2015:1) claim that:

Without intervention, there will be in the future, as in the past, high intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, inequality, dysfunction and child maltreatment. These self-perpetuating cycles create untold and recurring costs for society. The economic value of breaking these cycles will be enormous.

This discourse has been widely criticized by feminists and sociologists for attributing social problems to the individual failures of individual parents (see Edwards, 2013; Wall, 2004; Bristow, 2007; Gillies, 2007; Jensen, 2018).

Walkerdine and Lucey’s (1989:29) feminist exploration of the supposedly scientific rationale behind the promotion of ‘sensitive mothering’ as a means to create good citizens notes that ‘Science claims to tell the truth about natural mothering, but is founded on fears of what is to be found in the working class.’ Within this discourse there is an explicit element of fear<sup>11</sup> for the future, demonstrating James, Jenks and Prout’s (1998:9) observation that "Children pose a potential threat to the social order and its reproduction." For example, MPs Allen and Duncan Smith (2008:24) frame Early Intervention as prevention of social ills by painting a terrifying picture of the development of delinquency, from unruly toddler to murderer:

...prevention of ill-preparedness for school and other learning environments; prevention of the adoption of the violent behaviour that makes toddlers anti-social, school children unmanageable and ends up with young people languishing in prison; prevention of the physical and mental problems which will perpetuate the cycle of dysfunction; and prevention of the development of callousness that allows fatal beatings and stabbings on residential streets. It is as simple – and as difficult – as making sure that very young

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<sup>11</sup> This fear is also present in the childrearing pedagogy, in particular Palmer’s *Detoxing Childhood* (2008:153), which claims that the “toxic childhood s” of the “poor and uneducated” unless combated by following her childrearing advice “will produce an increasingly toxic world.”.

children 0-3 receive nurture, warmth and attention from parents (Allen and Duncan smith, 2010:24).

To combat this perceived threat and gain the social benefits attributed to 'good' childrearing, the state has been determined to extend the market for parenting advice<sup>12</sup>. A government initiative called CANparent (DfE:2014: 3) trailed free parenting classes, with the aim to

'evaluate whether the free provision of parenting classes would provide sufficient incentive to providers to start offering additional parenting classes nationally, including for parents beyond the foundation stage and whether a universal approach could normalise and de-stigmatise parenting classes.'

In the event only "2% of eligible families took up the offer of help" (Boffey, 2013). The CANparent initiative (DFE: 2014) surveyed parents about whether they required expert advice:

Their responses generally tended to show that those who would not seek help from outside their immediate circle were in a positive parenting situation and already had the support that they needed (or at least thought that they had all the help they needed – increasing awareness of the benefits of parenting classes may lead to the engagement of some such parents with CANparent.

This statement frames all parents as in need of expert advice regardless of their situation, even parents who are functioning, confident and supported are positioned as needing formal instruction on raising children<sup>13</sup>.

A report<sup>14</sup> from *The Early Intervention Foundation* (Asmussen et al, 2016:6) claims "all parents benefit from support and advice that is well timed and sensitive to their needs and aspirations." There is a political desire to cast seeking childrearing education and advice as a normal part of raising children. When prime minister, David Cameron (11/1/2016) suggested parenting education is beneficial to all parents and announced that 'the Life Chances Strategy will include a plan for significantly expanding parenting provision', more parenting guidance was presented by Cameron as a universal need:

We all need more help with this – because the most important job we'll ever have [sic]. So, I believe we now need to think about how to make it normal – even aspirational to

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12 According to the conservative newspaper, The Sunday Telegraph on 28th April 2019, Dr Carol Homden, chief executive of Children's Charity Coram appealed to the government to provide a 'red book' for parents suggesting 'A red book for teenagers could include advice on how much sleep adolescents need, as well as the importance of setting routines, structures and boundaries. It could also explain to parents that they should take an interest in their child's education, go along to parents' evenings and encourage them to do their homework.'

<sup>13</sup> This follows from Labour MP Frank Field (2010) urging the Government's Behavioural Insight Team, to promote parenting and nurturing skills.

<sup>14</sup> *Foundations for Life: What works to support parent child interaction in the early years.*

attend parenting classes.

We should encourage the growth of high-quality courses that help with all aspects of becoming a great mum or a great dad.

The idea of universal parenting education is superficially attractive, increasing knowledge is a positive aim. But it is also problematic, since as I will show, there is disagreement across the childrearing-pedagogy field on almost every aspect of 'good' childrearing.

Even when the evidence for a pedagogic approach to improving childrearing is limited or lacking, the desirability of parental childrearing education is not questioned. For example, the *Helping Parents to Parent* report published by the Social Mobility Commission (Clarke & Younas, 2017:38) examining pedagogic childrearing interventions concluded that:

'it is evident that some governments are beginning to approach universal parental support as a public health issue. Although there is a lack of robust evaluation for many universal parenting interventions at present, it appears that this approach is starting to normalise the concept of support for parenting, leading to success in engaging parents'

Universal 'parenting' education is often promoted as a panoptic gateway to targeted intervention. Critics have identified four potentially negative consequences of the use of universal interventions and "support" in this manner. Firstly, it may undermine all parental authority, confidence and competence (Furedi, 2008; Lee et al, 2014), as parents are expected to enter into an unequal partnership; deferring to the expert professional (Bristow, 2009:79). As Helen Lomax (2014:103) found in her study of infant feeding discourse, 'ordinary' family practices can be 'troubled by policy agenda' and 'a rhetoric of ideal mothering that 'negates the complexities of maternal labour'. This potentially creates a culture where all parents are targeted as being deficient in their capacity to raise children (Furedi, 2011). This is partly achieved through an exaggeration of the reality, for example, note the use of the word 'many' in this article in the conservative newspaper, *The Telegraph* (Turner, 2019) to create a narrative of parental deficit:

Ministers will launch a public information campaign later this year urging parents to "Chat, Play, Read" with their children before they start school.

The Education Secretary has promised to tackle the "last taboo" in education by highlighting the fact that many mothers and fathers are failing to teach their children how to talk.

Secondly it promotes a homogenous and hegemonic model of 'good parenting' (Gillies, 2005) which goes beyond established knowledge. Historian, Christina Hardyment's (2007:603) comprehensive study of 200 years of child-care advice concludes that although manual writers can give valuable insight into general themes of child development, and a baby care book may be a useful resource to



a new mother, “there is no such thing as a generally applicable blueprint for perfect parenthood”. Parenting mores and styles are cultural constructs which vary over time and place (Kagan, 1998: Hardyment, 2009: Cunningham 2006; Hays, 1998; Mercer, 2013), and social class (Kagan, 1998; Lareau, 2003; Nelson, 2012; Wall, 2010, Jensen, 2018). As anthropologists Deloache and Gotleib (2000:5) find in their analysis of seven childrearing cultures ‘Every group thinks that their way of caring is the obvious natural way – a simple matter of common sense... what we call common sense is anything but common. Indeed, what people accept as common sense in one society may be considered odd, exotic, or even barbaric in another.’ Rosalind Edwards (2013) study of the changing social mores of ‘parenting’ shows how:

policy debates about contemporary parenting deficits are notably ahistorical in that they fail to acknowledge or engage with these changing understandings and expectations. Influential claims from Frank Field MP that ‘Britain is witnessing a rupturing in its once strong parenting tradition’ (2010: 18) conjure up an era of taken for granted standards and values in relation to good parenting. Yet our analysis of the classic studies reveals widely accepted practices and values from the 1960s that would today be viewed at best in terms of benign neglect and at worst as child abuse.

Not only did Edward’s find that childrearing mores had changed considerably, she noted that in the 1960’s the, currently ubiquitous, moralised discourse of parental liability was absent.

Thirdly as family sociologist Esther Dermott (2012:2) suggests, government policy shows ‘the tendency to think of parenting as an independent mechanism through which negative outcomes for children can be avoided.’ Dermott argues that the ‘The rationale for taking issue with the status parenting is currently accorded is that it misrepresents current evidence and hides the complexity of relationships between parenting, poverty and outcomes for children.’

Lastly, attempts to justify the view that parents need expert help promotes the idea that parenting is a complex and difficult endeavour, that must not only be learned but be taught (Furedi, 2008). For example, the final report for the CANparent (DfE 2014:18) trial states ‘parenting is challenging for all parents’ This is line with Hays definition of ‘intensive motherhood’, gleaned from her analysis of childrearing manuals, that ‘good’ mothering must be intensive and “expert guided”. Authority has increasingly been equated with expert knowledge; competing with folk knowledge, experiential knowledge and less formal inter-generational transmission of parenting knowledge (Apple, 2006; Furedi, 2011b). As in the childrearing manuals, within the policy discourse folk knowledge is both dismissed as ignorance and lamented as lost. For example, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Childhood campaigner and manual writer Sue Palmer’s (2016:293) polemic *Toxic Childhood*, laments a supposed loss of intergenerational teaching and traditional knowledge, and concludes that the state needs to fill the gap:

... multimedia and the Internet show increasing potential to fill the gap in handing out knowledge left by the death of the extended family, village wise women and so on. But it's still up to parents to seek out support. If childrearing is to take its rightful place at the centre of our culture, we need to ensure every parent knows the nuts and bolts of child development- and this probably means governments have to get involved.

The communitarian concern, as exemplified by Amitai Etzioni (1995), that families have become isolated from older generations and communities, at a time of changing patterns of female employment and relatively high divorce rates is brought as a justification for state endorsed parenting pedagogy. For example, in *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, Allen and Duncan Smith, (2008:23) claim:

“The transmission of parenting skills from generation to generation has changed considerably and while the middle classes can read the guide books, those with lower educational and social skills are finding parenting skills squeezed out as extended families reduce and more one-parent households have smaller knowledge bases on which to draw”.

Here, poor parenting is firmly equated with the alleged lack of knowledge of non-middle-class parents. Leaving aside the prejudiced assumption that non-middle-class parents cannot also read childrearing manuals, this statement suggests middle-class mothers read and assimilate the proffered advice uncritically and the advice is beneficial. Allen and Duncan Smith are presuming that the perceived success of middle-class child rearing is positively influenced by the parenting manuals. Jensen highlights this as ‘absolute faith...planted in the power of practices of “good parenting”’ (Jensen 2010:1)

The promotion of childrearing pedagogy assumes that the way a child is raised has a profound and direct influence on a child's adult behaviour, yet the empirical evidence that childrearing acts as a stable and systematic mechanism in the creation of adult character and outcomes is lacking<sup>15</sup> (Plomin, 2018; Paris, 2013). Throughout the political discourse on childrearing there is a lack of criticality around the validity of childrearing pedagogy<sup>16</sup>, and a lack of understanding about how mothers may respond to the available advice. Improving child outcomes through parenting pedagogy relies on an assumption that parents will assimilate the advice and reliably replicate approved childrearing practices. This study employs a critical realist approach to examine the validity of childrearing pedagogy and the mechanisms underpinning mother's negotiation of the dominant

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<sup>15</sup> ‘when differences in parenting correlate with differences in children's outcomes, the correlation is mostly caused by genetics’ (Plomin, 2018:83)

childrearing ideas in twenty-first century Britain, in the hope a fuller understanding may illuminate the role of childrearing pedagogy beyond a blind acceptance or refutation.

The next section examines the validity of childrearing pedagogy by examining the claims for efficacy, complexity and privileged knowledge presented in the childrearing manuals.

## 2.2 Claims Made by Childrearing Manuals: Essential and Privileged Knowledge

The confidence in parenting pedagogy demonstrated in policy discourse is reflected in the childrearing pedagogy marketplace. Childrearing book titles and sub-titles are explicit in their claims of essential and privileged knowledge. The manual writers claim to know ‘secrets’ for successful childrearing and ‘calm’ happy family life<sup>17</sup>. The reader/mother is invited to discover this secret knowledge that has been previously withheld. In the titles childrearing, childhood and family life is often presented as extremely problematic. The titles offer to ‘tame’ children and promote ‘calm’ and ‘happiness’ as well as successful, well behaved or responsible children, suggesting a belief that these things may be lacking in family life. Parents are presented as lacking the knowledge to successfully raise children without the transformative expert guidance offered by the manuals’ solutions.

Marketing these books as a source of essential and infallible knowledge, in contrast to parental ignorance and fallibility may sell copies, but it also perpetuates the notion that all parents potentially are deficient in their ability and capacity to rear children (Furedi, 2011). If the methods are infallible but the desired results are not forthcoming the fault is presumably due to the parents' application not the method itself. According to some childrearing authors their books can tell parents exactly how to bring up children, for example, in *Parenting Effectiveness Training: The Proven program for Raising responsible Children*, Gordon (2000:5) states: ‘This book presents a comprehensive philosophy of what it takes to establish and maintain an effective total relationship with a child, in any and all circumstances...Parents will be given a complete system, principles as well as techniques.’

### 2.2.1 Experts versus Grandmothers

Authority and knowledge are claimed by the expert, undermining tacit knowledge gained by parental experience, folk knowledge<sup>18</sup>, and the transmission of inter-generational parenting knowledge (Apple, 2006; Furedi, 2011b). In his history of 20th century American childrearing Stearns (2003:40) recognises that selling childrearing manuals depends on ‘identifying needs and refuting previous

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<sup>17</sup> See bibliography of childrearing manuals (p.233) for examples of childrearing manual titles.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Sunderland (2015:39) dismisses peer-advice as unscientific: ‘Parents may wonder if their baby is using crying to manipulate them, especially when they hear comments from well-meaning friends and family such as “Just leave her. She’s just trying to control you. Give in now and you will suffer later.” We now know this is neurobiologically inaccurate.’

generation's advice.' We can see this within the childrearing manuals, for example, Spock and Needham (2011:1) opine that, 'The world is different from how it was twenty years ago, and the old answers may not work anymore.' Without any acknowledgement of paradox, the genre both laments the demise of intergenerational sources of potential expertise and advice (for examples see: Frost<sup>19</sup>, 2005:13; Palmer, 2008:157, 2016:293), and dismisses such advice as old-fashioned and potentially mis-guided. Writing his manual in the 1960's Dreikurs (1964:10) was clear that new ways of childrearing must replace 'obsolete traditions' and, following a doctrine of parental determinism, claims the failings of today's parents can be firmly placed on the shoulders of previous generations. Similarly, two generations later, manual writer Sunderland (2006:10) warns:

It is chilling to know that some accepted ways of being with children can leave them vulnerable to depression or rage in later life... This book goes deeper, harnessing research that shows how everyday parenting can contribute to widespread misery.

This sentiment is not new, the nineteenth century philosopher Herbert Spencer (1861:29) railed: 'Is it not monstrous that the fate of the next generation should be left to the chances of unreasoning custom, impulse, fancy – joined with suggestions of ignorant nurses and the prejudiced counsel of grandmothers?'

### 2.3 The Messy Battle of Persuasion

In her twentieth century history of childrearing advice Hulbert (2004:9) describes how in each period there is an 'odd couple', one 'stern father figure of the Lockean nurture is what counts school' and one 'gentler Rousseauian proponent of letting nature take its course in childhood'. Sociologist Charlotte Faircloth (2013:20) describes a heuristic distinction between 'structured' and 'unstructured' models of childrearing. The former characterised by routine, separation of adult and child, and the latter characterised by practices such as long-term breastfeeding, co-sleeping and 'positive' discipline. The American psychologist Jane Rankin (2005:254) describes parenting manuals as 'part of an ongoing dialogue between fundamentalists and progressives.'

The dialogue permeates the wider discourse around childrearing pedagogy, creating cultural scripts by which childrearing is judged<sup>20</sup>. For example, consider how the press coverage of a public

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<sup>19</sup> 'In the past there were often grandparents and other family members nearby who could lend a hand and give support, and advice.' (Frost, 2005:13)

<sup>20</sup> As I will demonstrate in chapter four my analysis of current childrearing manuals supports this view, identifying two distinct cultural scripts of 'good motherhood' the fundamentalist and structured, 'control of the chaotic' and the progressive and unstructured 'sensitive motherhood'.

pedagogy initiative in Leeds<sup>21</sup> to educate parents about healthy eating was reported in the quality press. Sarah Boseley (2010) in *The Guardian* stresses the progressive, social-democratic aspects of the programme, using choice to avoid authoritarian childrearing:

The programme encourages authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting, she said [...]

Instead of being asked what vegetable they want with dinner, children might be asked whether they would like carrots or broccoli. Instead of being told to go to bed, they are asked where they want to read their bedtime story.

Instead of telling a child to stop watching television, a parent could ask whether they would like to turn the television off or whether the parent should do it.

Whereas the same story reported by Maria Lally (2019) in the conservative *The Telegraph* is headlined 'The Permissive Parenting Fat Trap: how becoming stricter can cut childhood obesity' and continues to claim that:

And then of course there's the rise in what's known as 'permissive parenting'. Speaking from personal experience, us modern parents tend to be a rather eager lot when it comes to pleasing our kids. We don't like saying no. We like to offer choice. And, whisper it, in a busy world we sometimes need to take the (speedier) path of least resistance and if that means a snack to keep them quiet here, or an hour on the iPad over a trip to the park there, so be it.

Although both articles acknowledge that the scheme promotes authoritative childrearing, the *Guardian's* interpretation is social-democratic, whereas the *Telegraph* concentrates on parental authority by emphasising parents' role in limiting and controlling children's eating behaviour.

To further illustrate the current manifestation of the dialogue between fundamentalists and progressives, I shall now examine the views of two commentators on childhood psychologist Aric Sigman (2009) and sociologist Harry Hendrick (2016). Both writers subscribe to a belief that childrearing pedagogy has a powerful influence on mothers' subjectivities and behaviour. By looking in detail at these two commentators I will demonstrate the problems of supposing a universal engagement in childrearing advice.

### 2.3.1 *Baby Whisperers and Martinets*

Sigman (2009:20) looks at current British society and sees that 'erosion of authority is cascading across our society'. In *The Spoilt Generation* Sigman (2009: xi) claims the problem stems from the

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<sup>21</sup> The initiative is offered by the charity Henry (Health, Exercise, Nutrition for the Really Young)

current child-centred childrearing advice promoting lax and permissive parenting. He argues this has produced a generation of 'spoilt' children with parents failing in their 'duty to try to bring up socially viable children'. Sigman (2009:149) posits a narcissistic entitled child is created through the 'religion of self-esteem' which he attributes to a parenting culture 'devoted to expressing feelings and emotions, without, without at the same time, demanding self-discipline and self-control – civilised behaviour'.

Sigman's view of spoilt children in need of discipline is reflected in much media coverage of parents and children. Childhood author and educationalist, Alfie Kohn (2014:6) argues 'When countless publications offer exactly the same indictment of spoiled children and entitled Millennials – and accuse their parents of being lax or indulgent – this has a very real impact on the popular consciousness.'

Writing before millennials were the subject of moral concern, James, Jenks and Prout (1998:10) suggest this type of public moralising relies in the construction of the 'evil child', assuming 'evil, corruption and baseness are the primary elements in the constitution of the child.' Jenks (2005:64) names this conception the Dionysian child and links this model of childhood to Freud's concept of the id, 'the libidinal repository of insatiable desire.' This perception of the child allows the moralisers to insist the child must be controlled through discipline, the id must be repressed so 'people can live in relation to one another'. Negotiation, discussion, altruism and empathy with the child have no place, if the child's implicit nature is base and in need of adult control.

In contrast to Sigman, Hendrick (2016) looks at current British society and sees narcissism and selfishness. In *Narcissistic Parenting in an Insecure World*, he argues that acceptance of an adult-centric behaviourist view of the child has fundamentally changed British society for the worse by emphasising reciprocity and individualism over altruism and self-sacrifice. He evidences his argument by referencing current childrearing advice. Hendrick (2016:5) claims, 'the managerial strategies can also be "learned" (a key behaviourist term) from childrearing manuals advocating a variety of approaches from "tough love" to "positive parenting".' And this learnt knowledge from the 'marketplace of childrearing' has 'a corrosive tendency' to undermine moral standards, since as everything is for sale, it hesitates to pass judgement.'

His hypothesis rests on an assumption that parents have absorbed and reproduced the tenets of behaviourist childrearing technique, and Baumrind's<sup>22</sup> 'authoritative parenting style'; at the expense

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<sup>22</sup> Baumrind's theory categorizes parents into Authoritarian (authority, but no warmth), Permissive (warmth, but no authority), Disengaged (no warmth, no authority) and Authoritative (authority and warmth) (Baumrind, 1996).

of the advice given by ‘child centred’ advocates of ‘social-democratic parenting’.

Hendrick (2016:21) uses the phrases ‘social-democratic parenting’ and ‘child-centred’ favourably to suggest ‘an adult appreciation of the specificity of children’s being, facilitating their participation as agentic actors, engaging in shared dialogue, and giving just recognition to their self-declared interests where possible.’ Social-democratic parenting was promoted in the 1960’s as the ‘new principles of childrearing to replace the obsolete traditions’ (Dreikus, 1964:10). It has continued to be advocated in the twenty-first century. In his introduction to his manual *Parent Effectiveness Training*, Thomas Gordon (2000:xiv) looks to a future where children raised with his methods ‘would not only grow into healthier happier adults, but they would also become democratic parents themselves, continuing the cycle of non-violence to another generation.’ Hendrick (2016:258) recognises that the social-democratic parenting ethos is still present<sup>23</sup> and practiced but maintains it is being undermined by acceptance of an adult-centric behaviourist view of the child that has been powerful enough to fundamentally change society for the worse. Building on Alfie Kohn’s work on conditionality in childrearing, Hendrick (2016:249) argues that understanding children and childhood through the tenets of behaviourism has ‘exacerbated the more repressive features of childism, whilst serving several of neoliberalism’s imperatives.’ Hendrick maintains current parenting culture promotes neo-liberal values such as ‘skill, routine, self-reliance, responsibility, empowerment, meritocracy, competition, contractualism, managerialism, and individualisation – but not democracy.’ Hendrick (14) views children as ‘emotional and aspirational persons who by virtue of their physical, legal and political powerlessness, require our self-sacrificial involvement in their lives as they *work* at growing up.’ In this view of the child, the child is innocent and sacred as defined by James, Jenks and Prout (1998:13) as characterised by the belief that:

Children, then, have a natural goodness and a clarity of vision. Redolent with the reason that will form the society of tomorrow, their natural characteristics are those we can all learn from; they represent a condition lost or forgotten, and thus one worthy of defence.

The innocent, sacred child, also called the Apollonian child, (Jenks, 2005) is the central tenet informing the logic of sensitive intensive mothering where it is children’s innate innocence which renders them ‘deserving of protection from the corrupt and cruel outside world’ (Hays, 1998:128), through the dedicated self-sacrificial attention of the mother. Writing from the principle of protecting the innocent Apollonian child in a corrupt world Hendrick lambasts<sup>24</sup> feminism for undermining

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<sup>23</sup> Social democratic parenting is the dominant approach of Faber and Mazlish’s (2001) best-selling childrearing manual *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and listen so Kids Will Talk*, Leach’s (2005) child centred manuals, and Kohn’s (1998, 2006, 2014) work critiquing behaviourist childrearing techniques and promoting ‘unconditional parenting’ (2006).

<sup>24</sup> For example, Hendrick (2016:239) claims ‘Feminists also liked Baumrind because the style promised less work for mothers;

motherhood and defends the logic of intensive motherhood<sup>25</sup> (Hays,1998).

Hendrick and Sigman advocate opposing views of childhood which inform their arguments; both about how children *are* raised and how they *ought* to be raised. In this respect Sigman and Hendrick represent two modes of thought that have divided childcare thought<sup>26</sup> for centuries, as Hardyment (2007:14) found in her comprehensive history of childrearing advice, 'at any one time you can find advice tender and advice tough, baby whisperers and martinets for routine.' Hendrick (2016:1-2) suggests this divide is political; placing himself firmly on the political liberal/ nurturance side, against conservative/strictness. He argues that British parents, whatever their political orientation, are bringing up children under 'the precepts of control, discipline obedience and reward and punishment, and are encouraged by parenting websites, the media, government pronouncements and health and welfare professionals.' which fundamentally orientates society towards the values of the political right. In Hendrick's adult-centric view childrearing is a political act, he is promoting social-democratic parenting as a path to creating his vision of left wing, social-democratic citizens of the future.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas, Sigman (2009:7) suggests permissive or socially-democratic parenting has orientated society towards the values of the political left; creating a retreat from parental authority. He asks, 'why has compulsion been replaced by the politically correct alternatives of persuasion and negotiation as the 'right' approach to shaping our children's behaviour?' Sigman (2009:xi) sees current childrearing as a form of left-wing indoctrination, stating 'there are far reaching consequences to the way we parent and the kind of children we are now rearing.'

Hendrick and Sigman disagree about the prevailing political orthodoxy but still make the same assumptions. Firstly, they assume a direct correspondence between childrearing advice and parents' actions. Secondly, that parental action has a deterministic effect of children's character. Thirdly, that individual parents' enactment of the advice produces a lasting effect on children's character. Lastly,

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it was counter to 'intensive mothering' – being intensive about one's life, one's work, one's hobby, one's diet was ok, but not one's children'

<sup>25</sup>Intensive mothering, as identified by Hays (1998), maintains good parenting should be child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive. It is linked to both the sensitive mothering of social democratic parenting and Lareau's concept of concerted cultivation and can be found as a dominant cultural script across childrearing manuals.

<sup>27</sup> The supposed link between parenting style and parents political view is echoed in Baumrind's work where she opines that 'Although not defined by ideology, parenting patterns are expected to differ on social ideology with directorial parents more conservative than lenient parents. Authoritarian parents are expected to be the most conservative and permissive parents the most liberal. However, social ideology is expected to not affect adolescent outcomes beyond the effects of parents' childrearing practices.' 2010:162



they argue that this process<sup>28</sup> is ubiquitous enough to transform the characteristics of a generation.

On either side of the argument parents' understanding and application of the childrearing advice is underexplored. The level of parental engagement in contemporary Britain with either the ideals of child-centred social democratic gurus or the dictates of authoritative behaviourist advisors are underexplored. Prior to an argument about the causal nature of potentially ideological childrearing advice on generations of children and their parents, there must be an understanding of how childrearing advice is negotiated by parents.

## 2.4 Conclusion- The Limits of Influence

Regarding offers of advice by manual writers, and childrearing professionals, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995:117) found that 'the fact that they are available does not necessarily mean they are followed, and so far, we don't have any reliable data on actual behaviour. The evidence suggests however that modern parents – especially mothers - orientate themselves far more on expert advice than their parents or grandparents did.' Parents may follow Hardymen's (2007:361) suggestion and 'cherry pick' advice that feels right to them or search out an expert 'who feels like a kindred spirit.' Parents may respond to the advice critically, as a starting point to reflect upon, forming or consolidating their own distinct practices through rejection, adoption or adaptation of certain recommended practices (Hays, 1998; Apple, 2006). As Charlotte Faircloth (2013:30) points out in her study of attachment parenting and intensive motherhood 'not all women are affected by the advice in the same way.' Gambles (2010: 708) observed that parents watching the parenting television show *Supernanny* respond with 'reflexivity and (healthy) scepticism' and this worked to deepen the pedagogic experience. Hays (1998:74) reported that mothers 'take both what they read and what they hear "with a grain of salt."'

But parental rejection could be deeper. In *Raising America* Ann Hulbert (2004:264) describes *The Child Rearing Study*, Spock<sup>29</sup>'s attempt in the 1960s to understand 'how ordinary parents responded to the expertise of Spockian psychoanalytic variety, with a view to helping advisers better anticipate and handle their problems.' This rather unorthodox study produced a startling conclusion:

The Child Rearing Study turned out to be hopelessly lacking in scientific rigor (no control groups, little consensus on standards, few consistent records), and all the more revealing for that. Unmethodological but open minded, Spock and his colleagues managed to gain an unusual insight into the way parents actually used advice like his in the midst of normal family bustle – just the sort of day-to-day muddling that clinical evidence drawn

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<sup>28</sup> Hendrick's offers 'Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony' (Hendrick, 2016: 209) as an explanation.

<sup>29</sup>Prior to this Dr Spock complained of mothers' hesitancy and lack of self-confidence worrying that 'child-care experts have imposed unnatural patience and submissiveness on her' (Spock, cited in Hulbert, 2004:251)

from families seeking professional help in crisis could not really illuminate. The Spock led investigators were taken aback to discover how often expert counsel was blithely ignored.

Since the research was flawed it is difficult to accept, and yet it opens a possible hypothesis that the influence of parenting pedagogy<sup>30</sup> is not as strong as sometimes assumed. Similarly, Gillies (2007:102) work with working-class mothers found that many mothers in receipt of advice by professionals 'sought to deal diplomatically with this kind of interference from professionals by humouring them but ultimately ignoring their advice.' Another study which was surprised by parents blithely ignoring advice was Passini, Pihet and Fazez's (2014:1400) research into childrearing disciplinary techniques used by mothers of toddlers. They found that mothers looked favourably upon the discipline techniques promoted by the expert led 'behaviour modification' approach (time-out, explaining rules and social reinforcement) but although spanking and yelling 'received low acceptance ratings, yelling was more commonly employed. In fact, it was utilized as often as timeout.'

Passini et al (2014: 1400) conclude from this that 'These findings suggest more awareness needs to be raised in communities about DTs [discipline techniques] favoured by the behaviour-modification approach and their implementation conditions in order to promote their use.' But it seems clear that mothers were aware of the approaches, just not consistently applying them.

There is a difference between what mothers think, do and say. It may also be possible this is evidence of the limitations of parenting pedagogy and the possibility that mothers will quote the culturally acceptable childrearing script, even when it may be at odds with quotidian reality.

#### *2.4.1 A Critical Realist Approach*

The gap between reality and the ideal representations of family life may provide, as Nikolas Rose (1989: 132) suggests, a space for increasing the governance of children through expertise, 'the almost inevitable misalignment between expectation and realization, fantasy and actuality, fuels the search for help and guidance in the difficult task of producing normality, and powers the constant familial demand for the assistance of expertise.' This study explores that misalignment, questioning how mothers negotiate the knowledge claims of expertise and to what extent they internalise the ideal representations of family, motherhood and childhood. As I will demonstrate the space between 'fantasy' and actuality may produce differencing outcomes, at times persuading some mothers to

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<sup>30</sup>For examples of assumptions about parenting pedagogy's influence see Allen and Duncan-Smith 2008: Cameron 2016: Helping Parents to Parent, Clarke et al 2017.

seek more guidance, but also persuading some mothers to reject the 'fantasy' and the childrearing advice which promotes it, even when paying lip-service to the fantasy. I avoid assumptions of influence and outcome by starting my research from the critical realist position that human beings have the 'capacity to construct variable meanings and identities' (Smith, 2010:10) and that 'human beings are themselves open systems capable of communication and creativity and resistance' (Gorski, 2013:662). To find a more nuanced understand of the relationship between mothers and childrearing discourse I seek to look beyond the categorisation of childrearing manuals as technologies of governance and take a critical realist position to explore how mothers assimilate or resist the 'expert' doctrines, ideas and languages of childrearing as they engage with dominant discourses of 'good' childrearing. Critical realism provides the tools to understand why human beings as 'knowing and reflecting subjects' (Danermark et al, 2002:25) draw on certain discourses of childhood (Sims-Schouten et al; 2007:104), and to ask to what purpose, and in whose interests, do different versions of parenting pedagogy work?

## Chapter Three: Claims to Childrearing Knowledge and Authority as Sources of Legitimacy for Advice and Regulation

This chapter examines how the childrearing books evoke science and research to lend legitimacy, interrogating the truth claims to discover how 'expert knowledge' claims are produced to sustain and defend rival transitive theories of childrearing; concluding that within the childrearing discourse, science is borrowed to support a priori beliefs.

### 3.1 Science or Pseudoscience?

By the start of the twentieth century the family was administered and policed by practices and agencies that were not 'private', but nor were they organs of central political power. Their operations and objectives were not specified by the decrees and programmes of political forces but operated under the aegis of moral principles and, increasingly, by professional expertise underpinned by the power of a claim to truth. (Rose, 1989:130)

In 1928 Watson set out his vision for scientific childrearing in *The Psychological Care of Infant and Child*. Stating categorically, 'Parenthood, instead of being an instinctive art, is a science, the details of which must be worked out by patient laboratory methods.' (Watson, 1928:12-13) Arguably since the publication in 1894 of Holt's *Care and feeding of Children* British and American childrearing manuals have attempted to translate aspects of science, and academic theory into instructions for parents. Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and an array of manual writers in Britain and America are claiming to have found the scientific way to raise children. The authors discussed here claim to represent a 'a brand-new era of parenting, where for the first time we have the scientific evidence, not just opinions, that explains how to enable a child to thrive' (Sunderland, 2016:13). However, a closer look reveals that the evidence is based on the childrearing dogmas rather than vice versa.

There is a great variation in how science and research is understood across the field of childrearing advice manuals. The sources cited vary in academic rigour, ranging from recognised academic sources to pseudo-science and self-help gurus. For example, Saad and Saad (2015) advertise their approach as 'A parenting philosophy based on hard evidence and the latest research', but this claim is undermined when they cite as scientific evidence, the book *10 Mindful Minutes*, by the actress Goldie Hawn, displaying a lack of distinction between science and pseudoscience. Some authors are reasonable in their assertions and skilled in the translation of established child development theory. Others over-extend and misunderstand established knowledge, for example by extrapolating on work with laboratory animals to make assumptions about human domestic family settings (see Sunderland 2016). As Shonkoff explains, available child-development information is not always trustworthy; and writers need to be able to differentiate 'between three categories of child

development information: established knowledge, reasonable hypotheses, and unwarranted or irresponsible assertions.’ (Shonkoff,2000:183)

In his book *The Scientific Attitude*, Lee McIntyre ( 2019:201) puts forward a case for science as ‘an attitude’ towards evidence:

The scientific attitude has helped us to realize that what is most special about science is not the alleged “scientific method” that it follows, but rather its respect for the power of empirical evidence to shape and change our theories, and reliance on the practices of critical scrutiny by our peers to catch our mistakes if we do not. Evidence matters in science, and recognition of this is the most important value that marks the difference between those who practice science and those who do not.

McIntyre (2019:49) contrasts this scientific attitude with ‘the ideologues who are deluded into thinking that they care about evidence merely because they cherry pick facts that confirm their prior beliefs.’

Many childrearing manuals are not reluctant to claim a definitive method of optimal childrearing and make claims that extend far beyond established knowledge. To make their case, they cite evidence very selectively. Current childrearing manuals offer ‘evidence’ for a vast array of supposedly scientifically backed advice. Techniques which some claim to be rooted in science, are often condemned by other manual writers on apparently equally ‘scientific’ terms. The table below shows a small sample of the manifold contradictions across the field.

Table One: Science and research claims made by childrearing manuals

Topic	Is it...	Or...
Punishment	'If you care to check out the research on the long-term effects of punishment, you will find that it teaches violence, sneakiness, low self-esteem and many other negative skills.' (Nelson, 2006:23)	'If there are no immediate consequences for anti-social behaviour, you will get anti-social behaviour' (Sunderland, 2016:226)
Childcare	'Research evidence, along with a revival of good common sense, is leading to a reversal of the idea that a crèche childhood is a good childhood.' (Biddulph, 2003:220)	'Research has shown that good quality child-care is beneficial to all children.' (Green, 2006:273)
Sleep training and crying	'I have read the science directly myself, the actual science in actual scientific journals. My unreserved view after reading all of it is that crying in and of itself never hurt anyone.' (Latta, 2012:67)	'...the research reveals how stress from prolonged crying and separations can affect a baby's developing brain.' (Sunderland, 2016:36)
Rewards	'Researchers have shown that if you remove the offered reward, then children are even less likely to respond in the way you want them to, than before the reward was used... So, rewards do not teach right from wrong – they merely result in compliance' (Ockwell-Smith 2016)	'Rewards reinforce the values, skills and habits that you believe are right....as behaviour becomes firmly established, the reward can easily be reduced then phased out' (Janis-Norton, 2016:247)
Praise	'...extensive research has proven that praising our children with evaluative words like "good" or "clever" can actually make them become afraid of failure.' (Saad & Saad, 2016:29)	'Research indicates, however, that a lack of praise and attention for appropriate behaviour can lead to an increase in misbehaviour.' (Webster-Stratton, 2006:41)
Naughty Step (time-out)	'Time-out provides an opportunity for children to reflect on what they have done and to consider other solutions and fosters their development of an internal sense of responsibility, or conscience...there has been considerable research showing the most effective ways to set up a time-out.' (Webster-Stratton, 2006:91)	'...The research on this is clear as a bell. When young children feel abandoned, it triggers anxiety that may temporarily stop the tantrum, but it creates a deep insecurity.' (Markham, 2016:103)
Parental Determinism	'Research shows that parent-child relationships change brains, not just minds. The evidence is overwhelming that childhood experience with our parents also dramatically impacts on later physical and mental health, for better or for worse.' (Sunderland, 2016:9)	'People used to think that all children were created with a 'blank slate' and that all bad behaviour was the fault of the parent. We now realise that every child is born with his own unique temperament and personality.' (Green, 2006)

The problem is not that authors disagree with each other, disagreement can further knowledge and debate. Some writers may be replicating ideas which have a scientific warrant, many most certainly are not. The problem arises when the authors use the concept of 'science and research' to confirm pre-existing ideological bias. By treating science in this way any warrant for the ideas expressed is put into question. As McIntyre (2019:202) writes:

Science is a rational process by which we learn how to constantly re-evaluate and discard our prejudices, wishes, and hunches about the world and replace them with conclusions that can be squared with the data of human experience. This is the root of scientific warrant.

As the following sections demonstrate much of the evidence presented in child rearing books is based on misunderstanding, reductionism or over-extension of scientific evidence. This is not to suggest that authors are necessarily insincere in their belief that their ideas are scientifically valid, but that a fundamental misunderstanding of the application of empirical evidence and scientific warrant leads to potentially pseudoscientific advice<sup>31</sup>.

Goldacre (2009:94) reminds us that 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence'. But the pattern in childrearing books is the more extraordinary the claim, the more pseudoscientific is the evidence, and the more unwarranted and irresponsible are the assertions. And the more pseudoscientific the evidence the more the authors are promoting the idea of scientific parenting. As natural scientist, Alan Sokal (2010:266) observes '...Most often (though not always) pseudoscience also claims to be scientific, and even claims to relate its assertions to genuine science, particularly cutting-edge scientific discoveries.'

## 3.2 Neuroscientific Claims

Nowhere are claims more extraordinary than when attributed to neuroscience. The term 'neuromania' has been coined by clinical neuroscientist and philosopher Raymond Tallis (2011:5) to describe the 'appeal to the brain, as revealed through the latest science, to explain our behaviour.' Neuromania co-opts aspects of neuroscience to forward a deterministic agenda, reducing man to his brain, and is distinct from the serious achievements of neuroscience.

Neuromania within childrearing pedagogy claims an empirical and scientific base for the belief that

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<sup>31</sup>. Outright pseudoscience is presented in claims about 'mindfulness' or Neuro Linguistic Programming (such as Bartowiak's (2011) *Be a happier parent with NLP*).

subtle variations in early parenting have a profound and deterministic effect on a child's developing brain. In *What Every Parent Needs to Know*, Margot Sunderland (2016:20) claims:

You have so much influence over how your baby's emotional brain develops because there are critical periods of brain growth in the first years of life .... Your approach can determine whether or not your child's brains systems and brain chemistries are activated in such a way as to enable him to enjoy a long and rewarding life...

But this is not a legitimate interpretation of the science, leading childhood psychiatrist Sir Michael Rutter (2002:13) explains:

The last decade or so has been accompanied by a different type of evangelism--namely, claims on the extent to which early experiences determine brain development. There has been a misleading extrapolation of the findings on experience-expectant development to the entirely different notion that higher quality psychosocial experiences in the first 2 or 3 years of life will have a much greater effect than similar experiences later on, because the early experiences bring about a lasting change in brain structure. As several commentators have pointed out, the claims (which come from people outside the field of neuroscience research) are misleading and fallacious for several different reasons.

The misleading and fallacious interpretations of neuroscience may have gained hold because they seem to confirm existing beliefs about children and parents (O'Conner & Joffe, 2013:254). As manual-writer Rebecca Eanes claims, under the heading Brain 101 'Without this knowledge, it is difficult to see why we believe what we believe.' Eanes may have it the wrong way around. Without the a priori beliefs, it is difficult to see why there would be this interpretation of neuroscience.

In *The Myth of the First Three Years: A New Understanding of Early Brain Development and Lifelong Learning*, philosopher and cognitive scientist John Bruer (1999) identified the mistaken beliefs about children's brains as stemming from the valid observation that from birth until about age three the brain exuberantly produces trillions of synapses, the rate of synapse formation far exceeding the rate of synapse loss. This is followed by a process of synaptic pruning until adult levels are reached. But here the neuromania myth enthusiasts depart from established science to claim that this synaptic abundance and pruning represents a critical period for learning and development, that can be stimulated by enriched environments and parental interaction. Promoting an idea of 'use it or lose it', and the erroneous idea that synapses can be exercised and developed and therefore preserved into adulthood. Conversely the claim is made that abuse, deprivation or neglect limit the number of synapses retained into adulthood. What Bruer identifies as 'the myth' claims there is a window of opportunity for optimum development that closes in early childhood. Within the neuro discourse it is implied that parenting literally grows a child's brain<sup>32</sup> and sub-optimal parenting damages the brain.

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<sup>32</sup> This neuro-myth was explicitly stated by PM David Cameron (2016), in his speech on life chances he argues for increased



For example, in her manual *The Gentle Parenting Book*, Ockwell Smith (2016) asserts:

Synapses (connections) are forming rapidly now (the more of the world your baby experiences, in a sensory way, the more synapses will form) and if they are reinforced, these connections will become a permanent feature of your child's brain into adulthood.

As Bruer makes clear, an abundance of synapses does not equate with increased intellectual function; pruning is part of a natural development: 'The evidence strongly suggests that excess connections need to be removed to establish normal function' (Greenough, cited in Bruer, 1999:97). Infant experience has no influence on whether this process happens. Brain science has not pointed to new ways of raising children that will stimulate those synapses above and beyond what any number of normal childhood experiences provide (Bruer, 1999:66). This puts into doubt claims, such as manual writer Sunderland's (2016:20), that a baby's brain is 'open to be sculpted by parental interactions.' If there are windows of opportunity or critical periods they are critical only in the sense that a complete absence of stimuli during this period could have irreversible negative consequences (Guldborg, 2009:135).

The 'neuroscience'<sup>33</sup> discourse exposed by Bruer has permeated British Government policy. Neuroscience is called upon to explain and justify increased political intervention into family life (MacVarish, 2016). Wastell and White (2013:17) note that within policy, '...science being enrolled to legitimate an a priori ideological position favouring a larger arena for public intervention in the lives of families.'

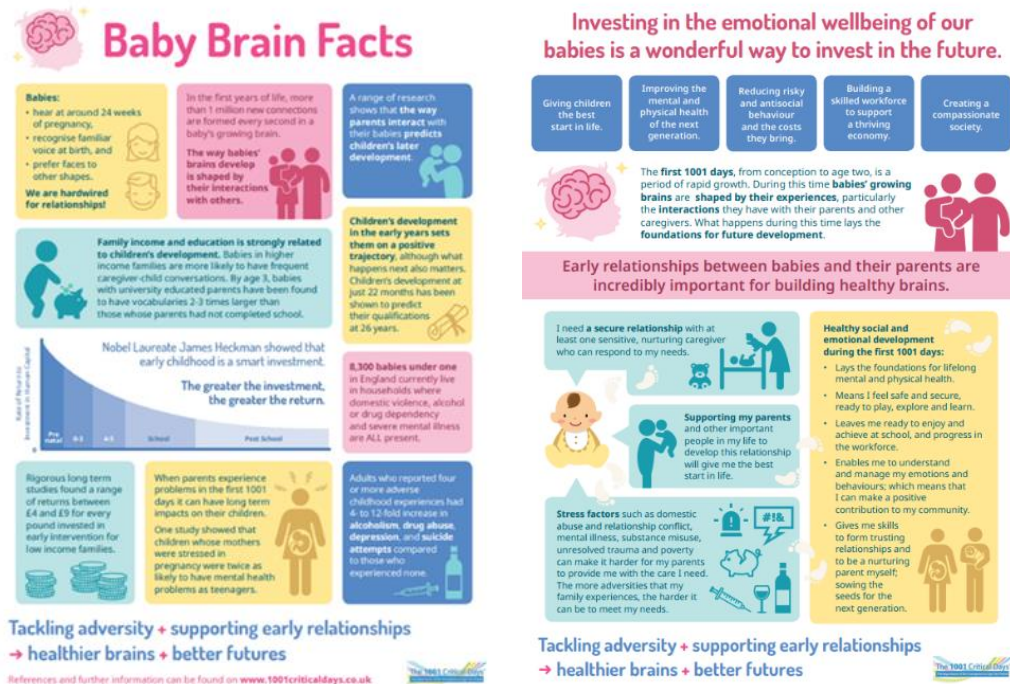
Nikolas Rose (2007) identifies this as a trend towards 'biological citizenship', where the individual's biology is self-governed for the collective good. For example, these infographics are produced as a piece of social pedagogy, by 1001 Critical Days, a lobby group affiliated with *The Conception to Age 2: First 1001 Days All Party Parliamentary Group*, and firmly equate social responsibility with responsibility for the biological.

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state supported intervention and childhood pedagogy by claiming 'And one critical finding is that the vast majority of the synapses the billions of connections that carry information through our brains develop in the first 2 years. Destinies can be altered for good or ill in this window of opportunity.' And that 'mums and dads literally build babies' brains.

<sup>33</sup> The neuroscience discourse is discussed further in chapter three.

Note how the infographics contain the three elements of Bruer's myth: Synapse growth, critical periods and enriched environments.



Bruce Perry's work on child trauma is often cited as evidence in policy discourse, however Perry himself responded to MP Duncan Smith's use of his work in the Guardian (2010, April 9) stating that that 'I do believe that overstating and misunderstanding the neurobiology can lead to confusion, anger, distortion and potentially to bad policy.'

What can neuroscience tell us about childrearing? Steve Petersen (cited in Bruer, 1998:188) a neuroscientist at Washington University in St. Louis, explains:

At a minimum, development really wants to happen. It takes very impoverished environments to interfere with development because the biological system has evolved so that the environment alone stimulates development. What does this mean? Don't raise your children in a closet, starve them, or hit them in the head with a frying pan.

Current findings within neuroscience do not have implications for child rearing beyond the practices which have been formulated through moral value-judgements. As Belsky and De Haan (2011:409-10) explain, 'the study of parenting and brain development is not even yet in its infancy; it would be more appropriate to conclude that it is still in the embryonic stage.'

In promoting an inaccurate, pseudo-scientific view of brain-development the policy documents and childrearing manuals exaggerate the complexity and level of parental vigilance and expertise required for normal child development (MacVarish, 2016). Pseudo-scientific parenting is onerous. It

involves preparation, research and reflection. The parent must carefully observe and monitor the child's developmental needs and respond correctly (Reece, 2013). But since the outcomes are mostly in the future, and the advice is contradictory, and changeable, it is not clear whether she is doing enough, or getting it right (Wall, 2011).

### 3.3 Attachment

One reason that the brain-based claims have such currency is they fit into existing beliefs about early attachment, as Wall (2011) explains in her lecture on the social positioning of mothers through brain development discourse: 'Some scientific findings are much more quickly accepted not because they are more scientifically convincing but because they fit into deeply embedded ideologies of the time.'

Attachment has long been a psychological hypothesis looking for scientific validation, and brain science seems to provide that (Kagan, 1998; Williams, 2014). Possibly, neuroscience is believed to be more credible than attachment theory alone in promoting an agenda of responsive parenting (Maxwell & Racine, 2012). Like brain-based claims popular-attachment theory is based in assumptions of infant determinism, sensitive periods, and the primacy of maternal sensitivity and availability. Rebecca Eanes (2016:11) in her childrearing manual *Positive Parenting an Essential Guide* explicitly links brain science to attachment:

We now know the incredible role that attachment plays in the healthy development of our children. We know that our earliest relationships actually build the brain structures we use for relating to others our whole lives. We know that the experiences in those early relationships encode in the neural circuitry of our brains by twelve to eighteen months of age, entirely in the implicit memory, and that these patterns of attachment become the "rules" for relating to other humans that we will go on to use for the rest of our lives.

Despite what Eanes may claim, any link between infant brain development and attachment is far from established, as Rutter & O'Connor (2004:92) state: 'It is important to emphasize that nothing is known about the neural substrate of developmental programming as it affects the brain—either with respect to cognitive impairment or disinhibited attachment.'

Attachment theory suggests the relationship between a baby and their primary carer produces an 'internal working model'. A supportive relationship with mother gives baby 'a favourable model on which to build future relationships' (Bowlby, 1969: 378). However, the power of the early mother/child relationship to determine a child's future may be overstated by popular-attachment theorists (Eyer, 1992; Kagan, 1998; Harris, 1998) as demonstrated in the above passage from Eanes. Although the baby may create a working model of its mother, he does not necessarily transfer expectations to other relationships. Attachment theory acknowledges that a child may be securely

attached to one parent and not the other and build multiple attachments (Rutter 2004). This could suggest a child holds not one working model but creates a different working model for each relationship (Harris, 1998:153). The constant in these relationships is not the child's attachment to his mother, but the child himself, for 'It's the same child, with the same genes, who participates in all these relationships, so it's not surprising that the attachment researchers occasionally find correlations between them.'

Attachment type could be influenced by child temperament (Marshall and Fox, 2005,) or a complex interaction between child temperament<sup>34</sup> and maternal sensitivity (De Wolff & IJzendoorn, 1997). Susman-Stillman et al, (1996) found maternal sensitivity and child's temperament correlate, showing an unsurprising: 'Negative relation between irritability and sensitivity and a positive relation between sociability and sensitivity.' It may be easier to be sensitive and responsive to an easy-going baby. De Wolff & IJzendoorn's (1997) meta-analysis investigating attachment and parental antecedents concludes that 'sensitivity has lost its privileged position as the only important causal factor'.

Kagan (1998) suggests attachment is a normal developmental process when all children will attach<sup>35</sup> to an available figure, regardless of the quality of the relationship. However, the Sutton Trust report, *Baby Bonds* (2014), claims 40% of children are insecurely attached. This high figure may be an accurate reflection of the test given, but the prevalence of insecure attachment cannot then be used as a prediction for psychopathology (Benoit, 2004). Insecure attachment can at best be regarded as a risk factor rather than a causation of future outcomes. An insecure attachment figure of 40% calls into doubt that secure attachment can be used as a normative measure (Mcvarish, 2014). It may be insecure attachment sometimes correlates with negative outcomes because of some other common variable<sup>36</sup> (Harris, 1998; Kagan, 1998; Pinker, 2002). It may be that children differ in their experience of parenting depending on the interaction between their genetic inheritance and their environment (Plomin, 2018; Pinker, 2002; Harris 2006), or that the growing child's unique symbolic interpretation of its parents' actions (Kagan, 1998; Plomin, 2018) is more potent than a uniform assessment of mother-love.

Attachment measures how good a mother is at allaying a child's fear, and as such it reduces maternal

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<sup>34</sup>The Demos report Building Character (2009:66), suggests a temperament check to identify babies who are 'differentially susceptible to parenting quality'" this would be paired with a 'parent-child interaction' test to measure warmth, responsiveness and attunement between the parent and child in view to increasing support and advice.

<sup>35</sup> This is why attachment is categorised as secure or insecure, not attached and unattached.

<sup>36</sup> A list of circumstances where disorganised attachment and later difficulties are more likely to arise is presented, (DfE, 2013, p.16) including poor maternal mental health, child maltreatment, drug dependency and family violence, all of which could act as common variables.

love to one distinct function. The parent child relationship contains many dyadic programmes; 'a parent-child relationship is by no means exclusively that of attachment-caregiving.' (Bowlby, 1969:378). When attachment is associated with Infant determinism, the attachment relationship is privileged above the parent as teacher/playmate/carer/mentor/guardian relationships. Or as Winnicott (cited in Eyer, 1992:64) worried about Bowlby's work: 'He ignores love and anguish, the real stuff of human life'

This is not to dismiss attachment theory as an interesting hypothesis and rich source of future research (Rutter et al., 2009), but to question its use as an uncritically accepted dogma to inform both social policy and parenting advice (Wall, 2010). Attachment theory is a legitimate academic discourse around a reasonable hypothesis. A reasonable hypothesis builds on established knowledge to further understanding; its defining feature is that it may be right, or may be wrong (Shonkoff, 2003). However, Attachment-parenting, especially when fused with claims about the child's brain, is a childrearing dogma representing an extreme form of intensive mothering; its defining feature is that it creates a doctrine to be adhered to (Faircloth, 2014). This bastardised and politicised<sup>37</sup> form of, supposedly neuro-scientifically informed attachment theory has emerged 'to legitimate an a priori ideological position' (Wastell and White, 2013:17) of intensive sensitive motherhood.

The language of Bowlby's attachment theory is co-opted by manual writers who promote parental behaviours deemed good from the ideological standpoint of the manual writer. For example, Sears and Sears (2005) evoke an aura of science and research to frame baby-wearing (carrying a baby or child in a sling) as natural<sup>38</sup>; 'The Mother has a biological instinct, drawing her to her toward her infant; an innate desire to pick up, carry, nurse and simply be with her baby. This is called mother infant attachment.' (314)

By framing certain behaviours as biological instinct, they present the mother who doesn't wish to wear her child for hour upon hour as an unnatural mother, who may be condemning her child to misery:

What happened if the baby does not have the benefit of a strong mother-infant attachment, spending most of his time lying horizontally in a cot, attended to only for feeding and comforting? The infant may develop disorganized patterns of behaviour:

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<sup>37</sup> Gerhardt (2004) develops a socio-biological strand of the cycle of deprivation; claiming therapeutic intervention, guidance and support on a large scale is 'imperative' to stop the cycle (Gerhardt, 2004:218). She claims that early interventions: 'are likely to prove cost effective too, given the enormous social costs of crime, of putting children into care and managing the consequences of poor emotional regulation' (Gerhardt, 2004:218). The same argument appears in Allen, 2011b, Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008 and DfE, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> This style of parenting is sometimes referred to as natural parenting, '...proponents of "natural" or "attachment"' parenting seems blissfully unaware of the social differences between a hunter gatherer society and those of mothers in the contemporary UK or US" Faircloth, 2014:163

colic, fussy cries, jerky movements, disorganized self-rocking behaviours, anxious thumb sucking irregular breathing and disturbed sleep. (Sears & Sears, 2005:309)

The academic evidence regarding the consequences of mother/infant attachment is less definite, Schaffer (1996:148) sums it up thus: 'Children no doubt differ in the quality of the attachment relationships they form: however the issue of the antecedents of such differences and their consequences is nowhere near as straightforward as has been suggested by many attachment enthusiasts.'

### 3.4 Stress

In order to conflate neuroscience with attachment theory, childrearing books often use the idea of stress, especially the child brain's regulation of the stress hormone cortisol. The trope of 'toxic cortisol' emerged from academic claims made about the potential risk of elevated cortisol in extremely neglected children (see Gunnar et al, 2001 for an example of this work), it was popularized by Gerhardt's (2005) book *Why Love Matters* and has become a common trope in recent childrearing-books (Sunderland, 2005; Leech, 2010; Biddulph, 2005; Ockwell-Smith, 2016), and political discourse<sup>39</sup>It is used to justify the promotion of intensive mothering (Sunderland, 2006, Gerhardt, 2004, Biddulph, 2005); to call for improvements in childcare settings (Sims et al, 2006); to limit the use of childcare (Biddulph, 2005) to warn against sleep training (Ockwell-Smith, 2016); and to justify universal parenting classes (Cameron, 2016). Below are three typical examples. The first appeared in *The Guardian* in Boseley's (2010) interview with Penelope Leach, where Leach used the toxic cortisol trope to argue against sleep training:

Neurobiologists say, according to Leach, that high cortisol levels are "toxic" to the developing brain.

"It is not an opinion but a fact that it's potentially damaging to leave babies to cry. Now we know that, why risk it? We are dealing with the expectations that a baby's brain is building up. The reason babies raised on strict routine regimens go to sleep, usually with less and less crying, is because they are quicker and quicker to give up. Their brain has adapted to a world where they are not responded to[...]That kind of early-induced anxiety may relate to anxiety right through adult life."

Another example from Margot Sunderland (2016:40) in *What every Parent Needs to Know*, employs

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<sup>39</sup> For example, 'The development of a baby's brain is affected by the attachment to their parents and analysis of neglected children's brains has shown that their brain growth is significantly reduced. Where babies are often left to cry, their cortisol levels are increased and this can lead to a permanent increase in stress hormones later in life, which can impact on mental health.' (Field, 2010:41)

the trope to argue against non-maternal day care in nurseries:

However, studies of children under five in nurseries have shown levels of cortisol rising rather than falling as the day goes on. What's more, as soon as these children were with their parents again, their stress levels dropped dramatically. In one study, cortisol rose in 75 to 100 percent of children when they arrived at nursery. This research is worrying because a key stress response system in the brain can become wired for hypersensitivity early in life.

The third example is from the political discourse on childrearing, and used to 'toxic cortisol trope' to justify increased childhood intervention and parenting pedagogy, PM David Cameron claimed in his 2016 *Life Chances* speech that:

As Dr Jack Shonkoff's research at Harvard University has shown, children who suffer what he calls 'toxic stress' in those early years are potentially set up for a life of struggle, risky behaviour, poor social outcomes, all driven by abnormally high levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.

The critical realist tool of retrodution can be employed to evaluate the 'toxic cortisol' claim by thinking what would the world be like if this were true? Sleep training through controlled crying (leaving a child to cry themselves to sleep for limited periods to promote independent sleep) and use of non-maternal daycare are claimed to increase the risk of enhanced cortisol levels which, it is claimed, may long-lasting negative effects into adulthood. The problem is that sleep training and daycare are common practices, and babies crying is ubiquitous (McVarish 2016:35). If this claim were true, then a from the huge number of people raised in this way, a significant number would be suffering due to elevated cortisol ranging from 'damage' and 'anxiety' and 'hypersensitivity' to 'risky behaviour and poor social outcomes'. This simple thought experiment demonstrates that the veracity of the claims is unlikely.

There is a reasonable hypothesis that stress hormones may affect brain development (Gunnar & Donzella, 2002), but this is far from established (Maxwell and Racine, 2012). Children may demonstrate varied levels of cortisol, correlating to different experiences<sup>40</sup>; for example, children exposed to long hours of low quality day care can demonstrate raised cortisol levels throughout the day (Sims et al, 2006), although: 'So far, there is no evidence that the elevated glucocorticoid levels associated with being in day care effect development.' (Lupien et al, 2009:437)

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<sup>40</sup> Research into cortisol levels also highlights the difference between global neglect and low parental care, since children experiencing severe neglect often exhibit lower than normal cortisol levels (Gunnar & Donzella 2002; Lupien et al, 2009) But, even in cases of severe deprivation, the evidence does not suggest permanent damage: 'Importantly, this hypocortisolism in humans in response to severe stress may not be permanent: sensitive and supportive care of fostered children normalizes their basal glucocorticoid levels after only 10 weeks' (Lupien et al, 2009:437)

Many childrearing books that mention elevated cortisol, suggest it has powerful permanent consequences, linking cortisol regulation to brain development and attachment theory to argue for intensive mothering. For example, Sunderland uses the concept of 'stress' to provide an argument for following her childrearing approach:

Stress-inducing parenting will keep activating the RAGE, FEAR, and PANIC/GRIEF systems in the child's brain until emotional states that induce anxiety, aggression, or depression become personality traits. Key chemicals triggered through these systems include cortisol and corticotrophin releasing factor (CRF) [...] But isn't all of this relevant only for children who have suffered abuse or neglect? No, the studies that underpin this book are not about abuse or neglect, they are about common childrearing practices and the effects of common stressful parent-child interactions.

The good news is that your parenting can strengthen the pro-social systems in your child's brain and it's never too late to start!

This passage uses a frightening interpretation of stress to include all parents as in need of instruction and all children as intensely vulnerable.

### 3.5 Sleep Training

'Toxic stress' and cortisol levels are most commonly used in childrearing manuals to advise parents against sleep training, framing sleep training as unscientific and potentially harmful.

However, the popularisation of the 'toxic stress' trope as 'settled science' misrepresents the consensus of academic work on sleep training infants and children. The data across studies suggests sleep training may be both efficacious and beneficial. For example, Mindell et al (2006:1263) conducted a meta-analysis of fifty-two well-designed studies of sleep training (including nine large randomized control studies) finding 'that behavioural therapies produce reliable and durable changes. Across all studies, 94% report that behavioural interventions were efficacious, with over 80% of children treated demonstrating clinically significant improvement that was maintained for 3 to 6 months.' Not only did this meta-analysis find sleep-training to work in most cases, ensuring regular and adequate sleep, but the data demonstrated improvements in child and family well-being.

The argument that sleep training reduces mother/child attachment is also far from settled, for example Eckerberg's (2004:131) data suggests far from harming parent/child attachment security, children with sleep problems demonstrated more secure attachment after the sleep training exercise. Eckerberg (2004:133) studied ninety-five Swedish families matched with a randomised control group, finding that two weeks after the sleep training intervention started:

the children were as a group perceived as significantly more alert, happy, accommodating and having better appetites. As mean night sleep time had also increased significantly, it



is probable that the improvement was partly or mostly due to the elimination of a sleep debt.

These examples show that there is no academic consensus against sleep training, but there may be a data-led case in favour of the practice. Studies such as these are unlikely to be cited in many child-centred childrearing manuals, since they do not concur with the script of intensive and sensitive, self-sacrificial motherhood. The demonization of sleep training by manual writers claiming privileged 'scientific' knowledge may be stopping mothers exploring the potential benefits of sleep for themselves and their children. If the conclusions of academics like Mindell et al (2006) and Eckerberg (2004) are credible, then the campaign against sleep-training in child-centred and attachment parenting manuals could have a real and detrimental effect on the wellbeing of children and the quality of family life.

### 3.6 Scientific Authority

As McCabe and Castel (2008) assert, 'science holds a cultural authority and persuasive power'. It is this power that the manual writers are attempting to co-opt to promote their agendas. As Sokal (2010:266) explains '...pseudoscience attempts to wrap itself in the mantle of genuine science, with the evident aim of capturing for itself some of the epistemic respect that the general public...ordinarily accords to "science."'

Neuroscientific explanations may be particularly persuasive<sup>41</sup>. To test this a team from Yale University (Weisberg et al, 2008) gave participants different good and bad explanations, some employing irrelevant neuroscience. They found that 'The neuroscience information had a particularly striking effect on nonexperts' judgments of bad explanations, masking otherwise salient problems in these explanations.'

The authority of science distances the manual writer from mere opinion, 'folk' knowledge, or the parents' experiential knowledge of childrearing. Manual writer Sunderland (2016) suggests not only that her 'scientific' parenting is superior to 'opinion based' parenting, but that the latter is harmful. Siegal and Bryson (2012) tell readers of *The Whole Brained Child*; 'We've both spent our careers taking complicated but vital scientific knowledge about the brain and boiling it down so that parents can understand it and immediately apply it in their interactions.'

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<sup>41</sup> Crawford (2010) in *The Limits of Neuro-talk* describes brain scans as 'a fast-acting solvent of critical faculties'.

By presenting themselves as translating science for parents the manual writers are claiming privileged access to knowledge which mere parents would not otherwise be able to understand. This knowledge is presented as vital, the manual writer becomes the essential gateway to the knowledge. Science is perceived as infallible rather than transitional, as system for accurately and statically assigning falsehood and truth; rather than on ongoing method for reducing uncertainty (Sokal, 2010:264; McIntyre, 2019).

There is a pragmatic argument that even if the science is inaccurate it does not matter if it spurs on good practice - responsive mothering and more money for child services (Broer et al, 2015). The argument may be compelling when one sees good practice. But conflating science with pseudo-science, and misrepresenting research, denigrates legitimate natural and social science; potentially eroding public trust in science and research and effecting science's potential to improve lives (Goldacre, 2008; Sokal, 2010; McIntyre, 2019). Linking public funding of early years services to pseudo-science could put the services in danger when the pseudo-science is debunked. As I discussed in chapter three, there are also doubts about whether pseudo-science is helping good practice. For example, Gillies, Edwards and Horsley (2017) raise concerns that neuroscientific claims are used to justify social inequalities 'positioning poor mothers as architects of their children's deprivation.' (167)

### 3.7 Conclusion- Science, Ethics and Morality

Supposedly infallible science is evoked to close debate and place childrearing advice beyond question. Differences in childrearing are no longer seen as differences in social circumstance, lifestyle, or customs, but are matters of right or wrong. Within parent pedagogy ignoring the new orthodoxy of scientifically informed parenting is positioned as irresponsible, as in manual writer Eanes' (2016:12) claim that ignoring her scientifically- informed advice would be 'an injustice to our children and the future'.

As Nancy McDermott (2009:95) observes putting a scientific gloss on advice may make parents feel 'obliged to treat the pronouncements of researchers and parenting 'experts' with far more seriousness than they deserve.' Science is borrowed to provide as 'is' on which to base the 'ought' of childrearing advice, thus, breaking Hume's law, that one cannot deduce a moral conclusion (an ought) a from non-moral premise (an is). As Tallis explains (2012:318): 'The key point is that "ought" relates to possibilities judged against abstract principles (although they are often passionately espoused) and the material cannot house what might generally be, only what actually and particularly is.'

It is possible to identify the value assumptions at play when childrearing advice shifts from 'is' (the scientific claim) to 'ought' (the recommended action). For example, imagine a well-researched study finds using reward charts increases children's compliance, to move from this finding to the directive 'parents ought to use reward charts' would have to include the moral premise that children's compliance is a good thing. This directive 'Use reward charts' assumes that compliance is valued over things which reward systems may not encourage, such as, intrinsic motivation or original thinking in children (Kohn, 2014). There is a growing body of knowledge about child development, but this knowledge doesn't clearly lead to action since 'there is an important difference in knowing how children grow and knowing how to grow them' (Farson, 2010:21). The facts discovered need to be given meaning, and this involves philosophical investigation and moral debate (Furedi, 2008). Even when manual-writers cite legitimate science, the leap from fact to value makes the advice problematic.

In his book *What is a Person?* Christian Smith (2010:60) develops a theory of critical realist personalism to guide social science. When the brain-based discourse is considered in light of the following definition of personhood it denies the reality of personhood, and the causal capacities of personhood:

...personhood subsists as a real ontological being, as its own existent actuality with its own causal capacities, not reducible to the lower level entities that emergently compose it. In short, human persons and personhood are not epiphenomenal appearances that can be dissolved by making reductionist moves towards lower, allegedly more real levels of reality. Human persons are fully real, in all of their properties, powers and existence.

In reducing the child to the brain, neuro childrearing discourse diminishes the personhood of the child. The brain-discourse undervalues the causal capacities of the child as a person. The idea that the infant brain determines the person, is intrinsically problematic in that it negates agency, as Tallis (2012:243) remarks: 'If we are identical to our brains, and our brains are evolved organs, how can we do anything other than act out a preordained evolutionary script? How can we "do" at all?'

My reading found childrearing manual writers deferring to science to answer broad questions, such as: 'Why love matters?' (Gerhart, 2004), or 'What do you really want for children?' (Bryson & Siegel, 2012: viii). And to answer ethical questions such as, is it right to smack, shout, or punish children? By turning to science and research the moral argument is put to one side, in favour of performativity. As made explicit by manual writer Janis Norton (2012:215) 'Without getting into a moral argument, here are a few reasons why smacking is an ineffective strategy...'.

These are questions which in other times and places would be discussed in terms of ethics, religion, philosophy, or custom. Attempting to make science answer these questions, may illustrate a modern

discomfort with ethical argument. The certainties offered by a positivist scientific approach appeal to a culture unsure of its moral position and undergoing rapid technological and cultural change (Satel & Lilienfeld, 2013). Rameaker and Suissa (2012:24) observe that ‘...the very concept of “parenting” can be seen as part of the aspiration to bring all aspects of human experience under the auspices of scientific research, where our choices about how to act are “backed up by sound evidence”’. But beyond this aspiration, the reality may be a fundamental misunderstanding of evidence and fallibility creating sets of incompatible ideological dogmas masquerading as ‘scientific’ approaches.

## Chapter Four: The Cultural Scripts – Childrearing Mores as Social Construction

This section explores the cultural logic that drives both the pseudo-scientific claims in childrearing manuals, and the wider discourse of ‘good’ mothering. As Hardyment (2009:91) noted ‘advice has always been related to the prevailing social, technological, economic and moral climate.’ Childrearing mores and styles can be understood as cultural constructs which vary over time, place, and social class (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; DeLoache & Gottlieb, 2000; Lareau, 2003; Cunningham 2006; Gillies, 2007; Hardyment, 2009; Jensen, 2010; Nelson, 2012; Mercer, 2013; LeVine & LeVine, 2016), although they are often presented as natural or self-evident (Faircloth, 2014; DeLoache & Gottlieb, 2000). This chapter explores how the cultural logic behind childrearing discourse has been identified in the academic literature, uncovering a conception of childrearing pedagogy as a force promoting a teleological application of intensive motherhood, which is uninformed by concepts of social structure. I suggest further analysis of childrearing manuals available to mothers in twenty-first century Britain, would build upon the existing academic literature to uncover the dominant cultural scripts of childrearing which mothers negotiate as they raise their children.

### 4.1 Intensive and Sensitive Mothers

*Democracy in the Kitchen* is a reanalysis of transcripts detailing thirty mother’s interactions with their pre-school daughters; produced for a study of ‘Language at Home and School’ by Barbara Tizard and Martin Hughs. Obviously, this raises questions about the reuse of qualitative data and the potentially problematic nature extracting data from the original context ( Moore, 2006). However, Walkerdine and Lucy (1989) were troubled by Tizard and Hugh’s conclusion that many mothers were more ‘sensitive’ to the needs of their children, and that the fifteen working class pairs and fifteen middle class pairs could be categorised as ‘equal but different’ in their childrearing approach. Concerned that this analysis ‘denies oppression in a liberal endeavour to produce equality out of a misplaced pluralism’ (7) Walkerdine and Lucey (8) re-examined the transcripts, producing a coherent argument that:

Middle- and working-class families are not equal but different.’ They are grossly unequal. The women oppressed by their labours in the middle-class households act out of a set of scientific ideas which tell them that they are right, that this is the proper thing to do. This

deeply oppressive guilt holds them responsible and full of unspoken guilt. But also renders them powerful in their morality and prepares them to be the very members of the caring professions who will come to regulate the working class mothers, who may come to be seen as frightening, rigid and pathological.

From this standpoint 'Sensitive' mothering can be understood as a constructed cultural script rather than a natural disposition. Walkerdine and Lucey identify the main tenets of sensitive mothering; the mother must prioritise meeting the child's needs, avoid conflict by showing no overt regulation and promote the child's development in everyday tasks. This means that every mother/child interaction is understood through the lens of child development. Walkerdine and Lucey (1989:83) describe middle-class British mothers who appear as 'sensitive mothers' as 'chained by an awareness of her child's cognitive and developmental needs.' Whereas the practices of working-class mothers who do not conform to the script are portrayed as lacking and 'other'.

Sharon Hays's (1998) analysis of childrearing books identified 'intensive mothering' as the cultural script dominant in late twentieth century America, by analysing manuals from the paediatricians Thomas Berry Brazelton and Benjamin Spock, and the British psychologist Penelope Leach. These best-selling authors all loosely followed a child centred approach, which encouraged maternal engagement with their child's development rather than prescriptive techniques (Hulbert, 2004). Hays (1998:177) looked at the similarity in the three authors' work and identified broad themes which underlay their advice, that good childrearing should be child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive. Hays then interviewed mothers and analysed how they responded to this cultural script. In doing so she highlighted the 'tremendous and undue burden' the cultural script of intensive mothering places on women.

Hulbert's (2004) analysis of child-centred childrearing advice similarly suggests:

to prescribe deep affection, abiding fascination with children, and the absence of friction as the crucial ingredients for successful motherhood – and to urge that they be spontaneous and heartfelt – is not necessarily the liberation the child-centred experts advertise it to be.

Other writers have identified cultural scripts, not through childrearing books, but by interviewing mothers, or analysing transcripts of mother/child interaction.

In *Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain times* US sociologist Margaret Nelson (2012:181) takes the theme of intensive mothering further and suggests her interviews with parents

show professional-middle-class parenting<sup>42</sup> ‘out of control.’ This has two meanings, beyond control, and from a position of control. Nelson suggests intensive motherhood has intensified, at least amongst professional-middle-class Americans. She suggests this parenting style is extremely intensive, time consuming and emotionally demanding. Nelson (2012:141) also suggests it is primarily mothers who bear the brunt since, ‘the inequity between men and women may have particularly devastating consequences for women’ This involves ongoing intensive monitoring of children, and a reliance on reason and negotiation. Nelson (92) explains that ‘Availability, intimacy, trust, flexibility and belief in potential are the hall marks of the style that I call parenting out of control.’

## 4.2 Concerted Cultivation

In her study of American childrearing, Lareau (2003:4) suggests there are a set of practices and beliefs about how children ought to be raised which form dominant cultural repertoires. Lareau suggests these practices are promoted by middle-class professionals (including health practitioners, social workers, educationalists, policy makers and childrearing manual writers) and are under-pinned by a peculiarly middle-class logic of childrearing which she terms concerted cultivation; a strategy of developing the child's individuality, character and intelligence, through cultivating the child's talents and academic success in a concerted fashion, requiring time, money and organisation. Lareau (2003:5) describes how ‘middle-class parents who comply with current professional standards and engage in a pattern of concerted cultivation deliberately try to stimulate their child's development and foster cognitive and social skills.’ Concerted cultivation could be an understandable product of a mother's assumption that they have the power to influence the character of their child, and have control over their child's outcomes, (Wall, 2010, Lareau, 2003, Nelson, 2012).

It is argued that concerted cultivation is a middle-class strategy to pass on cultural, linguistic and social capital, and ensure the child's place within the higher social classes (Lareau, 2003; Gillies, 2007; Jensen, 2018). Middle-class parents may be motivated to practice concerted cultivation by a fear of future generational downwards social mobility (Nelson, 2012)<sup>43</sup>. Jensen (2018) claims it is an

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<sup>42</sup> Nelson suggests the American professional middle class follow a distinct culture logic. Whereas the middle classes and working classes share a cultural logic of childrearing. See Nelson, 2010:103-104 for class differences in American parenting.

<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that this claim is more frequently made in an American context than a British one, this may reflect differences in the two class systems.

ideology of neoliberal motherhood that demands a self-reflective mother who seeks 'to optimize and consolidate their resources through social reproduction.' However, Irwin and Elly's (2011:488) study of concerted cultivation and British parenting values suggests caution in accepting this analysis, rather they suggest the manifestation of concerted cultivation in practice may be 'largely "a natural attitude", not bound up with anxiety about children's futures nor part of a strategic attitude in respect of class success: 'Middle-class anxiety and fear of falling appears to be a rather specific account, relevant to some middle-class parents only.' Aarseth's (2018:1088) comparative interview study of upper-middle class Norwegian parents led her to propose

the "fear of falling" and the "quest for advantage" thesis promote a rather one-dimensional view of the inner life of the middle class and are poorly equipped to grasp the dynamics that might produce resistance to a more pervasive competitive individualism.

Aarseth argues that although concerted cultivation may 'work to enforce privileged' it is 'arguably *driven* by other motives than the need for distinction'. She suggests examining 'the affective dynamics involved in the formation of middle-class subjectivities' would yield a more nuanced insight into parents' motivation 'to create joint experiences they can share with their children.'

Another alternative explanation to class anxiety as a driving force behind providing children with a full academic, sporting and cultural schedule may involve the child's agency. The slightly older child can be the driving force behind the activities, enabled by parental income, to peruse self-declared interests (Harris, 1999). Parents may comply in line with the cultural scripts of sensitive and intensive mothering which exhort the parent to follow the children's lead and let them discover their own interests. This explanation would be commensurate with Plomin's (2018:85) thesis of genetic inheritance which leads him to suggest:

In the tumult of daily life parents mostly respond to genetically driven differences in their children. This is the source of most correlations between parenting and children's outcomes. We read to children who like us to read to them. If they want to learn to play a musical instrument or play a particular sport, we foster their appetites and attitudes. We can try to force our dreams on them, for example, that they become a world-class musician or star athlete. But we are unlikely to be successful unless we go with the genetic grain.

From this perspective decreasing inequality would involve creating opportunities for all children, regardless of background, to develop their genetic aptitudes.

### 4.3 Home Learning Environment

The current appeal to 'evidenced based' or scientific rationale to promote sensitive mothering can be exemplified by current UK Policy's transformation of the family home into the Home Learning



Environment. *Improving the Home Learning Environment: A behaviour Change Approach* (HM Govt., 2018:9) defines the home learning environment thus:

The Home Learning Environment (HLE) is the physical home and the interactions in and around the home which implicitly and explicitly support a child's learning.

The quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a child's early language ability and future success; positive experiences can have lasting and life changing impacts<sup>44</sup>.

This Government policy document, (HM Govt., 2018:9) presents an ideal childrearing which reflects Walkerdine and Lucey's description of middle-class sensitive mothering, when it states:

Studies show that everyday conversations, make-believe play and reading activities are particularly influential features of the home learning environment, although daytime routines, trips to the park and visits to the library have also been shown to make a positive difference to children's language development. In particular warm and nurturing parenting behaviours that encourage children's natural curiosity and communicate reasonable expectations for learning are especially strong predictors of children's school achievement, over and above parental income and social status

In this passage school achievement is linked to the quality of the mother/child relationship. Noting a disparity in educational achievement between some children from low-income families and their middle and upper-income counterparts, this policy attempts to universalise middle-class childrearing practices by promoting a form of sensitive mothering and concerted cultivation.

#### 4.4 Classed Parenting

As Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) and Val Gillies (2007) note this discourse employs the language of developmental psychology to normalise and promote idealised middle-class parenting practices. This is based on an implicit assumption of parental determinism and the belief that positive outcomes for some middle-class children are founded in the superior quality of middle-class childrearing, rather than structural and material advantages (such as income, housing, access to books and toys, educational opportunities, access to public services and recreation facilities, day-care quality etc). As Gillies (2007:76) notes that within the childrearing discourse 'the material and structural underpinnings of parenting are concealed behind a projected façade of preference and

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<sup>44</sup> The Home Learning Environment advocated shares aims and values with school early years curriculums. This opens the possibility that the 'school readiness' which is being promoted by *Improving the home learning environment, A behaviour change approach* (HM Govt., 2018) may be mistaking cognitive development<sup>44</sup> for acculturation. School can be positioned as an institution formed in part to pass on the dominant culture to the young (Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Fureldi, 2009) and, as Lamont and Lareau (1988:155) suggest, those children who are already part of this culture do well on early school assessments, whereas those without the advantage of family cultural capital 'can never achieve the natural familiarity of those born to these classes and are academically penalized on this basis.'

(ir)rationality.’

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989:209) examined transcripts of conversations (originally generated by Tizard and Hughs) between working-class and middle-class mother/daughter dyads. They found differences in communication, practice and relationship that roughly fell across class lines. This leads them to question the validity of ‘sensitive mothering’ as a scientific description of ‘good mothering’ and highlight it as a classed practice, concluding that ‘there is no easy socialisation that mothers can be accused of failing to do’.

More recently, Gillies’s (2007:25) study, *Marginalised Mothers*, points to the danger that using social-mobility discourse in the context of childrearing may lead to blaming ‘working-class mothers for failing to equip their children with the skills for social betterment.’ Gillies suggests childrearing books and ‘parenting best-practice’ reflect middle-class values, which serves to position other values and approaches as lacking, uninformed or even harmful. Gillies (2005:2007) suggests this reinforces the impression that middle-class childrearing is ‘good parenting’ and attributes children’s successful outcomes to middle-class parenting mores rather than middle-class resources.

Valorising the concerted-cultivation and sensitive mothering supposedly prevalent in middle classes households may undermine the value of other approaches to childrearing. Lareau’s (2003:83) study of American childrearing, suggests parents following the strategy of accomplishment of natural growth (as opposed to middle-class concerted cultivation) put less emphasis on developmental potential of activities; ‘Of much greater importance are many steps involved in getting children through the day: getting them up, showered, fed, dressed, bundled up in winter jackets, and out the door in time for school, and at the end of the day , making sure they get home safely, have dinner, complete their homework and get to bed at a reasonable hour.’ Lareau’s (2003) found positive aspects of working-class childrearing practice, which negate the supremacy of concerted cultivation:

‘When parents follow the strategy of the accomplishment of natural growth, providing close supervision in custodial matters and granting children autonomy in leisure matters, the children appear to take real pleasure in their playtime. The lack of adult attention and involvement in their activities leaves children in working class and poor homes free to concentrate on pleasing themselves. The children we studied tended to show more creativity, spontaneity, enjoyment, and initiative in their leisure pastimes than we saw among middle-class children at play in organized activities.’ (Lareau, 2003:82)

However the external socio-economic factors in childrearing could be over-played when discussing private relationships of childrearing, as Ferdinand Mount (1992:220) suggests in *The Subversive Family*, there is a danger of suffocating the inner life of the family by taking “for granted that this inner life is directly and exclusively shaped and controlled by economic and political circumstances.” Lareau (2003:5) notes “middle class parents appear to shift their behaviours in a variety of spheres

more rapidly and more thoroughly than do working class or poor parents.” Since middle class mothers are often early adopters of childrearing advice (Beck & Beck- Gernsheim, 1995), classed parenting analysis may show the emergent trends as middle-class, and the older doctrines of childrearing as working-class. This may becloud a general movement in childrearing ideas across the culture.

There are substantial childrearing differences within social class as well as similarities between social classes. For example, Irwin and Elly (2011) found diverse orientations towards their children’s education within as well as between classes. And Dermot and Pomati (2016:11) suggest similarity between classes:

[...] whether a household can be categorised as poor – measure either by income or subjectivity – made no significance difference to the frequency with which most parents engaged in most of our ‘good’ parenting activities... Therefore, despite the frequently made association between poverty and lack of appropriate parenting, there is no clear evidence for this relationship in our findings.

It may be that that there is more similarity in childrearing practice across classes than often supposed. Jan McVarish suggests ‘good parenting’ is not determined along class lines, but by compliance to the ‘new orthodoxies and those who can’t or won’t’ comply. (MacVarish, 2009:107).

#### *4.4.1 Mothers Who Work Outside the Home*

Hays (1988) suggests the ideal of intensive mothering gained hold with the mass movement of women from home to workplace in the late 20th Century. The pressure for women to resume being economically active, runs parallel to the pressure to be a ‘good mother’. This has been trivialised in the press as ‘the Mummy Wars’ but represents an impossible dilemma or cultural contradiction (Hays, 1998). This contradiction is exacerbated when seen through the lens of, what Hays terms, intensive motherhood. The assumption that ‘good childrearing’ is labour intensive and the primary responsibility of the mother leads Leach (1994) to assert that ‘People cannot be in two places at once: ergo one person cannot be simultaneously a solvent, self-respecting citizen and an actively caring parent.’ Leach’s concerns echo Etzioni’s (1993) assertions of a ‘parenting deficit’ which link societal problems to parents working outside the home. The economic realities of family life, and the needs of the mother, are subservient to the ideal of the available and sensitive mother.

#### *4.4.2*

The belief that ‘sensitive mothering’ determines children’s future success undermines father’s contribution to childrearing. As Dermott (2018:39) notes,

At the everyday level, research shows that in many countries, men who are fathers now engage in a wider range of childcare practices, to a greater extent, than previously

reported and in ways that are significantly different from fathers in previous generations

Dermott continues to suggest that fathers themselves can be seen as having a 'dyadic' relationship with their child in that 'it is developed and performed between father and child directly rather than necessarily relying on mothers as facilitators and promoters'. Fathers and same sex partners living in the household may impact the use of parenting pedagogy and the prime-carer's negotiation of available advice. Children are also increasingly raised not just within households but between households, with separated parents. Grandparents, aunts and uncles are also involved in childrearing (Pashos & McBurney, 2008). By privileging the mother/child dyad the scripts of 'intensive motherhood' marginalises the family context of childrearing .

#### 4.5 Parental Influence and Long-term Rewards

The cultural scripts of sensitive motherhood, intensive motherhood and concerted cultivation all rely on the assumption that children are acutely vulnerable to parental action, and childrearing has a large teleological effect.

Childrearing manual writer Leach (2010:14), whom Hays critiqued as promoting intensive motherhood, is aware of the onerous quality of her advice and admits that 'Bringing up a child in this flexible, thoughtful way takes time and effort, matching hard work and commitment to long-term rewards.' It is the promise of long-term rewards that may, in part, persuade mothers to adopt this onerous intensive approach. Hays (1998: 120) recognised this in her interviews with American mothers:

Part of the reason that the methods of nurturing, listening, responding, explaining, negotiating, distracting, and searching for appropriate alternative care are so labour-intensive, so time-consuming, so energy-absorbing is... that parents (especially mothers) understand themselves as largely responsible for the way their children turn out.

Talking of middle-class 'parenting out of control' Nelson (2012:103) found 'These parents see their role as intense nurturers of children in the process of development.' Similarly, Wall's (2010:262) study of intensive motherhood in Canada found that intensive mothers felt responsible for developing their children's intelligence and future trajectory, placing their children's success or failure as reflections of their parenting skills. Thus, intensive parenting 'increased stress, anxiety, guilt, and exhaustion'.

Whereas, Nelson (2012:104) found a belief in parental determinism amongst the professional middle-class, but a different attitude to parental determinism expressed by middle-class and working-class parents, suggesting 'They too want to nurture their children, but they are more likely to see their children's personalities as set, as constituting the material with which they must work.' In

contrast to the 'out of control' middleclass professional approach, the cultural logic of middle-class and working-class childrearing is identified by Nelson as 'parenting within limits' and these parents as more likely to speak of boundaries, consequences, routines and rules. Annette Lareau (2003:238) refers to a working-class cultural logic as 'the accomplishment of natural growth' and suggests 'the working class and poor parents viewed children's development as unfolding spontaneously, as long as they were provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support.'

#### 4.5.1. Parental Determinism

Parental determinism can be defined as the belief that parental actions have a profound and direct influence on the person the child will be as an adult, determining the child's future and the future of society (Furedi, 2008; Guldberg, 2014). Parental determinism is a component of Infant determinism; the belief that the 'experiences during the early years are the most potent force in shaping a life' (Kagan, 1998:83).

In *Toddler Calm* Sarah Ockwell-Smith (2013:7) asks the reader '...what are your aspirations for your toddler? What qualities do you hope that he will possess when he is grown?' She suggests writing down ten qualities the reader wishes her child to possess as an adult and use them as childrearing goals. The promise that parents can influence a child's future personality is both a marketing ploy and a justification for the application of expertise. Across the parenting-advice genre, parents are told that they have almost complete responsibility over their child's future, and simultaneously portrayed as lacking the skills and knowledge to shoulder this responsibility. Furedi (2008:72) raises the concern that 'Parental determinism expands the concept of parenting until it becomes an impossibly burdensome task. With so much at stake, no one can be a "good enough" parent.' However, his work is theoretical supposition and does not address whether parents accept the parental determinist narrative, or how they negotiate its logic.

Permeating the parenting-advice genre<sup>45</sup> is the apparent belief that adult personality, cognitive ability and behaviour is strongly determined by experiences in infancy, especially the actions of parents. Childrearing manual writers claim the results of applying their parenting methods will have long lasting determining effects, for example: '...your life as a parent will become easier and your parenting more effective. More important, you'll create connections in your children's brains that build emotional and social skills that will serve them now and throughout their entire life.' (Seigal and Payne Bryson, 2015:99)

Calling on (potentially erroneous) readings of attachment theory and neuroscience parental

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<sup>45</sup> Parental determinism is also a key driver of Government policy around parenting pedagogy.

determinism is presented as scientific fact, for example, Sunderland (2006:9) writes 'For several years science has been revealing to us the key emotional systems in the human brain are powerfully moulded for better or worse by parenting experiences.'

From a critical realist perspective raising children is a complex activity (Clark, 2015). Although raising a child in a certain way may increase the likelihood of a certain outcome it does not guarantee it. Children are agentic open systems<sup>46</sup>, and parental action is just one part of a set of complex interacting influences. Real structures (social and/or natural) are in operation but can have varied effect due to the complexity of open systems (Paris, 2013). Since children and parents are complex systems themselves and are acting within complex systems, simple deterministic cause and effect claims for parenting methods are problematic. The critical realist researcher of childhood, Alderson (2016:173) explains:

A concrete singularized individual can be explained as a uniquely laminated structure, shaped by genetics, nurture and culture, so that each person has strong and partly predictable tendencies. These tendencies influence individual actions, but do not determine them, and they interact with free will and agency.

Although causal mechanisms are in operation these may have varied and variable effect. This observation necessitates caution when making claims about determinism and predictability in childrearing.

There are many who have expressed doubts about the desirability and validity of emphasising parental influence as a prime determinant of life character. A preoccupation with parental determinism has been criticized for ignoring the influence of child temperament and genetics (Paris, 2013; Pinker 2002; Plomin, 2018), luck (Paris, 2013) peer group (Harris, 1999), social class (Jensen, 2010; Gillies, 2007) and the wider environment including schools, media and neighbourhoods (Jensen, 2010; Harris, 1999, 2006, Gillies, 2007). None of these critics suggest having inadequate parents, or other poor environmental experiences does not make life miserable for a child in the present. Rather, they stress that an emphasis on parental and infant determinism undermines other factors which may be more significant in adult character formation and life chances. Putnam's

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<sup>46</sup> In complex open system with a multitude of mechanism at work, it is therefore difficult to isolate and observe individual mechanisms (Alderson, 2016:168) Observable events and entities will be simultaneously governed by different causal mechanisms at various levels, making finding the predictive active variables difficult. The laminated character of observable events and entities means that patterns within open systems can be read as producing causal tendencies, rather than inevitabilities (Bhaskar, 1989; Gorski, 2013; Alderson, 2013:109). The competing powers in open systems mean that open systems 'tend to have varying, and only partly predictable effects, unlike closed systems.' (Alderson, 2016:172). The complexity of open systems means that ultimately, 'the course of human life is chaotic' (Paris, 2013:189)

(2015:134) examination of the socioeconomics of childhoods leads him to observe that 'Even ideal parenting cannot compensate for all the ill effects of poverty on children, and even incompetent parenting cannot nullify all the advantages conferred by parental affluence and education.'

In his book *Myths of Childhood* psychiatrist, Joel Paris (2013: 188) examines the scientific validity of parental and infant determinism including exploring the implications for parenting of genetic research from twin and adoption studies:

Research on genetics and environmental factors in personality and psychopathology leads to a new perspective on parenting. Although parenting is important, it is only one of several factors influencing development, and not necessarily the primary driving factor. Genes shape behavioural differences between children, and the most important environmental influences are unshared. Thus, personality is not necessarily a consequence of growing up in a particular family.

The partial heritability of character traits is well established. Twin studies, adoption studies and statistical analysis of variation, have found the genetic influence accounting for approximately 50% of the variance between two individuals. (Plomin and Bergeman 1991; Pinker 2002; Plomin, 2018). Twin and adoption studies have demonstrated that the effects of the shared environment are small, accounting for between 0-10% of the variance (Pinker, 2002:379). This means the shared experiences of siblings, growing up in the same house, with the same parents, may have a negligible impact on future personality (Plomin, 2018).

This is not to replace parental determinism with biological determinism, or social determinism in childhood. In *Blueprint* behavioural geneticist Robert Plomin (2018:92) emphasises that genetic traits are probabilistic rather than deterministic, and 'Genes are not destiny'.

Paris's (2013:191), analysis concludes 'given the lack of evidence, the primacy of childhood must be regarded as a myth.' Paris (2013:199) sees hope within this, suggesting 'overthrowing the myths of childhood can lead to an increased respect for humanism and free will' and allow parents to be less anxious and more forgiving of themselves, and adults to transcend their childhood circumstances. Understanding the primacy of childhood as myth opens space for a new paradigm of childhood where children are 'understood as social actors shaping as well as being shaped by their circumstances' (James Jenks and Prout, 1998:6). Parents of more than one child, may recognise their interactions with each child varies in accordance with the child's personality (Rutter, 2014). Although parents have some influence over their children, it is not necessarily a result of deliberate action, but a rather subtler interplay of personalities and individual agencies, meaning, 'Childrearing is not something a parent does to a child: it is something the parent and child do together' (Harris, 1999:25). Parental influence may operate in the area of culture rather than character; meaning

parents and teachers can influence cultural acquisition of values, skills and ideas. As Pinker (2002:375) explains:

Concrete behavioural traits that patently depend on content provided by the home or culture are, of course, not heritable at all: which language you speak, which religion you worship in, which political party you belong to. But behavioral traits that reflect the underlying talents and temperaments are heritable: how proficient with language you are, how religious, how liberal or conservative.

This is in direct opposition to Baumrind et al's (2010:162) assertion 'social ideology is expected to not affect adolescent outcomes beyond the effects of parents' childrearing practices.'

Plomin (2018:84) addresses parenting manuals directly considering robust research into genetic heritability. He concedes that child rearing manuals are useful in providing 'parenting tips' but warns that 'when these best-selling books promise to deliver developmental outcomes, they are peddling snake oil', firmly stating 'there is no evidence that these parenting practices make a difference in children's development, after controlling for genetics.' This does not mean that parents 'don't matter' but that when examining the population as a whole, their importance is beyond developmental outcomes or stable and systematic influence. Those questioning parental determinism do not doubt parents have an ethical responsibility of care for their children. Rejecting parental determinism does not change this moral imperative to care and protect. As Harris (1999:291) states: "We may not hold their tomorrows in our hands, but we surely hold their todays, and we have the power to make their todays very miserable."

In opposition to the findings of behavioural genetics<sup>47</sup>, the promotion of parental determinism across the childrearing discourse persuades mothers that they possess the power to influence the character of their child and have control over her child's outcomes; positioning the mother as the Pygmalion architect of her child's future, and her 'children as valuable products of scientific parenting' (Wall, 2011). Mothers reading childrearing books must negotiate the concept that their smallest actions may influence their child's behaviour, character and life chances. Parental determinism is key to the

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<sup>47</sup> The extreme position on nurture is presented by Neo-Freudian psychotherapist Oliver Janes in *Not in the Genes* (2016), claiming:

"There are physical traits that pass down genetically, like height, looks and eye colour, but it now seems very much as if variations in things like mental illness, smartness or shyness, have little or nothing to do with DNA which pass from parent to child. Rather it is proven that patterns of nurture make us like our parents and grandparents." (Janes, 2016:1)

James's book is an interesting demonstration of persistence of the "blank slate" argument, despite being contrary to established knowledge which has repeatedly found psychological traits to be partly heritable (Plomin, 2013; Rutter, 2012; Paris, 2013). Psychologist Stuart Ritchie reviewed James' book in the *Spectator*, saying "Superficially, the book appears well stocked with scientific references. But just try following the citations: they frequently make precisely the opposite point to James. He often interprets honest discussion of methodological limitations as confessions that genetic research has been a let-down... James's opinions are vacuous nonsense" (Ritchie 2016)



childrearing books claims of efficacy and relevance, part of a persuasive account of childrearing used to sustain, justify and defend the childrearing advice.

#### 4.6 The Reflective Parent

Nelson (2012:177) found professional middle-class parents were more inclined to reflective self-doubt than their less privileged counterparts who gave the impression of confidence, she felt this could be explained partly by the middleclass acceptance of the myth of strong parental determinism.

The style I call parenting with limits is in many ways straightforward and unselfconscious. But professional middle-class parents, who adopt parenting out of control, worry a lot about the consequences of their own actions: they worry about the pressure their children face in school and on the athletic field; they worry that material and psychological “overindulgence”; and they worry that the hovering they do might have problematic consequences. (177)

Aspects of reflective mothering and choice have been severely criticised by Tracey Jensen in *Parenting the Crisis* (2018:43). For Jensen it is a neoliberal cultural hegemony that compels mothers to constantly reflect on their childrearing choices and whether ‘they are getting motherhood right’. Jensen suggests ‘the exhaustive rhetoric of choice’ both contributes to and is exemplified in ‘the explosion of moralised parenting pedagogy across cultural sites.’ In contrast, Richard Smith (2011:172) looks at choice and reflection in childrearing as an ethical endeavour which releases the parent from parental determinism and the pressure of performing a skill set.

By providing ‘scientifically’ informed dictates about how parents ‘ought’ to raise their children, childrearing manuals are potentially overriding the smaller moral decisions that are made every day by parents weighing up the best course of action, as Stadlen (2005:102) observes:

Translating goodness into daily actions is a different matter. There is rarely time to take stock. A mother is beset with moments of choice. They may seem so trivial that the mother’s decision looks pragmatic. It is easy to overlook the moral dimension.

This moral dimension to childrearing, where choices are constantly being made, leads Rameakers and Suissa (2012: xi) to talk of childrearing as being ‘ethical all the way down.’ This is not to advocate childrearing advice based on reflexivity, but to observe the daily ethics that constitute raising children is beyond advice as ‘...whatever it is that is communicated to parents through such advice does not, and cannot, capture the complexity of the ethical issues that are inevitably bound up with being a parent.’

It may be that whilst childrearing needs to be learned, it cannot be taught didactically since the ‘very

concept of parenting 'skills' obscures the essence of a child/parent relationship.' (Furedi, 2009). Stadlen (2005:45) argues that it is mothers' uncertainty that gives them the flexibility to help them to learn, and this is a positive aspect of the mother/child relationship that needs no outside interference: 'Far from helping new mothers, the experts may undermine the confidence each mother needs to work out for herself what her baby wants.' The expert's knowledge and authority can conflict with the mother's and 'may disturb a mother's trust in herself' (Erikson, cited in Hulbert, 2004:210), or even override her biological instinct or imperative (Apple, 2006; Stadlen, 2005, 2015). Parenting may be form of experiential knowledge, that cannot be fully understood didactically.

Jensen (2018:48-50) examines the social-media site mumsnet<sup>48</sup> and although she allows that this forum questions and 'interrupts the fantasies of parenting perfection with experiential accounts of the everyday experiences, struggles and anxieties of raising children', she suggests mumsnet provides a meeting place for women to 'exchange knowledge about how to morally authorise themselves' and argues that the architecture of the site is organized around participants reflexive and individualised quest for becoming 'a good mother' and fails to empower mothers to challenge presiding orthodoxies.

The technology is new but the phenomenon of women talking about motherhood is not. For Stadlen (2004:253) such encounters are positive:

'It seems to me that the best antidote to all these large and small pressures on mothers are circles of mothers, either at regular meetings or in spontaneous gatherings in shops or on the street. Here a mother can exchange views and have her assumptions challenged.

Jensen and Stadlen (2004: 254) agree that the mothers use such encounters 'as a way of reviewing their work as mothers.' But whereas Stadlen presents the reflexivity as positive and enriching, Jensen (1918:98) problematises the concept of 'reflexive choice', as wrongly situating family problems and unhappiness at the 'level of the self' and promoting 'individualised solutions' which absent 'the material and socioeconomic dimensions of everyday life.' Maybe the problem is nt choice per se, but the perceived responsibility that those choices hold. As Paris (2013:186) explains, a combination of parental determinism and reflexivity in the cultural discourse means that:

...many people under the influence of their own psychotherapy or the prevailing cultural ideas, believe that their own psychological problems must be the result of incompetent rearing during childhood. When such individuals have children of their

own, they are determined to avoid making the same mistakes. These concerns further feed the demands of contemporary parents for expert advice.

Lee (2014:218) suggests there is a problem promoting reflexivity within a culture that adheres to parental determinism, 'parental determinism acts to disregard any possibility that learning by experience, and the tacit knowledge that accumulates that way, is a perfectly good and acceptable way to go about raising children.' Lee's description allows for Staldens's (2012) observations of mother/child dyads. Reflective motherhood works as a description of what mothers do (Raemaker and Suissa, 2012) but it is difficult to say mothers 'ought' to be reflective, since as Helen Reece (2016:52) argues prescribing reflective motherhood has 'the potential to be just as coercive as any substantive model of good parenting.'

Childrearing manual writer Leach's (2010:13-14) description of her own advice includes flexibility, finding 'what works for you' and 'the courage to dismiss unnecessary guilt.' Rather than precluding experiential learning, reflection is promoted as a good model of childrearing, although childrearing is still expected to be expert led in line with 'intensive mothering' and a mother is encouraged to reflect on the 'entrancing results of child development research'. Leach accepts parental determinism and advises that as a mother 'you are laying the foundations of a new member of your own race', her emphasis is on the relationship between mother and child, 'a relationship that is unique and can be uniquely rewarding.' And the 'parent and child as a unit of mutual pleasure giving.' This is the 'emotionally absorbing' element of intensive mothering as described by Hays (1998).

If a mother's interactions with a child are viewed as highly deterministic of the child's character and future, the encouragement of maternal reflection may ultimately end with mother blame. For example, Tanya Byron (2007:143) in her manual *Your Child, Your Way* tells readers:

We all, as parents, have to accept the fact that our children's behaviour can only be managed and changed in a positive way if the underlying aspects of those problems are realistically addressed – underlying problems and issues that stem from us.

Manuals demanding reflection assume that after reflection a mother will follow the author's advice and belief system. Advising reflection is often a coercive and persuasive writing technique rather than a genuine call for engagement and potential dissent. For example, a review quoted to promote Rebecca Eanes's manual *Positive Parenting* suggests: 'This is a must-read book for all who care enough about their children to reflect deeply on themselves as parents.'

In her analysis of 20th century American childrearing advice Hulbert (2004:367) suggests, maybe counterintuitively, that 'It is the "hard" advisers, bossing mothers around and warning about too

much rather than too little bonding, who often end up leaving both mothers and children with more independence and freedom to manoeuvre.'

#### 4.7 Conclusion – Responding to the Script

The cultural scripts of sensitive motherhood (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989), concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003) and 'parenting out of control' (Nelson, 2012) have been identified as reflecting a peculiarly middle-class logic of childrearing (see for example, Gillies 2007; Duncan 2005, Jensen, 2018). It is argued that perceptions of 'good' childrearing practices, values and experiences are heavily influenced by class (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Lareau, 2003; Gillies, 2007) and the childrearing books promote middle-class childrearing norms. But since middle-class mothers tend towards early adoption of childrearing fashions (Lareau, 2003) it is difficult to identify the direction of influence. Walkerdine and Lucey (1989:57-63) attribute the emergence of the cultural script of sensitive mothering to the development of attachment theory, and the growing belief that mother/child interactions could promote children's development, wellbeing and educational success in the future. Following this belief, is the conclusion that employing sensitive mothering across society could have the power to establish 'the erosion of inequality and particularly of social class differences.' Walkerdine (2015:172) identifies and refutes '... long-standing ideas which support middle class mothers who turn their domestic work and childcare into proto education and implicitly or explicitly argue that educational success will follow if working class mothers assume the same strategy'. Dermott (2012:6) suggests due to any feasible way of quantifying good childrearing 'Good parenting is then largely defined in reverse: if good parenting is the most important criteria for children to be successful, then ipso facto what the parents of successful children do must be good parenting.' This is problematic in that it does not account for either socio-economic inequalities (Jensen, 2018) or genetic inheritance (Plomin, 2018).

Concentrating on childrearing difference between social classes may obfuscate both differences within classes and similarities between classes. Hays (1998:130) suggests all mothers respond to the cultural script of intensive mothering and gives examples from her interviews with mothers across a range of backgrounds and circumstances. 'the overwhelming majority of women to whom I spoke clearly recognized the script of intensive mothering, understand its logic, use its language and are committed to living up to its tenets.' Hays (1988:4) acknowledges social difference in childrearing but shows that 'these differences between upper- and lower-class mothers should not obscure their common recognition of the larger ideology of intensive childrearing and their shared commitment to good mothering.' This does not mean that all Anglo-American mothers are 'intensive mothers', but

this picture of the 'good mother' dominates the Anglo-American culture and the childrearing manuals, providing an 'important 'cultural script' or 'ideal' to which parents respond in negotiating their own practices' (Faircloth, 2014a:31). Hays work was conducted in late twentieth century America, where the dominant childrearing discourse was firmly child-centred. In 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain a more diverse range of childrearing advice could produce different set of cultural scripts or repertoires for mothers to negotiate.

In the 1990's Hays criticised parenting-pedagogy for promoting intensive motherhood (Hays, 1998) at a time when women were increasingly working outside the home. Since then enrichment parenting-pedagogy has been further criticised for: Promoting a homogeneous and hegemonic paradigm of 'good-parenting' (Gillies, 2005); undermining parental authority (Furedi, 2008); promoting an unrealistic normality of childhood (Burman, 2008); ignoring child individuality (Farson, 2010); reducing the parenting relationship to a skills set (Lee,2014) ; being impossibly onerous to implement (Reece, 2013); promoting neo-liberal values (Jensen, 2018; Hendrick, 2016); encouraging permissive parenting (Sigman, 2009; Rosemond, 2012); professionalising parenting (Ramaeker and Suissa,2011); competing with folk knowledge, and less formal inter-generational transmission of parenting knowledge (Apple, 2006); and privileging and legitimising middle-class parenting at the expense of working-class families (Gillies, 2007:101; Jensen, 2018).

These critics call into doubt the validity of parenting pedagogy and question to what purpose, and in whose interests, do parenting pedagogies work. Although, however valid some of these criticisms undoubtedly are, these critiques still do not fully explore how mothers themselves use and understand the claims of childrearing pedagogies. This may fail to address how and why mothers engage with parenting pedagogy.

## Chapter Five: Methodology and Method

### Conceptual Framework: Establishing a clear picture of the nature of the phenomena under investigation

Research informed by Critical Realism is driven by the ontology not the methodological approach. This means that a clear picture of the nature of the phenomena under investigation needs to be established before appropriate methodology and technical research methods can be sought (Maxwell, 2012).

Before I could examine how mothers negotiate childrearing ideas, I needed a conceptual framework of how childrearing is imagined and defined in 21<sup>st</sup> century parenting-pedagogy and policy discourse. This conceptual framework informs the interviews with mothers and subsequent analysis.

To this end I reviewed literature in key areas; the influence of childrearing pedagogy (chapter 2), claims to childrearing knowledge (Chapter 3), and cultural scripts of 'good' mothering (Chapter 4). I examined the emergence of childrearing ideas and the provenance of current childrearing ideas (see section 6.3); paying attention to the emergence of knowledge-claims and examining how these claims are utilized in childrearing manuals. This allowed me to identify and critique dominant knowledge-claims, ideas, themes and tropes of childrearing advice discourse which could be used to inform the analysis of my interviews with mothers, this included themes such as; concerted cultivation; judgment of mothers by others; motherhood and social class; past, future and changing childrearing; maternal responsibility; parental determinism; children's brain development and attachment.

To gain a more detailed understanding of dominant childrearing ideology I have analysed current popular childrearing manuals as a data source. This data provided a firm understanding of the childrearing ideas that mothers negotiate when raising children within contemporary British culture. The analysis of the childrearing manuals informed the structure and aims of the interviews (see the discussion below). These are the books implicitly referred to by Allen and Duncan Smith (2008) as the books that help the middle-class parent, when they claimed:

"The transmission of parenting skills from generation to generation has changed considerably and while the middle classes can read the guide books, those with lower educational and social skills are finding parenting skills squeezed out as extended families reduce and more one-parent households have smaller knowledge bases on which to draw." Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008:23

This conceptual framework is not fixed; it is part of an ongoing iterative process able to respond to new information (Maxwell, 2012). The literature reviews and textual analysis create a conceptual framework which informs the interviews, and then the interviews prompt a reappraisal of the

conceptual framework, which informs the analysis. For example, I originally selected childrearing manuals to study using Amazon bestseller information, but during the interviews some participants mentioned other books and websites that had influenced them; these books and websites were added to the childrearing manual data set. Another example of how the study became refocused, concerns the expectations of the participants and their goals for this interaction. Participants put a great deal of emphasis on their decision how much to work outside the home or be at home with their children; how to balance time and money. Although I had been aware of the tension between home and work commitments, I had under-estimated its influence on how mothers negotiated current childrearing advice and now understood that issues of practicality should take greater prominence within the conceptual framework. The study was constantly refocusing, to reflect what was *actually* happening, in line with Maxwell's (2012:76) description of realist qualitative research as: "...necessarily inductive in its approach to design, and this inductive strategy means that the research plan itself is constantly changing in response to new information or changing circumstances".

## 5.1 A Critical Realist Approach to Researching Childrearing Discourse

There is little guidance on the application of critical realism through precise research methods (Fletcher, 2017). As Ackroyd and Karlsson observe, "in the area of methodology, realist practitioners are well behind the game. There is a serious lack of appealing and accessible material on CR-informed methodology" (2014:45) This is partly because Critical Realism allows for a great deal of methodological freedom (Maxwell, 2012; O'Brien and Ackroyd, 2011). Bhaskar reminds critical realist researchers that there is not a "formula, recipe or algorithm" (2014:xv) for applied critical realism.

"For CR guided researchers the role of a research method is essentially to connect the inner world of ideas to the outer world of observable events as seamlessly as possible. How this is to be accomplished however is not obvious and there are few reliable rules about how to proceed." (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014:21-22)

I aimed to develop a critical realist approach to discourse analysis to gain insight into how parents understand and negotiate *ideas* about childrearing and explore how expert knowledge-claims are used to create, sustain and defend childrearing ideas and advice. This approach has foundations in the philosopher, Bhaskar's (1979) seminal text on realist social science, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, which sets out the philosophical underpinnings for realist social science. In this study I built on Maxwell's (2012) *A Realist Approach to Qualitative Research* and operationalise a realist ontology and a constructionist epistemology. Critical realism attempts to improve knowledge of the real by adjudicating rival accounts and making justified truth claims about reality based on research findings:

A realist investigation zigzags between ideas and evidence. It neither starts with specific empirical stances (induction), nor from general statements (deduction), but from fragile

ideas (or more grandly, bold, yet naive conjectures) to be tested and refined through engagement with evidence. Realist research works out the relation between ideas and evidence.(Emmel, 2013:6)

By exploring the relationship between ideas and evidence, different theories of childrearing can be evaluated as more or less truth-like. Through an application of Critical Realism, the conceptual framework can be interrogated to explore how expert knowledge-claims are used to create, sustain and defend childrearing ideas and advice.

## 5.2 Tenets of Critic Realism

The basic tenets of Critical Realism are ontological realism, epistemic perspectivism and judgmental rationality (Bhaskar, 1986; Bhaskar,1998). This proposes that reality operates regardless of human awareness of it; reality is mind-independent (ontological realism). Human knowledge is always conceptually mediated and situated within culture, history, and society (epistemic perspectivism). Yet, it is “normally possible for humans to improve their knowledge of the real, to adjudicate rival accounts, and to make justified truth claims about reality” (Smith, 2015:13) (judgmental rationality).

Alderson (2016:172) sums up the realist position thus:

Realism accepts the existence of objects, beings, events, structures, and causal powers, which are independent of human understanding of them, and which determine the truth value of our statements. We discover and do not invent reality.

To understand parenting in contemporary British society I examine *ideas* about childrearing, and how they emerge through processes of reproduction and transformation; agreeing with Collier that, “an account of the ideas prevailing in a society will be an essential part of a social-scientific account of that society.” (1998:446) As the cultural historian Christina Hardyment (2007: ix) notes, when studying childrearing manuals ‘...it becomes clear that while babies and parents remain constants, advice on the former to the latter veers with the winds of social, philosophical and phycological change.’ Ideas about childrearing refer to a real world, real children and parents. The ideas about childrearing can be regarded as real. Within Critical Realism something is real when it has causal effect, regardless of whether the mechanisms at work are understood. This means that ideas can be regarded as real if they have causal effect on a person; meaning that “Meaning and culture are real” (Maxwell, 2012:15) since ideas and cultural practices can have causal effect.

Critical realism provides a powerful counterview to the social-positivist tendency to portray children are passive recipients of their upbringing and parenting practices as ensuring certain outcomes (Alderson, 2013). Within critical realism the complexity and agency of humans is recognized; “human beings are themselves open systems capable of communication and creativity and resistance”



(Gorski, 2013:662). In line with critical realism, this study starts from the viewpoint that adults and children are capable of accepting or resisting and aiding or subverting the parenting discourses. Critical realism provides a nuanced tool to examine the creation of meaning through social process; through the interdependent relationship between human agency and structure (Gorski, 2013), and through “the engagement between knowing subjects and the real world they address” (Alderson, 2013:60).

This study understands childrearing mores and styles as cultural constructs which vary over time and place (Kagan, 1998; Hardyment, 2009; Cunningham 2006; Hays,1998; Mercer, 2013), and social class (Kagan, 1998; Lareau, 2003; Nelson, 2012; Wall, 2010, Jensen, 2018). However, there may be some more universal features of the parent-child relationship that an over emphasis on cultural construction may fail to fully recognise (Alderson, 2013).

In *The Possibility of Naturalism* Bhaskar (1978) suggests that critical naturalism (his original term for what has become known as critical realism)

“can do justice to the proto-scientific institutions of both positivism and its hermeneutical foil.” In contrast to positivism, CR can “sustain the transfactuality of social structures, whilst insisting on their conceptuality (or concept dependence). And in contrast to hermeneutics it can sustain the intransitivity of both beliefs and meanings, whilst insisting on their susceptibility to scientific explanation and hence critique, in a spiral (rather than a circle) which reflexively implicates social science as a moment in the process it explains.” (Bhaskar, 1978:22)

Within realist social science, ideas can be regarded as ‘real’ if they have causal effect (Maxwell, 2012:40). Mental and physical dimensions of existence interact as parts of the real world; each having causal power over the other and forming a complex web of “continuous dynamic interaction” (Bhaskar, 1986:6). This perspective serves as a powerful justification for qualitative research, as Maxwell (2012) asserts, realism will:

“treat both mental and physical phenomena as real. Seeing meanings, beliefs and values, and so on as part of reality supports an interpretivist approach to understanding mental and physical phenomena without entailing a radical constructivism that denies the existence, or casual relevance, for mind, of a physical world.” (20)

Critical Realism guards against an over-emphasis on social construction. People do not simply invent society. We are born into a society and inherit the ideas, practices and structures that constitute that society, and must act within this pre-existing context. However, we also have agentic power to transform or reproduce the society we inherit through social activity: “Society stands to individuals, then, as something that they never make, but that exists only in virtue of their activity” (Bhaskar, 1979:34).

Critical realism gives an advantage over more relative discursive approaches as in allowing that there are partially non-discursive elements at play (Sims-Schouten et al, 2007: 103). Claims made about childrearing can be critically evaluated, by acknowledging that the physical child is real and different interpretations of scientific knowledge about the child may be more or less truth-like. Real children exist independently from conceptions of childhood. For example, childrearing manuals may conceptualize a childhood where children develop through normative ages and stages, but real children exist independently from the conception and may or not conform to the concept. In turn, the 'ages and stages' concept of child-development influences our perception of and behavior towards real children (through demi-reality). Critical realism contends that there is a reality, but peoples' varied perception and interpretation of that reality matters.

By taking this approach I hope to not only describe the construction of conceptions of childhood, and childrearing mores, but be able to critically evaluate the conceptions of childrearing as more or less truth-like.

### 5.3 The Reproduction, Transformation and Emergence of Ideas

To understand the causal effect of parenting ideas in 21st century England it is vital to understand the inherited culture from which current ideas emerged. People are influenced by inherited cultures, consisting of a group of beliefs and ideas about society (including about childrearing), which they did not create (Bhaskar, 1998:36; Alderson, 2013). Through human actions and engagement these ideas can be accepted, adapted or rejected. Subjects' interaction with inherited cultures, reproduce or transform the objective features of a culture. This process is essential to society<sup>49</sup> since as Bhaskar, (1979:36) states:

people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so.

The concept of emergence can be applied to ideas; to provide a means of understanding how new knowledge and misunderstandings emerge from previous knowledge (Alderson, 2013). Theories of childrearing have emerged and built on each other, although the later ideas cannot be reduced to

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<sup>49</sup> Society and culture are not interchangeable. In line with Maxwell (2012) and Archer () definition of society – or more precisely societal structure – as material, whereas culture is ideational.

the former. Some of the contradictions in current childrearing pedagogy can be understood by tracing the gradual emergence of ideas, through reproduction and transformation. Alderson (2013:67) traces knowledge of childhood, for example, from 'scientific-medical childcare manuals, into developmental psychology, and then slowly into the social study of childhood', with one discipline emerging from (but irreducible to) the other

The emergence of new ideas in parenting pedagogy can be traced from early 20th century medical and hygiene advice, through behaviourism and psychoanalytic theory to child-development theory and to current neuroscientific claims. However, this process is neither strictly linear, nor necessarily progressive. New knowledge can be forgotten, and old ideas readopted. New knowledge and greater understanding may be achieved, but new misunderstandings also arise in new contexts (Alderson, 2013). Nor is the process strictly rational, as the conservative philosopher Scruton (2017:4) contends, 'ideas have a far-reaching influence over human affairs; but one should recognise also that they do not arise only from other ideas, and often have roots in biological, social and political conditions that lie deeper than rational argument.'

Ideas about childrearing have an experiential and emotional element, that may lie deeper than rational argument. The ideas that emerge in academia, science, parenting pedagogy and policy are not simply adopted by parents. Parental childrearing knowledge is continually being produced through evaluation and reflection, as a parent negotiates salient ideas about childrearing, in the context of to their particular child and family:

"As human beings, 'knowing' and reflecting subjects, we continually evaluate the experiences we are making, which may lead to changing our actions and practices in various respects. Since we have language, this can happen just by our partaking in and discussing other people's experience and notions. Therefore, even the social phenomena under study might themselves change through people's learning of and adapting to – or rejecting and opposing – knowledge continually being produced in society." (Danermark et al, 1997:35)

Bhaskar suggests this dynamic relationship between structure and agency forms the bedrock of sociological study. He calls this the ***transformational model of social activity*** (TMSA<sup>50</sup>) (Bhaskar, 1979). Society can be understood as a set of structures, practices and relationships which are reproduced and transformed by human beings (Bhaskar, 1979:36). New structures, practices and relationships emerge from the transformation. This breaks down the barrier between structure and

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<sup>50</sup> This model does not allow social objects to be regarded as external to human activity, "possessing a life of their own and coercing the individual" (Bhaskar, 1978:31) Or suggest society is created in an intentional manner. Nor does it conflate structure with agency. Bhaskar describes the any explanation of social object which ignores the pre-existence of society as the error of voluntarism. On the other hand, not acknowledging that society is activity dependent is to commit the error of reification. For Bhaskar attempts at conflating structure and agency commit both errors.

agency and positions human agents as “bio-pycho-social structures with emergent powers of intentionality” (Gorski, 2013:668)

When building my conceptual framework, the literature review has exposed a simple expectation within policy circles that applying parenting advice will raise up parenting practice; evidenced by a political desire develop a universal culture of parenting experts and advice:

We want to see a culture where the key aspects of good parenting are widely understood, and where all parents recognise that they can benefit from advice and support on parenting skills... we want access to parenting advice and support once a child is born to be considered the norm.(DWP & DfE, 2011:38)

But this is made problematic due to the variety of advice, and its innate contradictions (Hardyment, 2007). Cameron’s (2016) assertion that “we all need more help” with parenting, expresses the hope that once exposed to parenting education, parents will change their behaviour, and this in turn will change the behaviour of their children. This stratagem represents a widespread belief in the power of expert knowledge to inform childrearing (Furedi, 2008; Lee, 2014). But the relationship between education and behaviour may not be as simple as parents passively reproducing the expert advice. Parents may interpret advice differently, rejecting, adopting, or transforming the ideas (Hardyment, 2007; Hays 1998). Therefore, there is a need to further understand the relationship between individual parents and parenting-pedagogy, before being able to evaluate the potential power of parenting-pedagogy to effect change. To gain insight into how mothers negotiate childrearing ideas (aim 1) I will identify how emergent ideas are **adopted**, **rejected** or **transformed** by human agents.

## 5.4 Childrearing Manuals: Establishing the Dominant Childrearing Discourse

My initial investigation found the same sets of ideas presented across various platforms. For example, Webster-Stratton’s *Incredible Years* parenting education programme is available through parenting classes (Incredible Years is one of the approved programmes for the CANparent<sup>51</sup> parenting classes and the children’s charity Barnados), and a best-selling childrearing manual. Nanny and celebrity parenting ‘expert’, Jo Frost has ‘Supernanny’ television programmes, books, a parenting app and a website. A set of dominant ideas are present in childrearing books, websites, magazines, newspapers, social media, discussions with

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<sup>51</sup> CANparent is a UK state-funded universal parenting education initiative.

professionals (health visitors, teachers, children center workers, nurses, nursery staff, parenting class facilitators), and peer-to-peer informal advice. My research could therefore have focused on any number of textual, visual and aural sources. However, I chose to concentrate on childrearing manuals, since they not only comprehensively present current ideas in a clear textual form ready for analysis, but have been identified as presenting a useful reflection of the differing dominant cultural models of raising children (Apple, 2006; Faircloth 2014; Hays, 1998; Stearns, 2003) since the mid-eighteenth century (Hardyment 2007). This meant that I could trace the emergence of childrearing ideologies within the same format, which could not be accessed through aural accounts or the more ephemeral and recent phenomena of newer media platforms. The parenting manuals represent an “important 'cultural script' or 'ideal' to which parents respond in negotiating their own practices” (Faircloth, 2014a:31).

The childrearing manuals became a data source which could inform, and interreact with, the data from the parent interviews. To be used as meaningful data I had to ensure that the childrearing books were bought by parents, and the ideas potentially read and disseminated<sup>52</sup>. I chose my childrearing manual data by using the Amazon best seller rating. This is both for general books and broken down into categories. For example, Tanya Bryson’s (2102) *The Whole Brain Child* ranks 701 in books and:

“#2 in [Books](#) > [Health, Family & Lifestyle](#) > [Families & Parents](#) > [Raising Children](#) > [Child Development](#)  
 #2 in [Books](#) > [Health, Family & Lifestyle](#) > [Psychology & Psychiatry](#) > [Applied Psychology](#) > [Psychotherapy](#)  
 #2 in [Books](#) > [Science & Nature](#) > [Medicine](#) > [Medical Sciences A-Z](#) > [Psychotherapy & Clinical Psychology](#)”  
**Amazon**

Some of the books are recently published and had a fashionable impact (quickly joining the best-seller lists) and some have been in print for decades and could be considered “classics”; for example Dr Green’s *Toddler Taming* was first published in 1975 and its 30<sup>th</sup> edition was published in 2006 and Dr Spock’s *Baby and Childcare*, first published in 1945 and its 9<sup>th</sup> edition (updated and revised by Robert Needham) was published in 2011. I originally chose only books which discuss children between two and eight years old, since I was interested in how childhood was constructed and represented by childrearing manuals. The mothers in my sample all had at least one child in this age range, and so were potentially part of the intended readership. I had planned to utilize baby care manuals to provide valuable background, (this study focuses on childrearing rather than baby care); however, the baby care manuals were referred to by participants thus became included within the

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<sup>52</sup> Simply being bought doesn’t equate with being read, rather it reflects an opportunity to be read.

analysis. Mothers used manuals more in the early years than subsequently, and had strong and lasting feelings, both positive and negative, about the books read in early motherhood. It became clear that the experience of baby care books had a residual influence of maternal identity and childrearing approaches in the subsequent years. It also emerged that themes from the baby-care continued into child-care books, for example child-centered practices versus routines. I ignored specialized books dealing with specific challenges, such as autism or extreme behaviour issues as these were not referenced by my interview sample. Although I will also refer to best-selling books on issues such as screen-time and sleep when relevant, the study concentrates on books offering general parenting advice reflecting current childrearing ideologies. I originally analysed thirty books and identified the main trends in childrearing thought, including behaviourism, pop-neuroscience, child-development and positive parenting. I chose to include this number of books to establish the range of available ideas within a vast field. It was only when I reached saturation, in that the same ideas were presented again and again, that I stopped adding to the data source. As I read themes started to emerge and I began to sort the books thematically into child-centred, attachment-mothering, neuroparenting, behaviourist, positive parenting, Adlerian communication and professional approaches from Nannies and Nurses( See Section 6.3 ‘Childrearing Pedagogy Past and Present’ for a discussion of these categories.)I ensured that there was at least one book from each category in my sample. Below is a table detailing the books selected, their highest Amazon best seller rating, the author’s background and the dominant childrearing standpoint. After the interviews the list of manuals increased to thirty-six, as I included the baby books mothers referred to in the interviews. The table below shows which books were added to the sample. I also examined websites connected to the books in my sample, and books and websites referenced by my participants. This data added to the conceptual framework of current childrearing ideology which mothers negotiate as they raise their children

## Selected Childrearing Manuals

Author	Title	Date	Rating	Target Age	Author background	Original data set?	Dominant childrearing standpoint
Faber, A & Mazlish, E	How to Talk so Kids will Listen & ...	2001	1	children	Writers, workshop providers	yes	Adlerian
Sears, W&M	The Good Behaviour Book	2005	649	children	Paediatrician	yes	Attachment
Sears, W&M	The Baby Book	2005	83	babies	Paediatrician and Nurse	no	Attachment
Palmer, Sue	Detoxing Childhood	2009	605	children	Teacher and campaigner	yes	Behaviour
Berman,	Permission to Parent	2014	861	children	Psychiatrist	no	Behaviour
Briers, S.	Superpowers for Parents	2008	33	children	Psychologist	yes	Behaviour
Green, C	New Toddler Taming	2006	49	0 to 5	Paediatrician	yes	Behaviour
Hughs Joshi, L	New Old-Fashioned Parenting	2015	104	children	Journalist	yes	Behaviour
Janis-Norton, N	Calmer Easier Happier Parenting	2012	6	children	Teacher	yes	Behaviour
Latta, N	The Politically incorrect parenting book	2012	263	children	Phycologist and clinician	yes	Behaviour
Nelson, J	Positive Discipline	2013	77	children	Psychologist, educator, mother	yes	Behaviour
Palmer, Sue	Toxic Childhood	2015	201	children	Teacher and campaigner	yes	Behaviour
Phelan, T.W.	1-2-3 Magic Effective Discipline for children	2010	8	2 to 12	Psychologist, CANparent provider	yes	Behaviour
Severe, Sal	How to Behave so your Pre-schooler will too!	2002	496	0 to 5	Psychologist (education)	yes	behaviour
Taylor, C	Divas and Dictators	2009	317	children	Teacher, behaviour specialist	yes	Behaviour
Markham, L	Calm Parents, Happy Kids	2014	18	children	Psychologist, mother	yes	Cc + neuroparenting
Gonzalez, C.	Kiss Me!	2012	1406	children	Author	no	Child centred
Hogg, T	Secrets of the Baby Whisperer	2002	71	babies	Nurse, television presenter	no	Child centred
Leach, P	Your Baby and Child	2010	186	0 to 5	Psychologist	yes	Child centred
Oakwell-Smith, S	The Gentle Parenting Book	2016	21	0 to 7	Psychologist, Doula, , homoeopath	no	Child centred
Spock, B., & Needham, R.	Dr Spock's Baby and Childcare	2012	364	0 to 8	Paediatricians	yes	Child centred
Oakwell-Smith, S	Toddler Calm	2013	33	0 to 5	Psychologist, Doula, , homoeopath	yes	Child-centred
Ford G.	The New Contented Little Baby Book	2006	9	babies	Nanny	No	Expert Nannies
Ford, G	The Contented Toddler Years	2006	44	2 to 5	Nanny/nurse	yes	Expert Nannies
Frost, J	Jo Frost's confident toddler Care	2011	2	2 to 5	Nanny, television presenter	yes	Expert Nannies
Mewes, K	The 3 Day Nanny	2012	141	0 to 8	Nanny, television presenter	yes	Expert Nannies
Skenazy, L.	Free Range Kids	2010	330	children	Journalist	yes	Free Range
Seigal, D., J. & Bryson, T	The Whole Brain Child	2012	4	children	Psychiatrist, and Psychotherapist	yes	Neuroparenting
Sunderland, M	What Every Parent Needs to Know	2016	5	0 to 8	Child Psychotherapist	yes	Neuroparenting
Byron, T	Your Child, Your Way	2007	151	children	Psychologist, television presenter	yes	Positive Parenting
Cohen, L.J.	Playful Parenting	2012	71	children	Psychologist,	yes	Positive parenting
Eanes, R.	Positive Parenting	2016	108	children	Writer and mother	yes	positive parenting
Hartley-Brewer, E	Happy Children through Positive Parenting	2005	375	children	Writer	yes	Positive parenting
Saad, C. & Saad, N.	Kids Don't Come with a Manual	2015	61	children	Teacher and NLP practitioner.	yes	positive parenting
Webster-Stratton, C	The Incredible Years	2005	67	children	psychologist, CANparent provider	yes	Positive parenting
Biddulph, S	The Complete Secrets of Happy Children	2003	21	children	Psychologist, family therapist	yes	PP + child dev.
Biddulph, S	10 Things Girls Need Most	2017	63	children	Psychologist, family therapist	yes	PP + child dev.

## 5.5 Selecting the Interview Site

Several of my interviews took place in play-gyms, this was a practical consideration as it allowed the mothers to lightly supervise a playing child whilst talking. The play-gym is a site of mother-and-mother talk, and children's play; where friendly chat about childrearing happens organically, and children are afforded independence to explore. After the first few interviews, I began suggesting play-gyms as the best meeting place when children were present.

I initially offered the participants a choice of interview venue. When a middle-age, middle-class stranger (such as myself) enters one's home to talk about childrearing it is usually in an official, maybe supportive and maybe judgmental capacity (such as a midwife, health visitor or teacher). This made it slightly more challenging to build the rapport necessary when meeting in a participant's home. I found participants responding in a marginally more anxious and 'performative' way when interviewed at home.

In the interviews where young children were present, they were, understandably, competing with me for their mother's attention. I sensed an unease from the mothers about having their interactions with their children observed (especially in a home setting) and there was an element of justification and performance<sup>53</sup>. For example, a participant, Amy, gave me an unelicited justification for giving her children treats; 'We don't do treats normally, you're here today, they've had a piece of chocolate and a packet of crisps because I'm distracting them.' By giving this information, she was clarifying her position as a 'good mother' who adheres to recommendations of limiting junk food and uses parenting techniques (distraction) judiciously. I understood such statements and performances as displays of the childrearing scripts, rather than a true reflection of private childrearing practices. Since this is not an observational study, I preferred to interview without children present, or at a site where children could be happily occupied.

## 5.6 Selecting Participants

I am using a small participant selection of eleven mothers with whom I spent between one - and three-hours talking one-to-one, see table below for approximate interview lengths and words transcribed. These interviews generated over 98,000 words of data. This intensive approach is consistent with qualitative critical realist research as the endeavour to find causal explanation in a limited number of cases (Maxwell, 2012). Parr argues that 'This more detailed approach is necessary

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<sup>53</sup> This 'performance' is illustrated by the participant, Amy's exchange with her daughter about a conditional treat discussed at the end of the next section.



to understand the specific causal connections and dynamics associated with the phenomena under study' (Parr, 2013:196). It was also a pragmatic decision since I was working within the constraints of a single researcher with limited time, and eleven interviews has generated nearly ten thousand words of data for analysis.

Allen and Duncan Smith (2008:23) imply that, the childrearing books are a necessary knowledge base on a par with extended family support. I wanted to talk to those parents who "could read the guidebooks", (who form part of the majority of British parents), and gain insight into how childrearing ideas are negotiated and understood. Although much of the literature refers to 'parents' I have decided to concentrate on mothers. The term 'parenting' hides the gendered nature of much childrearing. While fathers are increasingly targeted by expert advice, mothers are the parents expected to perform most of the childrearing tasks and are more likely to reduce their paid employment in favour of child-care (Crittenden, 2010; Pedersen, 2011; Senior 2014). I originally planned to include fathers, and I interviewed two fathers. However, as my research of the literature progressed it became increasingly clear that this focus was too broad. Mothers and fathers are presented differently and play distinct roles within families (Dermott 2008). Research has also indicated that they have a different relationship towards ideals of parenting, and childrearing advice books (Pederson, 2012; Faircloth, 2014). My own interviews bore this out, with fathers often portrayed as more sceptical about childrearing advice. I decided to concentrate on mothers who, in contemporary Britain, are most often the primary careers for children (Pedersen, 2012; Palkovitz et al, 2014) and targeted by general advice books (Lee, 2014; Hays, 1998). It is also mothers who are most severely criticized and targeted by early intervention policies (McVarish, 2016; Gillies et al 2017).

I am specifically concerned with the development of British childrearing ideas, and so did not seek mothers with diverse cultural influences (outside the traditions of British childrearing ideas) that could confound my findings. This meant excluding recent immigrants to this country, but including second or third generation settlers as part of an inclusive British culture. The participants are all British, living in Yorkshire with at least one child aged between two and eight. The sample is indicative of my personal desire to understand the parenting culture that I am participating in. I am also a British mother living in Yorkshire (I discuss this further in section 5.7 *Mothers Like Myself*.)

I recruited participants through 'friendship pyramiding' (Hermes, 1995); by asking parents I knew to ask a friend (whom I did not know) if they would participate. I provided leaflets explaining the project (see appendix 3). Thus, I was provided with a participant sample from my own parenting

culture, but not from my intimate circle. My friends were very obliging<sup>54</sup>, asking their friends, acquaintances, and work colleagues to participate. I did not select on the basis of social class, but my recruitment method meant that the social class of my participants reflected the range of my own social circle which is broadly in line with the new “fuzzy and complex” middle layers as described by Savage (2015) in his Bourdieu influenced *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*:

“...classes are indeed being fundamentally remade. Away from longstanding differences between middle and working class, we have moved towards a class order which is more hierarchical in differentiating the top (which we call the wealth elite) from the bottom which we call ‘the precariat’ which consists of people who struggle to get by on a daily basis, but which is more fuzzy and complex in its middle layers.”(4)

The willingness of my participants to discuss childrearing ideas with a researcher suggests a self-selecting group. This is a selection of mothers who are open to reflective childrearing, and this bias is acknowledged in my findings. However, willing maternal reflection can be seen as a component of contemporary parenting ideology (Apple, 2005; Reece, 2013); therefore my sample is purposely selected as mothers who participate in the majority (reflective) childrearing culture – the parents who potentially “read the guidebooks”.

Within this seemingly homogeneous sample I aimed to examine the diversity of childrearing ideas and practices; to gain insight into how salient ideas are adopted, rejected or transformed by human agents. I was looking for a range of viewpoints and experiences within the selection parameters. ‘Participating in the majority British parenting culture’ is a vast category and includes many different ideas, and viewpoints. Despite being from one geographic locale, my sample of participants is varied. The participant’s occupations include teachers, a teaching assistant, insurance clerks, project manager, civil servants, hairdressers and stay-at-home-mothers. Owing to age of their children and reflecting current working patterns<sup>55</sup> just over half of the sample of the mothers work part time, but two are in full time work and three are stay-at-home mothers. Some participants have only one child, others have multiple, and the sample includes two mothers of twins. The relationship status is also varied, including married, single and divorced, heterosexual and lesbian. The mothers’ ages range from twenty-eight to forty-eight. The sample includes mothers with religious convictions and those without religion. Although the majority of participants are white British, one participant is mixed race British and two have mixed race children. The mothers’ educational attainment in my participant

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<sup>54</sup> One draw-back to this method of sourcing participants is that friends may want to know what the participant said in the interview. Their curiosity is understandable, but it is easily dealt with by appealing to ethical constraints, and politely refusing to be drawn.

<sup>55</sup> For family working trends see the Modern Families Index, 2019: [https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/mfi2019\\_full/](https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/mfi2019_full/)

sample ranges from level 2 (GCSE) to level 8 (PhD), and includes mothers identifying as working-class and middle-class.

Table two: The Mothers I talked To

	Age Range	Marital status	Education Level <sup>56</sup>	Children	Approx. Length of interview	Words transcribed
Amy	40-45	Married	6	Charlie (2) Olivia (2)	130 minutes	8308
Alison	45-50	Married	3	Boy (30) Girl (28) Boy (24) Boy (10) Evie (7)	140 minutes	11077
Becky	30-35	Married	7	Harry (8) Jake (5) Lucy (5)	120 minutes	10068
Charlotte	45-50	Married	8	Edward (7)	170 minutes	16346
Louise	35-40	Married	4	Elsie (3) Alfie (1)	80 minutes	7948
Claire	35-40	Single	6	Callum (6) Alexander (2)	70 minutes	5453
Hannah	35-40	Married	6	Leo (6) Eva (1)	60 minutes	3481
Jan	35-40	Married	5	Kate (7) Milo (3)	75 minutes	7813
Maris	35-40	Separated	2	Boy (21) Boy (19) Boy(17) Lily (6)	160 minutes	9340
Jess	30-35	Married	7	Eliza (8) Verity (4)	120 minutes	13024
Miranda	25-30	Single	3	Zach (2)	80 minutes	5580

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<sup>56</sup> Education levels explained: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

I do not propose that my sample is representative of social class-distinctions, or that this is a class-comparison study. By acknowledging the “socially and materially grounded nature of childrearing” (Gillies, 2005:835), social class in this study is recognised as contributing to the material and conceptual standpoint from which parenting culture is participated in. I recognise that individual childrearing beliefs and practice are contingent in part on social class (Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Putnam 2015; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Kagan 1998), but as I argue in the literature review, I am sceptical about claims that childrearing practice is wholly predicated on social class; and question the ethics of treating people as representatives of a social class. The mothers who form the sample are participating in the same parenting culture, but each from an individual standpoint and context.

#### 5.6.1 Anonymity

The practice of anonymisation has been conceived to ‘avoid harm’ (Elliot et al, 2016) to research participants. To this end, in much research names, places, occupations and occasionally gender is beclouded to render the participants unidentifiable, occasionally individual cases are merged or unidentified in order to occlude personal details (Thomson et al, 2005). However, a feminist ‘ethics of care’ approach for social research has highlighted inadequacy of a paternalistic ‘protection’ of subjects and proposed instead an approach situated in specific contexts and characterized by an emphasis on on-going responsibilities to others and our -selves (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). Following the ‘ethics of care’, the decision to anonymize is not simply a technical or procedural requirement but may be better thought of as a series of open-ended ethical questions (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002; Lomax and Fink, 2016; Gabb, 2010; Moore, 2012). For example, invoking Virginia Wolfe’s observation that ‘I would venture a guess that Anon[...] was often a woman’ Niamh Moore (2012:332) suggests that

*For much of history anonymity did not protect the vulnerable, but excluded women and others from authorship and ownership of their own words, erasing them from the archive, even from history, and in the process creating vulnerability through rendering people nameless.*

This does not mean that participants should not be anonymized, but rather, as Moore (2012:338) argues, for ‘the need for, and benefits of, a careful situated and negotiated ethical practice around naming or anonymisation.’

I wished for my participants’ individual voices to be preserved. Ideally, I wished for the reader to follow the ideas of each participant and build a picture of a real person negotiating childrearing culture. Recognising that some of the mothers I talked to were reluctant to speak under their given

names, I felt that using generic descriptors such as mother of two, or woman age 30 would not reflect the individuality that is granted a named person. By agreeing to use a fictional name for each participant, I hoped to preserve their individual standpoints and narratives. However, as Thomson et al (2005) observe “removing identifying information also, inevitably, removes contextual information that has potential value to the researcher.’ To this end I have not changed the substance of the women’s data beyond omitting place names and providing new names in much of the data. However, this approach must be balanced against the possibility that people’s voices could be recognised. As Jaqui Gabb (2010:14) suggests when reflecting on the ethical and epistemological dilemma’s faced by family researchers, ‘The need to establish a trusting research relationship is paramount in research on family living because participants are simultaneously revealing identity publicly to the outside world and just as importantly privately among family members.’ Through a commitment to adopt a feminist ‘ethics of care’, I realised that I would have to compromise between allowing women’s distinct voices to be heard and explicitly revealing matters which other family members may wish to be kept private . To this end there are times I have tried to care for the participants by occasionally using a double pseudonym, adding the names Kirsty, Mary, Karen and Pamela to the project. These names are used for more than one participant. I also changed biographical markers in these sections, such as age and number of children. I did this when participants were discussing aspects of their own childhoods, and when they discussed practices, such as smacking, which carry social disapproval and identification could lead to possible social discomfort for either the mother or a family member. I hoped that Kirsty, Mary, Karen and Pamela will not be automatically associated with any particular participant. I believe these measures respond both to the traditional call for anonymization, where ‘the measures, which you put in place to manage re-identification risk, should be proportional to the risk and its likely impact’ (Elliot et al, 2016), and to the feminist ethics of care which call for a responsive and empathic understanding of the participant’s position.

## 5.7 Mothers Like Myself – social class and positionality

By claiming that I am participating in the same parenting culture as my participants, I am not insinuating that I talked to people who shared all my childrearing beliefs, and ideas and practices. As the critical realist, Maxwell (2012), explains, “although sharing is one possible form of participation, it is not the only one” (28). Human knowledge is always conceptually mediated and situated within culture, history and society. The individual social and material context also mediates the ideas, beliefs and practices of mothers (Thurer, 1994). Rather than a culture based on similarity and shared beliefs, values and practices, current parenting culture may be a system of diverse beliefs and values

connected through interaction (Mawell, 2012: 29). This echoes Raymond Williams's (1965:48) account of the interaction between people and culture as: "A series of unique individuals in real relationships, learning and contributing to a changing pattern." As a participant in a parenting culture, I too have had to negotiate current childrearing ideas and have constructed a maternal identity within this ideological environment, but I cannot assume full understanding with others simply from the position of shared motherhood. As Mannay et al (2018:772) point out 'Motherhood is not a singular category, and assuming that mothers are best suited to interview mothers silences the multifaceted nature of identities, lifestyles, and perspectives and discounts crucial differences between women.' My own experience and position may be at variance with the context of some of my participant's lives.

My identity as middle-class, is instantly obvious due to my southern received pronunciation<sup>57</sup> accent.

Erin Roberts (2018:8) notes that 'Just as the researcher makes judgements about who the interviewee is, so too do interviewees make judgements about the researcher's identity, all of which may or may not correspond with who each person thinks themselves to be.' This is exemplified by my field notes describe a meeting with potential participant; on hearing my accent she asked, "You're not one of them organics, are you?" I asked her for clarification and found that "organics" is a pejorative term for a certain type of intensive middle-class mother; recognizable by her insistence on feeding her child organic food, an option the potential participant considered profligate and silly. At the time I assured the participant that I was not "an organic", but on reflection I recognized it as sharply satirical description of some of my privileged middle-class choices as a mother; which must be accounted for if I was going to understand different perspectives to childrearing. Walkerdine et al (2001:107) frame this as a challenge to any researcher negotiating the context of social class:

The challenge for those who talk about gender and class is being aware of the emotional dynamics within their own lives and finding some way of accounting for themselves, for their own subjective position

As the following interview excerpt shows, mothers are vulnerable to superficial judgement from others based on social class:

Miranda : Oooh, I was really badly judged the other week... I went out for a birthday and one of the women was an NCT teacher. And I just said - because I didn't really know much about the NCT, the only parenting thing I went on was the free one at the hospital, I wasn't going to pay - she was like "Oh no, it's a very middle-class thing.." and I was like [pulls a face] "thanks, I'm just going to put that down to the fact that you've had five

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<sup>57</sup> Received Pronunciation, sometimes referred to as BBC English is a form of standard speech, unlike other accents it is not a regional accent, but has associations with the educated middle classes,

cocktails". Yeah, I just thought that was a bit of a dig, you obviously feel that I'm below the rest of this group.

J: So it's a kind of elite group, the NCT?

Miranda: Yeah, Yeah, and she said it. She runs the classes and I was like, you really don't know me at all. It was really judgemental and I was a bit... I could have taken that really badly, but yeah.. so yeah.

Miranda's dignified assertion that the woman did not "know me at all", illustrates the wounds that stereotypical class-assumptions can inflict, and dangers implicit in ignoring the etiquette which asserts "the public naming of classes is hotly contested and uncomfortable" (Savage, 2015).

Both the NCT woman's elitism and the funny categorization of middle-class mothers as "organics", illustrates how class context shapes not only one's own maternal identity but perceptions of others. It also illustrates an ambiguity towards class; as Skeggs (1997) discusses in her study, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, for some women being labelled working-class by others can have negative connotations of unrespectability, and yet identifying as middle class can be seen as pretentious. Savage (2015) also found that "most people are ambivalent and hesitant about which class they belong to, and when quizzed often prefer to reflect on the way that they straddle different classes." (366) This chimed with some of the participants in this study who claimed to be middle-class parents but from working-class backgrounds.

I had to be careful not to make assumptions of difference or similarity between myself and the participants. It is essential to acknowledge and challenge researcher's preconceptions and 'the propensity for research to be clouded by their subjective assumptions' (Mannay & Creaghan, 2016:86). Jean Duncombe (2002:117) describes interviewing liberal middle-class women "whose tastes and lives" were similar to her own as "enjoyable conversations, where intimate emotional disclosures came so easily that the boundaries between research and friendship seem to blur." She worried that a recognition of similarity led her to assume an understanding which on reflection may be superficial.

However, I found it was not shared social class that created affinity between myself and my participants; it was the similarities and differences in childrearing approach that informed a potential connection with the participants. I felt an affinity with my participants through our shared status as mothers, and we were able to talk mother to mother. As Mannay (2010:93) notes 'shared knowledge and shared understanding can counter the severe imbalance with regard to intimacy and distance between interviewer and interviewee, which is often common in research interviews.' However, this had a potential pitfall, it was easy to assume I understood a participant's rejection or adoption of a

childrearing technique/idea when I had also rejected or adopted it. Like Duncombe (2002:117), I worried that 'over easy rapport has its pitfalls' and could lead to assumptions of a more complete understanding than I had. As Mannay et al (2018:772) observe, 'the problem of overfamiliarity can also mean that the knowledge held by the insider researcher can overshadow the accounts of participants, facilitating the need to "make the familiar strange"' Heeding King and Horrocks, (2010:129) warning against adopting 'a position of "knowing" what participants are feeling and experiencing', I acknowledge that my own childrearing ideas are subjective.

#### *5.7.1 Myself as a Mother*

I believe that there are many ways to raise a child well. How my husband and I raise our daughter , Alice, suits the three of us; but others raise children equally well with different approaches. My daughter is a responsive and pleasant child and there has been very little conflict in our relationship. I do not think this is rare, but it is contrary to the dominant discourse that frames raising children as inherently 'problematic' or conflictual. In common with the mothers I talked to my childrearing includes elements of both cultural scripts. For example, I breastfed my daughter until she was two and half and carried my daughter in a sling, but I also practiced controlled crying. As she got older, I used explanation and discussion in response to rare unwanted behaviors, but I also had strict expectations about manners and behaviour towards others (which Alice invariably fulfilled). Now she is ten she is encouraged to manage her own time and show independence, but we also still have morning and bedtime routines which I feel make daily life easier. I do not have a tribal allegiance to any mothering style, rather I muddle through making things up as I go along and responding to the child I am raising. From my experience raising a child is a cooperative endeavor between all members of a family, including the child herself. Through this study I have realized that this type of personalized hotchpotch of ideas and approaches to childrearing is not unusual. I may not share a particular set of ideas and practices, with another mother, but I do share the experience of working through salient ideas, rejecting, adopting and transforming ideas to suit my family.

There was however a tension between my identity as a fellow mother and my professional identity as a researcher. For example, as a mother I felt I wanted to share my experience, offer and receive advice and encouragement to the other woman; but as I researcher I felt allowing myself to suggest childrearing ideas would block the mother from talking about her own. I wanted the mother to be 'the expert' and didn't want to take on that role.

Erin Roberts (2018:8) suggests that the researcher's self-disclosure during interviews provides a more 'relaxed, conversational nature' which helps 'to facilitate exchange.' In this instance empathic



sharing, agreement and recognition was not used to 'build rapport', I was not instrumentalising sharing. I shared because is it how I relate to other mothers. I empathised with stories of minor frustration such as lost school cardigans, offering my experience to complement theirs. These were moments of mother-to-mother connection. Where I recognised my family in the mother's talk and offered my own experience. For example, I laughed with recognition at one mother's story of her young daughter secretly making 'surprise' cookies 'for mummy' by mixing the entire contents of the baking cupboard and putting it into a cold oven because she knew she wasn't allowed to turn it on. I offered a similar story of finding Alice (then age four) and a friend playing naked in a bath of freezing water. They had clandestinely run themselves a bath whilst the adults were downstairs, but they had tried to be 'good' and only used cold water as they were not 'allowed' to touch the hot tap. When sharing these anecdotes, the participant and I laughed in recognition at the way both our daughters try to be independent and simultaneously act within parameters of 'the good girl', even when transgressing.

In the extract below Becky and I momentarily share and bond over the attraction of 'unboxing' videos for our daughters

*Becky: Because you can get kid's you-tube so it's all people opening prize eggs, people playing with playmobile and building Lego...and stuff...*

*Jonquil: Yes, my daughter likes watching people opening Shopkins [toys]... (giggles).*

*Becky: Yeah that kind of thing! Why!? Kinder eggs and all sorts of stuff like that...*

*Jonquil: Yeah, exactly, why? I don't get it. (giggles).*

*Becky: Me neither (giggles). Crazy.*

In my experience, this type of conversational back and forth where agreement is sort and given is a type of listening mothers regularly use together, to share experience, finding common ground and understanding. As a researcher I felt the need to offer myself through sharing as well as taking the other mother's experience. In retrospect I hope it showed the participants that I have an experiential understanding of living with a child, but sharing was an instinctual response whilst participating in mother-talk.

One childrearing practice which I have rejected in my own life is the use of threats and bribes. I have consciously avoided this way of relating to children as a mother, teacher and friend. In my personal life I agree with Kohn (1999) that these techniques are disrespectful to the child as a person and counter-productive for teaching children right from wrong. My daughter has never had a reward chart, a time out, a 1-2-3 or a punishment. I would find any such technique alien and have not found

a time when it would be necessary. Obviously, I have no idea how I would behave with a less 'easy' child. I am raising my child within the same culture as my participants and am familiar with feelings of judgement and guilt around childrearing and recognized Becky's anecdote about changing her childrearing behaviors when there was a risk of negative judgement. This means that I am loathe to appear as judgmental or critical towards other mothers, not only because an ethic of care demands that researchers conduct and adapt their research in care-full ways, (Foley et al ,2019; Edwards and Mauthner, 2002)but because I empathise with mothers feeling the risk of judgement.

### *5.7.2 Avoiding judgement*

At the times my own ideas and practices about childrearing conflicted with those of my participants I made a conscious decision to remain silent, since sharing my own childrearing ideology with participants may disrupt the purpose of the interview. Jaqui Gabb (2010:7) describes how ' the researcher adopts the role of active listener: they neither interject nor reorient the narrative however this unfolds.' Gabb suggests that this approach guards against the researcher's presupposition about the significance of particular events or ideas. Despite having a framework of topics to be discussed, I wanted the participant to decide on the significance and meaning of the phrases presented and I endeavoured to be an 'active listener' as the mother explored the topic cards. This was at time slightly uncomfortable, as Duncombe and Jessop (2002:115) observe it is difficult to "smile, nod and appear to collude" with views I oppose (such as the acceptance of physical punishment, or bribes and threats in childrearing). I had to both privately acknowledge my own positionality, and suspend my judgement, to extract the information needed. For example, during the interview with an educated, liberal middle-class mother, Amy, she had a dialogue with her daughter which I found antithetical to my own childrearing practice. My field notes describe how Amy's two-year-old daughter had stopped playing alone, and wanted her mother's attention, leading to the following conversation:

AMY: {talking to Olivia} Do you want more chocolate?

Olivia: Yes

AMY: Then you need to be a good girl, then you might get some more. Becuase the way you're going, you're not having anymore.

Olivia: oh..oh..

AMY: Well you need to be a good girl then, because that's how it works. Is chocolate a treat?

Olivia: Treat!

AMY: And who gets treats?

Olivia: Good girls.

AMY: Yeah.

By using conditionality to attempt to improve behaviour, the dialogue conforms to the childrearing techniques advocated by pop-behaviourist and positive parenting childrearing ideas. The interview situation may exert pressure on a participant to perform the 'good mother' and seek approval by demonstrating a normative display of parental control. There is a danger that 'the interaction in the research interview tends to elicit 'presentations of self which largely conform to the dominant cultural forms' (Aldred and Gillies, 2002:146). To understand Amy's perspective, I had to acknowledge that Amy was managing her responses to a potentially judgmental interview situation. I also had to silently acknowledge my bias against this type of childrearing method and manage my own response to her childrearing. This dialogue happened early in the interview, before the rapport that can allow confidence and reflection was fully established. During the textual elicitation method, when Amy had relaxed, she had a chance to evaluate this childrearing approach. It became apparent that Amy was not as convinced about conditional rewards as her performance indicated. She was in the process of negotiating and questioning the pop-behaviourist childrearing ideas, and felt a level of anxiety about her use of the technique:

Amy: I'm a bit anxious about rewarding them for... if you're a good girl today. It would just be nice if you are motivated to be good actually, without chocolate at the end of it - and that's your motivation; because I don't know where that leads you long term. It's not that we never go down that road in desperation, because sometimes we do. A bit of bribery works a treat doesn't it? But yeah, I have some level of anxiety about reward.

My field notes show that Amy's reflections reinforced my suspicion that the previous dialogue had been a display, performed "in desperation" to persuade her child to cooperate with the unusual situation of the interview. Intervening and promoting my own childrearing beliefs (that bribes are undesirable) would have been at the expense of discovering Amy's deeper reflective reservations about conditionality in childrearing. More importantly, challenging Amy's interaction with her daughter, by stating my position, would not have been ethically justifiable as it could potentially make her feel defensive and uncomfortable. Through-out the research process my positionality must be acknowledged and explored to address the risk of reinforcing an agenda rather than opening it up and questioning it (Maxwell, 2012). But my position should not necessarily be shared with the participants lest it impacts on their well-being, and their freedom to express their own position. As a mother researching childrearing ideas, I am a participant within the culture under scrutiny, but this does not translate to shared beliefs and values.

## 5.8 Finding the Method

A major methodological challenge was how to discuss the vast content and coverage presented in the parenting books (and across related platforms) to find out how parents *responded to, understood and negotiated the dominant ideas* about childrearing practice.

I began by looking at a selection of books with the participants and gathered first impressions. But, first impressions were rather superficial, and although this activity gave insight into how a parent might choose a parenting book, it did not allow for an in-depth exploration of the content. It did not allow me to access the mechanisms (a critical realist term for the underlying processes) involved in a parent's choice of childrearing strategies or explore how mothers negotiated the advice presented to them.

I asked participants to bring childrearing books/websites which they had read. This proved a useful short cut to understanding the childrearing ideas which were particularly salient, attractive or uninviting to the participant. But this did not work for participants who had not read many parenting books or used websites. Nevertheless, even if a parent has not read a book promoting particular ideas, I suspected that they may still be salient as part of the dominant culture; and present a cultural script (Faircloth, 2014:31) for parents to negotiate. I wanted to find out if ideas and 'parenting' language had been assimilated by mothers (Stearns, 2003) – regardless of their reading choices. For these participants I needed an interview method to unlock their responses to dominant childrearing ideology over and above their use of parenting books and websites.

I considered how one viable way to elicit rich data would be photo-elicitation, a method based on "the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2003:13). Discussing childrearing practices by sharing family albums or giving participants disposable cameras to document family life, could provide valuable access to a participants' individual childrearing beliefs. Photo elicitation methods have been promoted by social scientists as a way to create "dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher." (Harper, 2003:15). The idea that photo elicitation interviews are "particularly helpful in exploring every day, taken for granted things in research participants lives." (Rose, 2016:316) appealed to me. But I was uncertain how this approach would directly access the relationship between childrearing practice and childrearing ideas; this method may be suited to a more general and open-ended study of motherhood.

My eventual decision not to ask participants to share family albums during the interview or take photographs of family life was rooted in concern that asking mothers to share photographs of their

childrearing could be potentially uncomfortable. I was not sure that I would want to share my own photographs with a researcher and felt it would be unethical to ask participants to do something that I wouldn't want to do myself. Photographs are intimate. It is one thing to be invited to share an album by a friend, as I was on the playdate, but different to demand it from a stranger. The sharing of the album was a symbol of friendship and intimacy. I also had concerns about ownership of images and child consent; family albums contain pictures of children which the child may not want to be shared beyond the family either now or later (Nutbrown, 2011). In a different context, such intrusion may be justifiable, but I could not claim that this intrusion was in the best interests of my participants. I also could not make this claim since, although I was convinced it would produce rich data, I was uncertain that this method would generate the specific discussion and information I needed to fulfil my research aims

A less intrusive way to use visual elicitation would be to provide a box of cut-out images of parents and children and ask parents to make a collage representing their childrearing ideas. Using the visual in this way is also regarded as an effective method of eliciting views and experiences beyond the semi-structured interview (Mannay, 2010). Talking through the image choices could provide a valuable way to access general assumptions, emotions and beliefs around childrearing practice and ideas.

I used this as part of my approach in the first interview I conducted, asking my participant to "make a collage showing your view of childrearing". However, this participant, Becky, demonstrated a resistance to collage, intimating that it was a childish activity. This suggests participants willing to talk about childrearing expect to talk and may not be open to alternative forms of expression. It may be that a different participant would have embraced the collage activity more enthusiastically, but I had already had feedback from some other potential participants, suggesting they were unsure about the collage. The question was "do I have to do the collage?" and the obvious ethical answer is a respectful "no, of course you do not."

Wanting to appear helpful Becky offered a spider diagram<sup>58</sup> in lieu of a collage, which she claimed

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<sup>58</sup> See appendix 5 for a larger copy of the spider diagram

Becky's Spider Diagram



was an easier way for her to think than art; Becky chose to visually present words relating to childrearing.

This diagram showed a very idealized view of family. I could detect themes such as concerted cultivation, discipline, time and family relationships. But it produced a short and superficial discussion. Maybe a more experienced interviewer could have reached beyond the surface

explanations, or dissolved Becky's resistance to collage. I felt the participant was feeding me a 'staged' presentation of self (Goffman, 1971) based on assumed ideals of parenting. This was interesting as a way to understand normative childrearing ideals through maternal 'display', but it did not access how the participant negotiated these ideas. This superficiality and 'display' was highlighted later on in the interview when we were discussing how mothers feel judged by others. The participant started to discuss Facebook<sup>59</sup>:

"There's the Facebook thing as well the whole social media, and that's terrible for feeling judged, and judging yourself against what other people's lives seem to like. Trips out, baking, crafts. And you know, you know it's not real." Becky

We looked at her spider diagram again, which included "trips out, baking, crafts", and I realised that this was indicative of the 'display' Becky was describing as "not real." With the ubiquitous nature of social media, mothers are adept at presenting an ideal of family life; a maternal display, often presented through carefully selected family photographs and open to comparison with other family 'displays' (Coyne et al, 2017). I do not claim that this superficiality is inherent in visual research methods, rather I suggest the public/private nature of childrearing, maternal awareness of being judged and maternal identity may skew these methods towards superficiality and display in this instance. I am also aware that this problem is integral to qualitative research interviews; as Aldred and Gillies (2002:146) have found, the data from participants will be skewed towards "the everyday pressures to be normal" and "as researchers we elicit performances in which radical difference is suppressed." However, my experience with Becky convinced me that in this instance using a pictorial

<sup>59</sup> I discuss mother's views on social media in further detail in section 9.7, including looking again at Becky's comment.

representation method would invite further opportunities for suppressing difference and displaying conformity. If my aim was to understand how childrearing is 'displayed' (Finch 2007) then methods such as producing and discussing collages, spider-diagrams or exploration of family albums or Facebook pages would be ideal; this is demonstrated by Kehily and Thomson's (2011:64) study where a 'focus upon the visual and material aspects of the study comments upon the significance of display as a site for the unfolding practices of motherhood.'

Despite my attraction to these visual methods I had to make pragmatic judgments about which methods seem most likely to be productive in answering particular research questions (Hammersley, 2008). I was uncertain that these methods would produce the discussion I needed, since I am interested in *ideas* about childrearing, and specifically how the dominant ideas are negotiated (in critical realist terms, the 'mechanisms' involved). I needed a method that explicitly presented the ideas contained in the dominant discourse of childrearing advice (as represented by the childrearing manuals and policy discourse) in a form which encouraged reflexivity rather than display. As these ideas are expressed predominantly through language; I wanted to understand how the language of parenting present in childrearing manuals and parenting discourse was understood by mothers. I needed the language of childrearing forefront within the interview structure in order to "connect the inner world of ideas to the outer world of observable events." (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014:21-22)

## 5.9 Textual Elicitation

I solved the methodological challenge by drawing on photo-elicitation techniques to create a new *textual* elicitation method to access the ideas, language and mechanisms involved in childrearing.

My devised approach was based on a technique, which I used when I was a media studies sixth form teacher, of providing 'topic cards' in order to help the students critique and evaluate ideas.

Remembering how well this worked in an educational setting I thought it could be transferred to a research interview. My technique has similarities with the research method of knowledge elicitation known as card-sorts. Card-sorts ask participants to sort and categorise words and/or pictures on cards and are usually accompanied by qualitative interviews. For example, Lobinger and Bratner (2015:15) coupled qualitative interviews with a card-sort technique 'to capture subjective and intuitive interpretations' of images of politicians.

Closed card-sorts ask participants to sort cards into researcher defined categories. An example of closed sort method is Q-sort, which uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

Participants can sort cards into pre-designed categories, which can then be subject to factor analysis

(Kubitsco and Kaun, 2017) which can ‘reveal patterns of shared subjectivity or shared “ways of thinking.”’ (Stabler et al, 2019:120) Q-sort methods also include a qualitative interview to compliment the quantitative findings. Open card-sorts cannot be as easily analysed quantifiably yet allow participants more freedom of expression. As Fincher and Tenenbun (2005:89) explain, ‘Open sorts, since subjects generate their own terms in naming criteria and categories, are subject – rather than researcher – centred.’

In common with card-sort methods I felt my new textual elicitation method would be ‘effective in eliciting our individual, and often semi-tacit, understanding.’ (Fincher and Tenenbun, 2005:90) However, my technique is different to other card-sort methods. It is less focused on the categories generated by the participants sorting the cards, and more interested in the participants understanding of the terms encountered, enabling participants to critique and evaluate ideas; placing judgement on the childrearing manuals not on the participants’ mothering. Rather than being asked to ‘sort the cards’ this method encouraged the participant to encounter and explore the breadth of advice and its often contradictory nature.

This textual elicitation method was designed to allow the participant to talk from their own perspective, using their own frame of reference but within provided parameters; allowing comparison across interviews. It directly asks mothers to respond to the dominant childrearing ideas, as expressed in language. Using phrases from popular parenting culture, most of which are recognisable and understood by the participants potentially addresses “the need, described in all qualitative methods books, of bridging gaps between the worlds of the researcher and the researched.” (Harper, 2002:20) This method shares some of the value of visual methods such as photo-elicitation, but the opportunity to evoke “information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph’s particular form of representation.” (Harper, 2002:13) has been replaced by the opportunity to interrogate (un)shared meaning of language.

#### *5.9.1 Textual elicitation ‘topic cards’*

I used my analysis of the childrearing-books to identify the dominant childrearing themes and techniques. I then created fifty “topic cards”, representing the content of the books, for example “Time-out”, “Reward Systems”, “Limit Screen Time”, “Love Bombing” and “Family Meals Together”. (see appendix 1) At the interviews, these cards were spread out for the participant to explore, picking out ones to talk about, handling them, picking them up and grouping them if they wished. This method provides an iterative framework where participant interviews are directly informed by the analysis of childrearing-manuals, and the parent interviews are then structured to interact with



and facilitate a re-analysis of the childrearing manuals.

As I suspected at the planning stage, even the participants who had read few parenting manuals were familiar with the ideas and language, and were actively responding to the childrearing ideas presented on the cards by critiquing the ideas, and by doing so reflecting on their own child childrearing and parent-child relationship in the context of the 'advice'.

Participants responded to the cards with a mixture of anecdotes, opinion and explanation. Listening to the participants evaluate the ideas provided a way of glimpsing the mechanisms of reproduction and transformation of ideas employed by the parents. For example, here is participant 'Becky' responding to the topic card "Reward Systems":

"Rewards yeah, been there, we've done the jewels in the pot. We've got away from that then because probably when Lucy and Jude were about two: they loved it but they were only doing it so they would get a prize at the end. When your jar's full you can have a prize. I thought hang on a minute this teaches them that when you behave good you only behave good to get something. Whereas now we've got much more of a focus on, well you behave well because you want to live in a family where everyone gets along and it's happy and pleasant to be here." (Becky)

As I will discuss further in section 10.2.3 in this extract Becky is not rejecting this technique because it failed, but because she is uncertain about the moral implications. Ethical concern is the operative mechanism in Becky's rejection of a standard piece of childrearing advice.

The parent could move freely from topic to topic and respond to complex issues and ideas in their own way, although I had clearly set the parameters of the exercise. This approach also allows participants to return to cards that are particularly relevant to them, giving more information and potentially richer data. Unlike other textual elicitation methods such as card-sort (Kubitsco and Kaun, 2017) I did not ask participants to sort the cards, however some participants grouped and ordered the cards - making their own categories such as "I like", "maybe use" and "would never use", or "soft" and "regimented". In this way they were still presenting themselves and defining their selves as mothers though the exercise. It became increasingly apparent that this method demonstrated the process of maternal identity construction, through the adoption or rejection of childrearing ideas and techniques, as the participants negotiated the ideas presented on each card. The participants were also evaluating the nature of the advice and placing the cards within their own framework of childrearing concepts. Fincher and Tenenber (2005:90) suggest that when card-sort method are employed, 'There is evidence to suggest that the way in which participants categorize entities externally reflects their internal, mental representation of these concepts.'

Aldred and Gillies (2002) have pointed out that display is unavoidable within research interviews, which tend “to elicit presentations of self which largely conform to the dominant cultural forms because of the implicit interactions that shape the interview process.” I do not claim that my textual elicitation method is an exception to this, however, it may help to illuminate the *process* of maternal identity construction, breaking down the barrier of display in four ways.

Firstly, the participants are explicitly asked to evaluate the ideas from the books, rather than evaluate their own childrearing or other mothers. This places judgement on the childrearing *ideas*, rather than the participant, lessening the need to perform. Participants had the opportunity to use their own childrearing beliefs and practices to critique the child-rearing ideas represented by the cards; rather than the dominant childrearing ideas sitting in judgement on themselves as mothers.

Secondly, the method opened up the discussion beyond the participants’ desire to conform to cultural norms by showing the diverse constructs of ‘good’ childrearing. When the topic cards were laid out the contradictory nature of current advice, with different ideologies of childhood vying for dominance, was illustrated. This made the diverse and contradictory representations of the good mother strikingly apparent and allowed for reflection on maternal identity construction. It allowed the discussion to include responses to childrearing ideas which were not part of the participant’s maternal identity and highlighted the implicit choices a mother makes in childrearing. As discussed in section 5.7 I was concerned about imprinting my own childrearing assumptions onto the interviews. This method, like other creative methods, enabled me to ‘make the familiar strange’ (as proposed by Delamont and Atkins cited in Mannay, 2010) by both allowing the participant independent free expression of ideas and by examining the minutiae of childrearing in a unfamiliar way.

Becky 'Liked':

Follow through,

play together,

Talk about right and wrong,

Limited choices,

Family time together,

Read stories together,

Be consistent,

No means No,

Natural

Consequences.



Becky 'did not like':

Nagging,

Evoke authority Figures

Reward systems

1...2...3

Treats for good  
behaviour

Thirdly, this method allows the researcher to interact with the participant as part of a dynamic interaction of meaning creation; understanding that 'the research interview is not a clear window onto the interviewee's experience, rather it is a joint production of an account... through the dynamic interaction' (Aldred and Gillies:146) of participant and researcher. As in other methods which involve the process of creation or activity as part of the interview, the researcher can question and ask for deeper clarification during the creative process, digging under the superficiality of display. As the participants explored the cards, I could open the discussion towards *why* ideas are rejected or adopted, how particular techniques are used, and which ideas were salient.

As researchers using card-sort and photo-elicitation methods have found, working beyond a question and answer format allows a broader exploration of the phenomena under study; "generating participants' critical reflection of an otherwise taken-for-granted lived reality" (Allen, 2011). I would suggest my textual elicitation method allowed the participant to 'work through' the ideas with greater freedom than if I had asked direct questions; sharing some of the advantages claimed for card-sort and visual elicitation techniques (Rose, 2016; Kubitsco and Kaun, 2017), especially the opportunity for exploration of ideas as opposed to answering a specific question. For example, the word "smacking" was on a card. This was picked up by Karen who explored and defended her own

use of smacking in a long, involved soliloquy. Framing the subject as a direct question about Karen's use of physical discipline could have been perceived as a challenge, positioning Karen against normative ideals in childrearing and making her feel more vulnerable to judgment.

Maybe Becky and Karen would give similar responses in a question and answer interview. But it is not certain that I would have asked the questions that would elicit these specific responses, since I was dealing with what Louisa Allen (2011) conceptualizes as 'unknown unknowns'. I suggest this method (like many visual elicitation methods) provides a freedom to meander around the topics, to muse on and evaluate ideas; allowing ideas to appear which may otherwise have been occluded. But unlike visual elicitation methods it foregrounds language.

## 5.10 Final Structure of the Interview

After reflecting on the pilot interview, I found a workable structure for the subsequent interviews. This structure was used in all interviews after the pilot interview:

### *5.10.1 Establishing Context*

I started the interview by asking the to tell me about her family, establishing the context of her childrearing; her relationships and support network. I attempted to put the participant at ease with sympathetic and friendly interest.

### *5.10.2 Establishing Prior Knowledge of Childrearing Advice*

I asked the participants to bring any childrearing books they owned, and to list other sources of childrearing information. We discussed the positive and negative aspects of the advice and the potential the influence of those ideas; in some cases, these books provided a reference point for the participant in the following discussion. Some participants claimed not to have read any material, for these participants the textual elicitation helped me to find out which ideas they had been exposed to.

### *5.10.3 Semi-Structured Thematic Questioning*

I then used a 'topic sheet'<sup>60</sup> (Edwards & Holland, 2013) to prompt discussion about where the mother turned for support and their experience of childrearing advice. We discussed childrearing advice in relation to the following topics; support networks; raising children; concerted cultivation; judgment of mothers by others; past, future and changing childrearing. The topics selected were informed by the formative conceptual framework. The topic sheet provided parameters to the

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<sup>60</sup> See appendix 2 for the interview question 'topic sheet'.

interview discussion but maintained space opportunities for the participants to work through ideas and allowed me to tailor my questions to the individual context whilst maintaining a topic framework (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

#### *5.10.4 Textual Elicitation – responding to dominant childrearing ideas*

A large section of the interview was structured around my textual elicitation method to encourage the participant to evaluate specific childrearing ideas and techniques present in the dominant discourse. I discuss this in detail in the previous section.

#### *5.10.5 Ending and Leaving*

Since my interview sought to encourage participants to reflect on their parenting practices and family relationships, extreme care was needed not to leave the participants feeling discouraged or overly self-critical. To try and mitigate this possibility I ended each interview with a positive request– ‘Please describe a good day with your children’. My hope was to remind the participants of the positive aspects of living with children before concluding the interview. This also provided me with insight to the participants ideal of child/mother/family interaction.

### **5.11 Analysis- A Critical Realist Approach**

I created a critical realist interpretive framework for the analysis; consisting of thematic analysis, interpretive repertoires, identifying mechanisms and retroduction. By employing both thematic analysis and interpretive repertoires I build a picture of modern childrearing culture that recognises ‘...culture as a system of *different* beliefs and values that are connected through interaction.’ (Maxwell, 2012: 29)

#### *5.11.1 Thematic Analysis*

As Clarke and Braun (2017:297) explain. ‘Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data.’ They suggest TA can be ‘used within a ‘critical’ framework, to interrogate patterns within personal or social meaning around a topic, and to ask questions about the implications of these.’ Thematic analysis is not tied to any particular single theoretical framework and can be conducted in different ways (Clarke & Braun, 2018). This includes the critical realist perspective underpinning this study, using thematic analysis to gain access to experiences and meanings and illuminate possible reflective mechanisms at play. Analysis of the childrearing books and the interview data was informed by Clarke and Braun’s (2006;2018) six step recommendations for reflexive thematic analysis. Themes<sup>61</sup> were generated

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<sup>61</sup> This work follows King and Horrocks’s (2010) definition of themes as ‘ recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts , characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research

from both sources and cross-referenced, moving back and forth between the two data sources, to establish a relationship. After an initial immersive reading of the childrearing books I read again, systematically taking notes in order to establish codes I kept a tally next to subject headings and used colour-coded bookmarks. I physically sorted the books into piles according to their dominant childrearing stance (for example, behaviourist, positive-parenting, attachment parenting), by looking at the coloured bookmarks in each pile I gained an overview of the types of techniques advocated in each category. I used the tally of subject headings to determine the most frequent phrases and create the topic cards for the textual elicitation technique. My textual elicitation method learnt itself to thematic analysis; as the topics on the cards (generated by the codes) could be clustered together to form themes, for example, behaviourist childrearing techniques, discipline, or child-centred childrearing ideas. I could then quickly see the array of diverse responses from my interviews and juxtapose these to the childrearing manuals. The topic sheet for the semi-structured interviews also generated codes as starting point for thematic analysis. The analysis was a fluid and organic process (Clarke & Braun, 2018), iterative and recursive in nature, as I returned to the texts repeatedly to hone the codes and themes. The final set of themes reflected the dominant cultural scripts identified by my analysis of the childrearing manuals. I followed the data and found five overarching themes generated from understandings of what children are and how they should be: sensitive motherhood versus control of the chaotic; maternal identity; maternal authority; sources of knowledge. This analysis serves to demonstrate how ideas are presented in childrearing manuals are interpreted by the mothers and begin to illuminate the relationship between childrearing ideas and maternal understandings of childrearing. As Clarke and Braun (2017:297) explain:

TA can be used to identify patterns within and *across* data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices; 'experiential' research which seeks to understand what participants' think, feel, and do.

### 5.11.2 Rich Data

The richness of the data meant that the same statement from a mother is often analysed from different perspectives. In the interests of clarity, at times I reintroduce the same section of data to demonstrate different themes, interpretive repertoires and causal mechanisms. The childrearing manuals are also treated as data. Since I have chosen to explore over thirty manuals, at times I chose a manual that exemplifies the ideas under interrogation, for example, I use Ford (2005) as an example of the type of advice that advocates routines, and I use mainly use Sunderland (2016) to

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question.'

explore neuroparenting advice. I present Lenore Skenazy and Sue Palmer as cases to illustrate ideas about what children are and how they should be.

### *5.11.3 Interpretive Repertoires*

The concept of interpretive repertoires was developed as a discourse analysis tool by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984:2) to set free ‘a multitude of divergent and conflicting voices’. Interpretive repertoires are repeated arguments, illustrations, metaphors, clichés, arguments, tropes or modes evoked by speakers in support of ideological claims. This “lexicon or register of terms is drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (Potter & Wetherall, 1987:138). These repertoires can be seen to represent the ‘common sense’ cultural knowledge that is salient in ‘everyday talk’ (Hermes, 1995:26). I examine how interpretive repertoires are utilized to produce meaning and lend internal coherence to childrearing ideas and action. As a tool it encourages the analyst to acknowledge interpretive variability and seek to understand why different versions are presented (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). The same interpretive repertoire may be evoked by different people in different contexts for different purposes. For example, interpretive repertoires connected with ‘natural motherhood’ are drawn upon throughout this study both within the ideological texts and from the mothers I spoke to, but it was utilized for very different ends; including as a justification to reject childrearing advice, and as an imperative to follow advice. Analysing discourse through interpretive repertoires provided a tool to piece together the multiple perspectives, by identifying the patterns within discourse which represent different conceptions of parenting (Wetherall et al, 2001).

I also used the analysis of interpretative repertoires to establish the relationship between the ideas in the dominant childrearing discourse and the ideas expressed by the mothers I talked to. Identifying not only how ideas are reproduced, refuted or transformed through the choice of interpretive repertoires, but gaining insight into how knowledge claims about children are utilized to create and justify different childrearing ideologies.

### *5.11.4 Causal Mechanisms*

In my analysis I wish to uncover the processes involved when mothers negotiate childrearing ideas and to understand what causes a particular mother to adopt, reject or transform a childrearing approach.

A critical realist approach enables understanding of the processes involved when parents respond to dominant childrearing ideas (Maxwell, 2012). In Critical Realism, these processes are referred to as causal **mechanisms**. As Sayer (1992:107) explains, critical realist analysis provides a ‘...mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are

capable of producing them...' By analysing the textual elicitation exercise data, I have identified some of the common mechanisms of adoption, rejection and transformation used by the mothers when negotiating the dominant cultural scripts of good motherhood. The mechanisms I have identified are largely intransient, beliefs, values and feelings. Although these same mechanisms were apparent across the interviews, the utilization is both specific to the person and contingent on context. This is in line with Critical realist researcher Maxwell's argument supporting the exploration of causation and explanation in qualitative work. Maxwell (2012:38) argues that critical realism supports three specific aspects of qualitative research: 'the use of qualitative methods to identify causation in single cases; the essential role of context in causal explanation, and the legitimacy of seeing individual's beliefs, values, motives and meanings as causes.'

Social knowledge cannot be discovered using the methods of natural science, 'we can only ever observe social structures by the activities and concepts of human beings or the material traces and artefacts they generate.' (Gorski, 2013:666) Natural science experimental methods attempt to isolate and observe events within a closed system, but closed systems, 'where a single power or force works with predictable effect' (Alderson, 2016:168) are rare (and are therefore created through laboratory experiment). Society (the object of social science) is a complex open system with a multitude of mechanism at work, it is therefore difficult to isolate and observe individual mechanisms.

Within complex open systems, such as childrearing culture, there will always be multiple mechanisms. The competing powers in open systems mean that open systems 'tend to have varying, and only partly predictable effects, unlike closed systems.' (Alderson, 2016:172). This means that I was identifying multiple mechanisms that may work simultaneously to produce varied outcomes. I do not claim that the mechanisms I identify represent an exhaustive list, only that they were observable and shared amongst the mothers I talked to.

#### *5.11.5 Retroduction*

Within critical realism (as within other interpretative approaches) understanding social phenomena involves double hermeneutics (Danermark et al 2003), where the researcher interprets an interpreted phenomenon. It is not enough to document the experiential or empirical level; critical realism seeks to discover the actual mechanisms which result in the empirical events being observed (Fletcher, 2017). The reality which is beyond our observations and about which we may be mistaken (Sayer, 2000). Both participants interpretations and childrearing ideas may be erroneous or misrepresent what is actually happening (Sayer, 2000). The Critical realist tool for accessing the reality of a phenomenon is retroduction. Simply put retroduction is a thought experiment, achieved by asking the question 'what would the world have to like for this to be true?' Retroduction moves



from ‘the manifest phenomena of social life, as conceptualized in the experience of the social agents concerned, to the essential relations that necessitate them’ (Bhaskar, 1979:32). As Fletcher (2016) explains: ‘As a reasoning process that moves from concrete to abstract and back again, retrodution is the “central mode of inference” in critical realism.’ It is through retrodution that critical realist research seeks to identify the potential causal mechanisms operating, with variable effect, in complex open systems.

#### 5.11.6 *Demi-reality*

People may act in accordance with some ideas that are not based on reality, they are illusions based on misunderstanding and error. But these ideas can become half-real when acted upon by human agents. Alderson (2016) gives the following example:

“The myth that all children are unreliable takes on demi-reality when they are so widely treated as if they are unreliable that adults and children believe the myth and there is a learned helplessness of children feeling and being unreliable.” (167)

Despite lacking verity such ideas become *demi-real* ideas when they have effects. One of the problems here is that the effects of a demi-real myth can lead us to suppose it valid. Critical realist research attempts to identify the demi-reality and the fallacious, improving our ‘knowledge of the real, to adjudicate rival accounts, and to make justified truth claims about reality’ (Smith, 2015:13). Part of the coding process involved the identification of demi-reality and the causal tendencies demi-real ideas may produce.

### 5.12 Conclusion

The critical realist epistemic perspective acknowledges that it is impossible to achieve the positivist ideal of the disinterested or objective researcher. Maxwell (2012:82) suggests ‘the attempt to exclude subjective and personal concerns is not only impossible in practice but is actually harmful to research’. He claims the illusion of researcher impartiality ‘obscures actual motives, assumptions and agendas that researchers have, and leads them to ignore the influence of these on their research process and conclusions.’ If acknowledged, my inevitable positionality, and ‘insider’ status as a mother, could work to provide ‘a major source of insights, questions and practical guidance in conducting the research and analysing the data’.

My prior beliefs and knowledge of childrearing, and my identity as a mother are part of the conceptual framework for this study; knowledge is gained from my researcher perspective. It was the experience of motherhood, and my own relationship with childrearing ideas which led to this study. However, my ideas and beliefs about childrearing, and context from which I engage with discourses of ‘good parenting’ must be accounted for and interrogated (see section 5.7 Mothers like myself).

I created an original textual elicitation method designed to uncover the mechanisms involved when mothers negotiate the language of childrearing advice. In designing this research, I have attempted to be responsive to the data; creating an epistemic and ontological framework informed by critical realism which recognizes and responds to the diversity within the culture studied. Critical realism contends there is a reality, but peoples' varied perception and interpretation of that reality matters:

“Human beings do have an identifiable nature that is rooted in the natural world, although the character of human nature is such that it gives rise to capacities to construct variable meanings and identities, which does complicate matters.” (Smith, 2010:10)

This approach was designed to illuminate the diverse ways discourse is used to construct versions of childrearing ideas and practice, and to explore the dynamic relationship between mothers and childrearing advice.

## Chapter Six: Childrearing Pedagogy

### 6. Twenty-first Century Childrearing Manuals

#### Introduction to Chapters Six to Eight

Chapters six to eight present an original in-depth examination of the content of twenty-first century childrearing manuals published and sold in Britain. Using the childrearing manuals as a data source I examine the ideas that the current books emerged from, and the models of childhood they expound. I interrogate the childrearing manual data by using the analytic concept of 'interpretive repertoires' to examine the way ideas are adopted, rejected and transformed across the discourse. I conclude by identifying the dominant cultural scripts evident in these manuals.

Chapter six provides a brief overview of childrearing advice past and present, drawing on Cunningham (2006), Apple (2006), Hardyment (2008) and Hulbert, (2004) and examining the emergence of ideas about childrearing and childhood. Finding a common thread of strong parental determinism of character is used to justify the different approaches, the chapter proposes that the models of childrearing presented in advice books are pre-sociological in that they are unimpressed by either social structure or mothers' and children's agency.

Chapter seven explores how adult conceptions of childhood inform childrearing pedagogy through an analysis of the work of two childrearing manual writers, Sue Palmer and Lenore Skenazy, showing how differing assumptions about the nature of childhood can produce radically different advice.

Chapter eight examines the language of childrearing pedagogy by examining the interpretive repertoires drawn upon across the field. Interpretive repertoires are repeated arguments, illustrations, metaphors, clichés, arguments, tropes or modes evoked by speakers in support of ideological claims (Potter and Wetherall, 1987). The same interpretive repertoire may be evoked by different people in different contexts for different purposes. Gilbert and Mackay (1984) describe the development of interpretative repertoires as a discourse analysis tool which enables the analyst to recognise interpretive variability within common language tropes. For example, I examine how different childrearing manual authors draw upon Baumrind's theory of 'parenting styles', and the 'ideal' authoritative parent who combines 'warmth' and 'firmness', suggesting interpretations of authoritative childrearing vary in line with the authors beliefs about childhood.

In chapter three, I discussed how varied and sometimes contradictory knowledge claims are made by the manuals. I examined how claims to childrearing knowledge and authority are utilised as sources of legitimacy to defend a priori positions. In this set of chapters I will revisit the persuasive

techniques employed within the manuals, including appeals to expertise, science, parental determinism and 'nature', and with an emphasis on understanding the positions the claims reveal. Within these chapters I seek to identify the cultural scripts of childrearing which are promoted through these texts by interrogating thirty-six 21<sup>st</sup> century childrearing books. I suggest childrearing books work as persuasive treatises expounding beliefs about what children are and how they should be. Concluding that there are multiple cultural scripts of childrearing, which are at times contradictory. I demonstrate that Hay's cultural script of 'intensive motherhood' is not only still apparent within the childrearing literature but has been further intensified and diversified. Within intensive motherhood scripts of 'sensitive motherhood' are working in conjunction with contradictory cultural scripts of 'control of the chaotic'.

These chapters examine how the beliefs are presented as advice to parents, as an ongoing dialogue between opposing views of the **what children are and how they should be**. I conclude chapter eight by bringing together the elements that form the dominant cultural scripts of motherhood in twenty-first century childrearing manuals.

## 6.1 Two Contradictory Cultural Scripts

In her account of visual representations of childhood, *Picturing Childhood*, Patricia Holland (2004:x) argues that it is necessary to make a distinction between the study of 'children and children's experiences' and the study of 'childhood' suggesting a study of childhood 'is essentially an account of *adult* views of what children are and how they should be.' Similarly, the study of childrearing manuals is not simply a study of children, but of adult views on what children are and how they should be. Ideas about the nature and meaning of childhood inform the childrearing advice given to mothers; shaping how mothers are advised to interact with their children. In this chapter I draw upon James, Jenks and Prout's pre-sociological models of childhood to identify different accounts in the childrearing manuals of what children are and how they should be. James, Jenks and Prout (1998:9-21) identify five pre-sociological models of childhood: 'the evil child', 'the innocent child', 'the immanent child', 'the naturally developing child' and 'the unconscious child'. I demonstrate that a writers' adherence to a model of childhood informs the advice, often with more than one model being drawn on by one author. In *Childhood* Chris Jenks (2005:62-65) identifies the two dominant conceptions of the child, the unruly Dionysian child and the innocent Apollonian child. I show how the Apollonian and Dionysian models dominate and inform the beliefs in childrearing practice. creating two cultural scripts of childrearing; the script of the 'sensitive mothering' and the script of 'control of the chaotic.'

The critical realist concept of demi-reality (Alderson, 2016) can be utilised to understand the

mechanisms at work. Working from an understanding that human beings act in accordance with ideas that may not be based on reality but rather are illusions, assumptions or matters of belief, the concept of 'demi-reality' explores the possible causal effects of these ideas. Demi-real ideas may lack verity but can have real effects. To give two simple examples, if childhood is perceived as anarchic, unruly and base, (following the model of 'the Dionysian child') then adults would be encouraged to exercise control and discipline to render the child civil. Or if childhood is constituted as purity and innocence (the Apollonian child), adults may be encouraged to nurture the child's goodness and protect the child from the corrupting adult world. These models are matters of belief rather than empiricism. I demonstrate that these models can coexist within the same discourse and contribute to some extent to the cognitive dissonance and contradictions inherent across the childrearing pedagogy

My reading finds the presence of competing scripts of 'good' childrearing, which co-exist and yet produce contradictions which a mother must negotiate. In chapter six I identify these as two broad cultural scripts of intensive mothering; 'sensitive mothering' and 'controlling the chaotic'. These scripts emerged in chapter two where I examined the dialogue between two competing theories of childrearing, baby whisperers and martinets for routine, exemplified by Aric Sigman (2009) and Harry Hendricks (2016). I chose to use the word 'sensitive' to imply both requiring exceptional skill or caution in performance, and an empathic attunement of a mother towards her child. I chose the phrase control of the chaotic, to denote not simply a controlling attitude towards the (potentially chaotic) child, but a desire to bring order to the family environment and protect against chaotic forces of the outside world. As epitomised by Frost's (2005:51) stated desire for her pedagogy to 'take the chaos out of everyday life'.

## 6.2 The Dionysian and the Apollonian

In *Childhood* Chris Jenks (2005:62-63) explains the Dionysian model of the child thus:

'...the Dionysian image rests on the assumption of an initial evil or corruption within the child [...] Children, it is supposed, enter the world as a wilful material force; they are impish and harbour a potential evil. This primal force will be mobilized if, in any part, the adult world should allow them to stray away from the appropriate path that the blueprint of human culture has provided for them. Such children must not fall into bad company, establish bad habits or develop idle hands – all of these contexts will enable outlets for the demonic force within, which is, of course, potentially destructive not just of the child but also of the adult collectivity.'

The cultural script I have identified as 'controlling the chaotic' attempts to control the Dionysian child's propensity for chaos. Those who claim that childrearing must include intensive monitoring of the child, the use of positive and negative reinforcement (rewards and punishments) and rigid

routine are in part drawing on the model of the Dionysian child.

In contrast the cultural script of 'sensitive mothering' as advocated by child-centred and attachment-parenting manual writers relies on the model of the Apollonian child. This is the Romantic model of innocence popularised by Rousseau, Jenks (2005:65) describes it thus:

'What now of the Apollonian child, the heir to the sunshine and light, the espouser of poetry and beauty? This does appear to be, much more, the modern, Western, but only 'public', way of regarding the child. Such infants are angelic, innocent and untainted by the world which they have recently entered. They have a natural goodness and a clarity of vision that we might 'idolize' or even 'worship' as the source of all that is best in human nature (note the character of these two metaphors 'idolize' and 'worship', so often used to denote the love relation between parent and child). Such children play and chuckle, smile and laugh, both spontaneously but also with our sustained encouragement. We cannot abide their tears and tantrums; we want only the illumination from their halo. This is humankind before either Eve or the apple. It is within this model that we honour and celebrate the child and dedicate ourselves to reveal its newness and uniqueness. Gone are the strictures of uniformity; here, with romantic vision, we explore the particularity of the person.'

Jenks( (2005:62) notes that these two dominant models of the child, the Dionysian and the Apollonian are 'competitive to the point of absolute incompatibility' they 'are used to understand childhood primarily through history but also synchronically, that is in parallel at the same time.'

From these incompatible models of childhood, two equally competitive ideals or cultural scripts of 'good childrearing' emerge. I have named these scripts of sensitive mothering and controlling the chaotic. Childrearing advice recommending maternal management<sup>62</sup> and 'control of the chaotic', largely relies on the model of the Dionysian child. Through childrearing practices such as routine and discipline this script positions the parent as manager of her child's behaviour and well-being, working both against the chaotic propensities of Dionysian childhood, and the threat of chaos from the outside world. In contrast, sensitive mothering positions the mother as a self-sacrificial nurturer of the Apollonian child. The innocent child is protected from the outside world and the child's natural goodness and innate potential is encouraged to flourish.

As I will show in this chapter, these cultural scripts of childrearing, based on incompatible models of childhood, simultaneously vie for attention within the marketplace of childrearing ideas, creating a

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<sup>62</sup> In *Narcissistic Parenting in an Insecure World* Hendrick(2016:3) criticises what he identifies as 'the growth of a deeply felt parental desire to exercise a form of "managerial" control over children, subjecting them to a kind of neoliberal contractual status' In contrast sensitive mothering is epitomised by Hendrick's (2016:321) ideal of the mother as sacrificing herself to 'open heartedly engage in helping and understanding our children as they work at growing up.' He claims, 'The self-sacrifice involved will imperil contemporary narcissism will be wholly to our credit and ultimately to our benefit.'

complex and contradictory field.

### 6.3 Childrearing Pedagogy Past and Present

The critical realist concept of emergence can be applied to ideas; to provide a means of understanding how new knowledge and misunderstandings emerge from previous knowledge (Alderson, 2013). Theories of childrearing have emerged and built on each other, although the later ideas cannot be reduced to the former. Some of the contradictions in current childrearing pedagogy can be understood by tracing the gradual emergence of ideas, through reproduction and transformation. Alderson (2013:67) traces knowledge of childhood, for example, from 'scientific-medical childcare manuals, into developmental psychology, and then slowly into the social study of childhood' with one discipline emerging from (but irreducible to) the other.

Similarly, the emergence of new ideas in parenting pedagogy can be traced from early 20th century medical and hygiene advice, through behaviourism and psychoanalytic theory to child-development theory and to current neuroscientific claims. However, this process is neither strictly linear, nor necessarily progressive. New knowledge and greater understanding may be achieved, but new misunderstandings also arise in new contexts (Alderson, 2013). New knowledge can be forgotten, and old ideas readopted. In the case of both attachment parenting and pop-behaviourist parenting, ideas emerge from an area of valid academic and are simplified and transformed to the extent that they are irreducible to the original thesis. In both these examples childrearing ideas and academic endeavour departed course decades ago and are not coterminous. The following section gives a broad overview of child rearing ideas which have emerged over the last hundred years, showing how ideas are adopted, rejected and transformed.

#### 6.3.1 Behaviourist childrearing –controlling the chaotic

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century childrearing became a scientific matter, that could no longer be left to female-knowledge, maternal instinct and affection, 'mothers now had to be scientifically trained' (Hays, 1998:39). The publication of Dr J B Watson's<sup>63</sup> (1928) *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* promoted good mothering as a set of skills to be applied under guidance, rather than a quotidian relationship (Lee, 2014). The new behaviourist<sup>64</sup> view may have been in part a reaction against the

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<sup>63</sup> Watson was an American Psychologist. He was Professor of psychology at John Hopkin's University from until 1908 to 1920 and edited the *Psychological Review* from 1915-1920, He advocated a natural science approach to psychology and was influential in promoting behaviourism, his 1913 speech at Columbia University *Psychology as the Behaviourist Views It* formed a behaviourist 'manifesto'. His most famous and controversial work concerned the conditioning of a fear response in the baby 'little Albert'(Hulbert, 2003)

<sup>64</sup> As explained by Malone (2014:4-8) behaviourist 'explanations depend on showing relations between past and present environments and behaviour.' In this, behaviourism rejects explanations that rely on underlying

child-centred and sentimental views of the turn of the century (Hardyment, 2007). The sensitive mother is usurped by a system which attempts 'to control the chaotic' through an application of technique. It was characterised by a faith in scientific authority to back up this efficient<sup>65</sup> and unsentimental approach (Apple, 2006). Although parental influence over children's development had been a recurring theme before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, parental determinism<sup>66</sup> and the perceived malleability of childhood began to be expressed with a new confidence, illustrated by Watson<sup>67</sup>'s (1928:45) assertion:

...at three years of age the child's whole emotional life plan has been laid down, his emotional disposition set. At that age the parents have already determined for him whether he is to grow into a happy person or...one whose every move in life is definitely controlled by fear.

Behaviourist techniques are still advocated in manuals such as *Divas and Dictators: The secrets to having a Much better Behaved Child* (Taylor, 2009), *Calmer, Easier, Happier Parenting* (Janis-Norton, 2012), *The Politically Incorrect Parenting Book* (Latta, 2012), *New Toddler Taming: A parents' guide to the first three years* (Green, 2006), *1-2-3 Magic: Effective discipline for children 2-12* (Phelan, 2010), *New Old-Fashioned Parenting: A Guide to Help You Find the Balance between Traditional and Modern Parenting* (Hughs Joshi, 2015), and social learning programmes such as Webster-Stratton's (2005) *The Incredible Years*. These authors draw on behaviour modification approaches, inspired by the work of American psychologist B.F. Skinner and behavioural psychology, maintaining all behaviour is learned, and this learning happens through a process of consequences. Reinforcement strategies are used to promote desired behaviour and diminish undesired behaviour, simply characterised as 'do this and you'll get that'. Through use of positive and negative reinforcements the mother is encouraged to control the chaotic and promote predictable and positive behaviour<sup>68</sup>. The manual-writers claim that these techniques work, and produce happy, obedient children. However, American writer, Alfie Kohn (2014) claims these pop-behaviourist techniques are flawed and counter-productive, decreasing intrinsic motivation and moral understanding. Reward and consequence systems are an essential component of the fashionable 'positive parenting' approach found in current childrearing manuals, such as, Tanya Byron<sup>69</sup>'s *Your Child, Your Way* (2007) which are in other ways ostensibly child centred.

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biological mechanisms or recourse to mentalism, 'the doctrine that our observable behaviour is dependent on mental causes'.

<sup>66</sup> Parental determinism: a belief that parental actions have a profound and determining effect on a child's future, and their adult selves (Furedi, 2008, Guldberg, 2013)

<sup>67</sup> Watson's ideas and scientific methods have been heavily criticised, as Hulbert (2003:137) notes 'Watson never sheid away from grandiose claims that were possibly not very well grounded.'

<sup>68</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Child phycologist, Tanya Byron presented television programs *The House of Tiny Tearaways* and *Little Angels*.



Over the second half of the Twentieth Century, behaviourism has been critiqued as reductionist, deterministic and simplistic. Cognitive psychologists, such as Jerome Bruner (1987:88) reject the premise that behaviour can be explained without reference to interpretive or cognitive process. As Burman (2008:48) explains ‘with the advent of cognitivism, 1970’s developmental psychology superseded earlier behaviourist accounts of infancy, claiming that they provided an impoverished picture of children’s abilities.’ However, simplistic behaviourist assumptions are unquestioned within current parenting manuals such as Jane Nelson’s (2013) *Positive Discipline* and Nigel Latta’s (2012) *The Politically Incorrect Parenting Book*. This demonstrates how childrearing ideas emerge from contested academic work and continue to be applied long after the original ideas have been superseded.

Routine reached its height of fashion in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Inspired by the paediatrician Dr Holt and behaviourist, Watson, and popularised by New Zealand health reformer, Sir Frederick Truby King and the *Mothercraft* movement he inspired: strict hygiene rules, breast feeding and sleeping routines became part of the accepted<sup>70</sup> view of ‘Good Mother’. Hardyment claims from the time of King’s visit to England in 1917 ‘for the next thirty years, raising a Truby King Baby was the aim of Britain’s mother’ (Hardyment, 2007:169). Whether or not mothers followed the advice both *Feeding and Care of Babies* (1914) and the manual *Mothercraft* (1934), written by Frederick’s adopted daughter Mary Truby King, were widely bought in Britain and the anglosphere. Cultural historian, Trudi Tate (2013:122-123) suggests Truby King’s methods provided a ‘comforting illusion of structure’ that made ‘adults feel more secure’. Tate suggests:

The fantasy of the mechanised baby ...perhaps deflects the anxiety about adult trauma... If babies are not soft and vulnerable, and if they have no internal world, no feelings to be disturbed, then perhaps we adults are not so troubled by the war after all.

In the twenty-first century routine has been repackaged as practical framework to meet the needs of the family and ‘take the chaos out of everyday life’ (Frost:51). A chaos supposed to be at least partly due to the previous prevalence of child-centred logics that replaced Truby King (Hardyment, 2007). The childrearing writers Ford (2006), Frost (2005), Sears (2005), Sunderland (2007) and Hogg (2002) all suggest structured time ensures needs for sleep and food are met, and provides security, predictability, a feeling of control, and clear expectations for the child. But crucially twenty-first century rules, routines and boundaries are presented as working automatically in the background, leaving time for the relationship and day to day living to take precedence, and allowing time and

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<sup>70</sup> Although the regime was not without its critics: Dr GD Laing termed King’s feeding routine as “absurd”, as it took no account of individual difference (Hulbert, 2003).

space for fun (Frost, 2005:48; Taylor, 2009:107). In contrast to earlier behaviourists, routine is promoted in twenty-first-century manuals to provide regular moments of affection and intimacy (Hogg, 2002) for example, Gina Ford promotes her baby routines thus:

Every day is filled with opportunities for cuddling, playing, singing, reading, splashing in the bath, tickling toes while nappy changing and chatting to your baby. But it is beyond doubt that a contented baby is best able to appreciate and participate in these activities. My routines are there to support and help you find a structure to your days that will result in a contented baby. (Contentedbaby.com)

Techniques of positive and negative reinforcement and use of routines are promoted as a means for adults to control the chaotic Dionysian child and bring order to family life.

### *6.3.2 Child Centred Childrearing – Sensitive Motherhood*

When the backlash against behaviourist methods came it rejected strict routines<sup>71</sup>, but kept the expert centre stage. As Cunningham (2006) argues by the mid twentieth century

the psychological and psychoanalytical thinking of the 1930's, was already undermining behaviourism, and the Second World War furthered that process. It came to be thought that the personality type that would emerge from a Truby King upbringing, with the stress on obedience, would be more suited to the German Third Reich than to a country fighting for democracy.

Social-democratic childrearing firmly based in psychoanalytic theory and developmental psychology, aimed to create the new democratic citizens. Although the dominant paradigm had shifted, an adherence to infant determinism and the assumed power of the mother to impact the child's future remained<sup>72</sup>. Whereas Watson's behaviourism had rejected the idea that 'love is the keynote of the psychology of childrearing' (1928:12), the new model of ideal childrearing epitomised by both Winnicott<sup>73</sup> and Bowlby advocated that maternal love is essential. Winnicott (1964:85) argues:

...on the psychological side, a baby deprived of some quite ordinary but necessary thing, such as affectionate contact, is bound to some extent to be disturbed in emotional development, and this will show in personality difficulty as the young person grows up.

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<sup>71</sup> Driekus (1964) did emphasise the importance of routine in family life as patterns for life, which "add up to an enriched and more pleasant life." (121)

<sup>72</sup> Although rooted in oppositional conceptions of human consciousness and the role of maternal affection, Watson and Winnicott make the same argument for the importance of maternal knowledge of psychology, both comparing psychological wounds to physical wounds (Watson 1928; Winnicott, 1964; Bowlby, 1953).

<sup>73</sup> The British paediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W Winnicott (1964:44) gave over sixty talks about childrearing on BBC radio from 1943 to 1966, promoting his message that "the foundations of health are laid down by the ordinary mother in her ordinary loving care of her own baby"

The influence of psychoanalytic theory had further entrenched concepts of both infant determinism<sup>74</sup> (Paris, 2013) and the innate vulnerability of children (Stearns, 2003). Although maternal affection was valorised by the child-centred manual writers, it was still not enough, and needed to be coupled with a scientific knowledge of child-development, and soft skills of empathy and reflection (Hays, 1998; Apple, 2006; Faircloth, 2014).

Winnicott (1964) is at pains to suggest mothers are not moulding their children from clay, but that by loving responsiveness they are participating in a natural process of growth. For both Winnicott and Bowlby it is the disruption of the mother/child relationship that causes negative future outcomes. The primacy of the mother/infant dyad in child development, is a recurrent theme within twenty first century child centred and 'natural' parenting manuals, from Penelope Leach (2010) to Margot Sunderland (2016). Attachment is evoked by Sears (2005) who popularised a version of attachment-based parenting for 21<sup>st</sup> century readers in his manual *The Baby Book*.

Spock (1946), also stressed maternal affection. He was influenced by Andersen and Mary Aldrich's *Babies Are Human Beings* published in 1938 in America (Hulbert, 2004; Hardyment, 2007). Rejecting the idea of imposing institutional care on the family home they insisted that babies needed warmth, comfort and cuddling, urging parents to 'adjust our habit-training to his individual rhythm' (Aldrich, cited in Hardyment, 2007:206). Over organization of children's lives was portrayed by the Aldrich's as reducing spontaneity and the development of the child's initiative (Hardyment, 2007). Spock was not opposed to routines per se, but he was strongly opposed to the behaviourists' rigid approach (Apple, 2006) and urged mothers to coax their child towards a schedule: 'Every baby has a tendency to develop regular habits of becoming hungry, and these will develop much more rapidly if his mother guides him a bit.' (Spock, 1973, cited in Apple, 2006).

New ideas about the nature of the child inspired new approaches to parenting-pedagogy. Gessell and Igg popularised an 'ages and stages' view of child development in *Infant and Child and the Culture of Today* (1943), stressing the mother's role as guiding child's 'self-regulated growth' (Gessell and Igg, cited Apple 2006:116). A concept of epigenesis (that there are predictable and linear stages in child development) was increasingly applied to childrearing advice as Freud, Erikson, Piaget and Vygotsky were interpreted by the new gurus to provide a cognitive and psychological authority to the new advice (Apple, 2006). James, Jenks and Prout (1998:19) identify this approach as following a model of 'the naturally developing child' and express concern that 'Under the hegemony of developmental

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<sup>74</sup> Infant determinism can be defined as the belief that the "experiences during the early years are the most potent force in shaping a life" (Kagan, 1998:83)

stage monitoring' children suffer through comparison with 'a gold standard of the normal child.'

Dr Benjamin Spock published *Baby and Childcare* in 1946; his child-centred view of an affectionate and sensitive mother intelligently observing and responding to her child's developmental stages, with guidance from experts, was according to Hays (1998), to become the dominant cultural model for childrearing in the second half of the 20th Century;) reflecting the increasingly egalitarian and socially democratic mood of the post war Anglosphere (Hardyment, 2008). The child-centred parenting writers Byron, (2007) Leach (2010) and Ockwell-Smith (2013) can be read as Spock's successors. Like Spock, they claim to offer essential psychological expertise and prioritise maternal sensitivity to promote the natural development of the Apollonian child. The latest edition of *Baby and Childcare* (Spock and Needlahm. 2012) states:

"Children are driven from within themselves to grow, explore, experience, learn, and build relationships with other people, so while you are trusting yourself, remember also to trust your child."

This can be considered the banner heading for child-centred approaches, and the bedrock of 'sensitive motherhood'.

### 6.3.3 Gina Ford – *Chaos versus order*

Ford published in 1999, *The Contented Little Baby Book* reinvented behaviourist childrearing for twenty-first century mothers. Its best-selling author Gina Ford popularised an approach based on controlling the chaotic through her strong recommendations of routine. On her website ([www.contentedbaby.com](http://www.contentedbaby.com)) Ford offers routine as a panacea for many potentially problematic aspects of baby rearing which may be experienced by mothers. Rather than a necessarily or normal part of childrearing, Ford (2018) suggests these problems are exacerbated by lack of routine:

What I offer is real and practical advice on how to establish a good feeding and sleeping pattern from day one, so that you avoid months of sleepless nights, colic, excessive crying, feeding difficulties and many other problems that we are so often told are a normal part of parenting.

Ford's detractors are so vocal and at times vitriolic, that in 2006 Mumsnet censored any mention of Ford, for fear of threatened legal action. The case was settled, and the ban was lifted in 2007, although the site still proceeds with caution (The Telegraph, 9/05/07). The controversy could be due to mothers deriving an identity through affiliation with a parenting style (Faircloth, 2014), promoting their own moral and scientific justifications for their positions. Much of the discussion of routines is a debate between two opposing camps of intensive mothering (Hays, 1998), Fordists<sup>75</sup> versus Child-

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<sup>75</sup> Followers of Gina Ford

centred/attachment -parenting<sup>76</sup>, or control of the chaotic versus sensitive mothering. This divide has been a recurring theme of twentieth century childrearing advice. Andersen and Mary Aldrich's "Babies are Human beings" published in 1938 in America rejected the idea of imposing institutional care on the family home insisting that babies needed warmth, comfort and cuddling, urging parents to "adjust our habit-training to his individual rhythm." (Aldrich, cited in Hardyment, 2007:206) Over organization of children's lives was portrayed as reducing spontaneity and the development of the child's initiative (Hardyment, 2007). This idea was popularised by Spock and is still prevalent in twenty-first century child rearing manuals.

Each camp argues that the other does not adequately meet the needs of children. Ford argues that child-led methods do not provide adequate sleep for parent or child, may lead parents to misinterpret all cries as hunger, and promote chaos (Ford 2006). Whereas, Ford has been criticised<sup>77</sup> by other childrearing writers for placing the mother's need for control above the infant's needs (James, 2003, 2010; Stadlen, 2005) and being disciplinarian and parent-centred, prescriptive and unloving (*The Daily Mail* 24/2/2007). In *The Baby Book*, under the heading "Beware of baby experts" Sears (2003:9) claims methods such as Ford's increase parent insensitivity to the baby's cues. The mother who chooses to train her baby with routines is characterised as wanting "convenience", seeing crying as manipulation rather than communication, and in danger of losing sensitivity and trust in their own intuition (Sears and Sears, 2003). The caveats and warnings against routines use often use vague terms. At worst routines are termed 'toxic', and parents are warned that they may negatively influence child outcomes and parental sensitivity. The assumption, by the child-centred/attachment writers, of children's extreme vulnerability to parental actions can mean every adult action is regarded as potentially problematic and must be reflected upon. This highly romantic model of 'innocent' childhood frames children as natural and sacred and adult intervention as problematic and potentially corrupting.

Reading Ford, it is hard to find justification for the criticisms, Ford is not Truby King<sup>78</sup> or Watson. Ford does provide pages of minutely worked out sample schedules, from the first week to the fourth year. but these are a sensitive re-working of the twentieth century behaviourists' rigid guidelines, with a firm emphasis on the needs of the baby. Ford encourages parents to watch for the child's

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<sup>76</sup> For an example of this dialog see mumsnet discussion threads like [www.mumsnet.com/Talk/parenting/1863336-Establishing-a-routine-Gina-Ford-baby-whisperer-or-both-Confused](http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/parenting/1863336-Establishing-a-routine-Gina-Ford-baby-whisperer-or-both-Confused)

<sup>77</sup> The then Deputy Prime minister, Nick Clegg publicly criticised Ford's methods as "absolute nonsense" and akin to "sticking children in broom cupboards." (Clegg cited in *The Daily Mail* 11/1/2010)

<sup>78</sup> Channel 4's parenting program 'Bringing Up Baby', showed three families each raising a child under the advice of a different childrearing method (Benjamin Spock, Truby King and the Continuum Concept) and parenting expert.. Rachel Waddilove was the expert presenting Truby King's childrearing methods. Gina Ford wrote an open letter to the NSPCC distancing herself from Truby King's methods, as demonstrated by Waddilove, and describing them as cruel (Jensen, 2018).

developmental signs (Ford, 2006:26) and alter the structure according to the individual child's needs; placing the mother as intensive observer to be led by the baby's developmental cues. At the same time as reflecting the childhood model (as identified by James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:17) of 'the naturally developing child' progressing through predictable stages according to age, Ford acknowledges the differences between children in a way Truby King's structures did not. Ford claims, 'Routines teach you to recognise the difference between hunger and tiredness and how to listen to what your baby is really saying. They are all about providing your baby with security and comfort, giving him what he wants before he needs to cry and demand it' (contentedbaby.com). In this way she claims to be enhancing maternal sensitivity through a childrearing approach of management and control of the chaotic elements in both the family life and the child itself.

The childrearing authors advocating routines mainly draw their authority from working with children; Nannies and nurses (Ford, 2006; Frost, 2005; Hogg, 2002; Mewes, 2012), or teachers (Janis-Norton, 2012; Taylor, 2009). They operate within a context slightly removed from the ideological demands of sensitive mothering. However, these authors do not err from the cultural script of intensive mothering, as identified by Sharon Hays (1998), that good childrearing should be child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive. Ford's conviction about the infallibility of her methods leaves little room for disagreement. In line with the scientific-mothering ethos, Ford terms her aims in terms of "enhancing parents' knowledge and understanding of their toddlers' needs, desires and behaviour" (Ford, 2006b:2). Yet, Ford does not claim authority from science alone, but from "hands on experience of working and living with families" (Ford, 2006, p1). Hardyment (2007:294) notes that: 'Much of her advice returns to traditions that have stood parents and babies in good stead for centuries'. Traditional advice such as, swaddling infants, giving sugar-water bottles and using cabbage leaves to soothe nursing mothers, and a warning about over-stimulating a baby. Gina Ford's promotion of a childrearing logic sympathetic to working-class childrearing logics of 'parenting within limits' (Nelson, 2012) and 'the accomplishment of natural growth' (Lareau, 2003) may be part of the reason that Ford is a divisive figure, both tremendously popular and loathed. Both logics are noticeable in Gina Ford's (2006:2) work, and her suggestion that good parenting is: 'the simple combination of a safe and happy home, a healthy diet, a good routine, encouragement and love.' Although her methods may be complicated, Ford can be read as backlash against the logic of intensive child-centred mothering (Hardyment, 2007

Gina Ford's detailed organisation is labour-intensive and onerous, but routines and rules, could be regarded as a framework to alleviate the emotional intensity of the other parenting approaches. Gina Ford can be framed as advocating good childrearing as 'control of the chaotic' within an intensive mothering framework. Her detractors offer an even more intensive motherhood rejecting elements

of management and 'control of the chaotic' in favour of a concept of 'sensitive mothering'.

#### 6.3.4 *The Reflective Mother – Sensitive Motherhood*

In a Guardian interview with Oliver James (2003), Ford explains her popularity:

A lot of my success is that I mother the mothers because when you're feeling frightened, or alone, or unsure, you don't want to sit and analyse; you want someone to come along and say, 'This is the plan. If it doesn't work, we'll try something else.' That's when you want someone to take control.

Ford emphasises maternal observation of the baby yet, her Contented Little Baby method is presented as the authority on the baby's needs, not the baby and not the parent. Motherhood is presented as potentially chaotic and frightening and her method is 'the secret' solution mothers need.

This is a refutation of the 'good mother' as primarily reflective. This is in direct contrast with authors promoting 'sensitive motherhood' such as Tanya Byron (2007), and Leach (2010:15), who frame childrearing as a uniquely rewarding reflective process, to be guided by child development knowledge and the child's needs and wants. Leach (2010:9) insists that her "book does not lay down rules, because there are none" and warns against childrearing "by the book" rather than "by the baby". This is echoed by Stadlen (2005:251), who claims Ford reduces the intimacy of mothering to a series of practical techniques, "encouraging mothers to attend to the book before the baby." Byron, Leach and Standon can be read as heirs to Winnicott (1964:17 who advised that,

It is vitally important that we should understand the part played by those who care for the infant, so that we can protect the young mother from whatever tends to get between herself and the child. If she is without understanding of the thing she does so well she is without means to defend her position, and only too easily she spoils her job by trying to do what she is told, or what her mother did, or what the books say.

Thus reflection is framed as protecting the mother's natural ability from outside influence.

Ford's assertion that parents do not want to analyse is contrary the reflexive mothering encouraged by positive parenting manuals, which ask mothers to reflect on themselves and their behaviours as part of the process of moving to a 'positive' parenting orientation or disposition (Lee, 2014:65).

The model of the 'unconscious child'<sup>79</sup> is predominant in approaches which emphasise reflective listening and communication as the focus of 'good' parenting. In the nineteen-sixties, Ginnot (1965)

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<sup>79</sup>James, Jenks and Prout (1998)

and Dreikus (1964) re-interpreted Adler's 1920's psychodynamic theory of inferiority, which suggested that the primary drive of childhood was a need to compensate for social inadequacy and build up self-reliance and independence (Hulbert, 2004). The new interpretation emphasised family democracy and positive communication between parents and children to produce 'new principles of childrearing to replace obsolete traditions' (Dreikus, 1964:10). Firmly rooted in psychoanalysis, the malleability of children and parental determinism is a central tenant: 'Parenthood is an endless series of small events, periodic conflicts, and sudden crises that call for a response. The response is not without consequence: It affects personality and self-regard for better or worse.' (Ginnott, 1965:3) James, Jenks and Prout (1998:20) identify this imagining of childhood as 'the unconscious child' which contends 'the explanation, and in many cases the blame, for aberrant adult behaviour lies in childhood.' They suggest this model dispossess children of intentionality and agency, and 'positions the child as no more than a state of unfinished business or becoming'.

Writing in the preface to his social-democratic parenting book *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for raising Responsible Children* Thomas Gordon (2000: xv) claims his book brings 'peace and democracy.' This belief in the power of social-democratic childrearing is also apparent in Hendrick's (2016) lamentation at the demise of the sensitive mother, and his belief that child-centred mothering practices will produce the right kind of democratic citizen. Faber, A., Mazlish, E. (2001), and Nelson, J. (2006) are disciples of Dreikus and Ginnott. A hybrid of child centred and Adlerian childrearing approaches is loosely bound under the rubric 'social-democratic parenting'. This approach aims to use psychoanalytic theory to inform sensitive mothering and thus create 'good' future citizens and society.

### 6.3.5 *The Sensitive Mother and Attachment*

Intensive motherhood (Hays, 1998) is not only prevalent in current childrearing manuals, but new forms of intensive motherhood have emerged in the twenty-first century, in particular neuro-parenting and attachment parenting advocate extremes of sensitive intensive motherhood.

Attachment-parenting was inspired by *The Continuum Concept* by Liedloff (first published in 1975) and has been popularised by Sears and Sears from the 1980's. Although influenced by attachment theory it is a separate movement. Attachment-parenting makes claims its tenets are natural or evolutionary<sup>80</sup> practices (Liedloff, 1989), often citing selected practices of contemporary tribal cultures as a blue-print for good parenting. 'The primitive is thus constructed as a site for fantasies of

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<sup>80</sup>In Sears' version of Christian attachment-parenting nature and evolution are replaced with the ultimate authority, he claims God's will in creating: "a style of parenting that allows the divine design for the parent-child relationship to develop." (Sears, cited in Hulbert, 2004:355)



the natural to be played out' (Faircloth, 2014:161.) It is claimed that attachment-parenting is eternal and enduring, common-sense that has 'been around as long as there have been mothers and babies' (Sears, 2005:3). Relying on the Apollonian model of childhood which romanticises the essential nature of the child and valorises 'sensitive mothering', for example In *The Baby Book* William and Martha Sears (2005:18) claim to have seen 'one quality that distinguished attachment parents and their children – sensitivity'.

Attachment-parents typically practice birth-bonding, responding to baby's cries, baby-wearing, co-sleeping, and extended breastfeeding (Sears, 2001) in the belief that extended physical contact between parent and child will create an enduring bond of attachment, and a secure base for later development. However, there is little evidence that a child raised in this way will be more or less securely attached (Faircloth, 2014; Kagan,1998; Rosemond, 2012). Although parenting in this way is not practised by many, as a middle-class approach with vocal advocates, it is increasingly influencing family policy (Faircloth, 2014) partly through the work of charity lobby groups such as the Wave Trust and OXPIP.

#### 6.3.6 Neuro-parenting

As I discussed in chapter three, the latest version of scientific parenthood, as epitomised by Margot Sunderland's (2006, 2016:6) childrearing manual *What every parent Needs to Know*, attempts to 'act upon what science can tell us about parenting.' Based on a popular interpretation of neuroscience, parents are positioned as determining the development of the child's brain, and the child's future functioning (McVarish, 2016). Across the childrearing manuals neuroscience is evoked to give scientific ballast to a range of childrearing approaches, for example, the methods and techniques advocated by Sunderland's brain-based pedagogy are informed by both behaviourism and attachment-parenting, whereas Seigal and Bryson (2012) use the concept of optimal brain development to encourage parent/child communication based on Adlerian principles. Although few experts write solely from this perspective, it is highly visible in current early years policy (Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008, Field and Allen, 2010; DfE 2011; DfE, 2013).

The appeal to neuroscience to inform childrearing is often evoked as a scientific justification of attachment theory (McVarish, 2014), for example in *Positive Parenting: An Essential Guide* Rebecca Eannes (2016:78) claims:

CONNECTION AND TRUST are the foundation upon which your relationship with your child will be built. This foundation of connection is based on one of the core principles of positive parenting: attachment. Lovingly and consistently meeting your child's needs has a positive, long-lasting influence on brain development.

Attachment-parenting and neuro-parenting emerge in part from the model of the 'naturally developing child, described by James, Jenks and Prout (1998:17) as understanding that a child 'poor biological creature that he is, is imbued therefore with grand potential to become not anything but quite specifically something.' That something is the achieved competence of adulthood, and children do this by progressing through stages of development. However, Attachment-parenting firmly links the quality of mother/child attachment as the driver of optimum child-development. For example, manual writer Laura Markham (2014: loc. 838), states, 'We can think of emerging independence as the child trusting his secure attachment to a parent enough that he can engage with the world and successfully perform his age-appropriate developmental tasks.' Conversely, failure to achieve secure attachment may lead to children whose 'preoccupation with the search for love may keep them from appropriately attending to other age-appropriate developmental tasks, such as learning and experimenting with independence.' Following this model everyday task such as feeding, playing with, hugging or carrying one's baby are seen as enhancing development through the prism of attachment. According to Sears (2006:318) in *The Baby Book*, carrying baby or young child close to mother in a sling for much of the day aids physical, emotional and intellectual development 'Sling babies cry less...Sling babies grow better...Sling babies learn more... Sling babies talk better'. Within this neuro-parenting/attachment parenting approach maternal sensitivity is not simply a case of loving the child. But loving the child in a particular way so as to potentially enhance development. Sunderland (2016:96) claims 'Some parents mistakenly think that to enable a child to become securely attached, you just need to love them. This isn't the case. Secure attachment means that the child feels secure in the adult's ability to provide attuned emotional responsiveness whenever they have an emotional need.' This approach further intensifies the cultural script of sensitive intensive mothering (Hays,1998) , promoting an extremely child-centred, extremely expert guided, extremely emotionally absorbing, and extremely labour-intensive script. As Glenda Wall (2017:409) discusses love is prescribed as a tool for child development, brain development and wellbeing:

Attachment is not viewed here as something that happens naturally as parents and children develop a relationship together through day-to-day activities. Rather it is framed as an accomplishment on the part of parents that results from very detailed, intensive and intentional behaviour informed by expert advice.

This is exemplified by Gerhardt's (2013) childrearing polemic 'Why Love Matters' which frames a particular form of parental love an instrument to ensure in optimum social, emotional and cognitive development. An example from the manuals of love being instrumentalised and prescribed is Saad and Saad's (2015:loc 1509) claim "Some psychologists go so far as saying that we need to give a minimum of twelve hugs a day to our child for the to thrive." . (This implies that a mere eleven hugs a day is not acceptable.) Mothers love in deeply personal ways and some are more

physically affectionate than others. The prescribed method of love risks turning love into a parental display. This problematises this most intimate and ineffable relationship. As demonstrated by Sunderland's (2016:96) claim in *What Every Parent Needs to Know*, that to achieve securely attached children who will flourish mothers must offer continued and constant attuned responsiveness:

In order to offer attuned emotional responsiveness, you need to be self-aware and to always be thinking about how you come over to your child – remembering that she needs empathy. Are you being too rough, too intrusive, or too anxious? Is your voice too harsh, too irritated, or low-key in response to a child's moment of pride? Think about these factors whatever you are doing, for example when you change her nappy, dress her, or play with her. With an older child, think about how you discipline her, praise her, and help her with friendship problems.

Although the attachment/neuro-parenting model is equally reductionist in its conflation of the mind and the brain, the person and the biology, this approach goes beyond the model of 'the naturally developing child' to portray children as a blank slate, whose personality and future is engraved by parental action. Parents are attributed the power to create or destroy their children through the minutiae of everyday interactions, as evidenced by Sunderland's warning to readers (2016:20) that: 'Your approach can determine whether or not your child's brain systems and brain chemistries are activated in such a way as to enable him to enjoy a rich and rewarding life.'

Thus attachment-parenting (and its off-shoot neuro-parenting) also emerges in part from the Freudian model of the 'unconscious' child'. As James, Jenks and Prout explain (1998:20), 'In the growth of Freudian psychoanalytic influence in contemporary thinking can be seen, then, a new source of causality: the explanation, and in many cases the blame, for aberrant adult behaviour lies in childhood.'

At the extreme of this approach, the mother/child relationship is valorised not simply for child-well-being in the present, but far into the future. For example, the home page of the website *Attachment Parenting UK* claims 'Children who trust in attachments are more likely to become emotionally healthy adults.' In *Toddler Calm* Ockwell-Smith (loc 1267) claims the age three-to six months 'is about forming a secure attachment with your baby so that he or she will be confident to go out into the world in time.' Sunderland (2016:95) claims 'How you love your child will dramatically influence whether she loves in peace or loves in torment in adulthood.' In *Positive Parenting: an essential guide* Eannes (2016:7) claims "Research suggests that children who fail to develop a secure attachment in the early years often have behavioural problems and relationship troubles in later life."

The adoption of pseudo-neuroscientific tropes, reducing the child to the brain, have further intensified the concept of parental determinism and maternal reflection. Sunderland, uses pseudo-neuroscience to call for a hyper reflective parenting, with teleological aims:

The latest brain science brings with it the need for a real paradigm shift by parents. Rather than simply thinking about the immediacy of whether to sleep train or not, use controlled crying or not, co-sleep or not, ignore tantrums, use the naughty step, or let toddlers play on tablets, we need to ask ourselves the following questions: “How are my parenting choices now likely to affect the long-term chemical balance and higher human functions in my child’s brain? How are the ways I relate to my child on a daily basis going to affect her physiology, her ability to make good decisions under stress, the likelihood of her suffering from anxiety or depression later, or capacity to go on to thrive in the world of work and personal relationships?”. (Sunderland, 2016:10)

However, the books promoting attachment-parenting do vary in their adherence to parental determinism. William and Martha Sears (2005:9) in *The Good Behaviour Book* are exceptions to the general trend of extreme parental determinism in attachment -parenting advice, they clearly tells their readers to:

Remember your child is not a blank slate on which to write your wishes. Your child’s personality is *guided* not formed, by you and other significant persons. You must take the child’s individuality into account. Because different children and parents have different temperaments and personalities, and families have different lifestyles.

Sears and Sears then continue to claim that ‘there are basic concepts which underlie all discipline, no matter what the characteristics of parent and child.’ The first ‘concept’ is to get connected early because ‘discipline is grounded on a healthy relationship between parent and child.’ And concept number eight is to ‘Shape your child’s behaviour’ in this section Sears and Sears (2005:14) use the analogy of gardening to claim that ‘Children are born with some behavioural traits that either flourish or are weeded out depending on how they are nurtured.’ In this version of ‘light’ parental determinism a parent can shape the behaviour of a child and although the child’s personality cannot be created it can be ‘guided’ and ‘shaped’ by a combination of sensitive mothering and behaviourist techniques. As Stephen Pinker argues in *The Blank Slate* (2002), even if parenting authors do not actually believe children are a “blank slate”, they often advise as though this is the case.

The utilisation of attachment theory in childrearing manuals is strongly tied to the dominant cultural assumptions about the essential sensitivity and availability of the 'good mother'. As Jerome Kagan (1998:101) argues in his essay *The Allure of Infant Determinism*:

...the claim that insecurely attached children are at psychological risk because they do not have sensitive mothers is an ethical judgement as to which maternal behaviours and infant reactions to parental absence are considered the most virtuous. (Kagan, 1998:101)

By prioritising the mother/child bond as the primary deterministic source of current and future wellbeing and personality attachment-parenting manual writers are making an ethical judgement on mothers through their child’s behaviour. A judgement mothers may have to negotiate and respond to regarding their own childrearing approach. For example, when Sunderland (2016:11) claims:

Particular ways of responding to your child will establish pathways in his brain to enable him to manage emotions well, think rationally under pressure, and calm himself down without recourse to angry outbursts, attacks of anxiety or in later life, alcohol, smoking and drugs.

The child's anger, anxiety is linked to parental behaviour and an ethical judgement can be made against the mother by observing the child. Within this viewpoint it is the mother who must be judged, managed and controlled through 'expert' exhortations to sensitive mothering.

### *6.3.7 Marrying sensitivity and control - Parenting Styles*

The 21st century has also seen Baumrind's (1996;1997) parenting styles research adopted and adapted as parenting-pedagogy and 'authoritative' parenting regarded as key to good parenting. Baumrind (1996:410-411) suggests parenting is characterised by two prime factors; responsiveness and demandingness:

Responsiveness refers to the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent of children's needs and demands.

Demandingness refers to the claims that parents make on children to become integrated into the family and community by their maturity expectations, supervision, disciplinary efforts, and willingness to confront a disruptive child.

Baumrind's theory of childrearing is a move away from accepting the dichotomy of 'autocratic' and 'democratic' childrearing. She attempts to combine the 'responsiveness' of democratic parenting with the 'demandingness' of autocratic parenting to produce, what she frames an ideal 'authoritative' approach. This can be understood as an attempt to resolve the conflict between the dual cultural scripts of 'sensitive mothering' and 'control of the chaotic'.

In Baumrind's typology of childrearing, there are at least three distinct types of 'parenting style'; 'Authoritarian', 'Permissive' and 'Authoritative'. In advocating authoritative parenting as defined by Baumrind (1996:405), the experts emphasise the dual parental roles of responsiveness and demandingness (often referred to in the childrearing manuals as warmth and firmness). But there is little agreement on the optimal balance between the two modes. As I will demonstrate, how the authors define warmth and firmness, and the optimal balance, is dependent on what they believe a child is and what a child should be.

The advice varies considerably according to the authors' interpretation of authoritative parenting and the view of what children are and how they should be. For example, childrearing manual writer and childhood campaigner, Sue Palmer's interpretation of authoritative parenting 2015: 283

'Authoritative parents treat their children warmly, which in practical terms translates into

giving them plenty of time and loving attention, listening to them and responding to their concerns and allowing some (safe) choices. But they're also firm, ensuring rules and routines to provide stability, security and safety- for instance, regular family meals, bedtime schedules and rituals, monitoring of TV viewing (and no television in the bedroom).' (Palmer, 2015:281-282).

This statement is a typical example, but it does beg the questions, how much time is 'plenty', how should the parent respond to concerns, which choices does a parent allow, how do parents ensure rules and what rules and routines are desirable? Within Palmer's definition the mother may be sensitive to the child but must control the chaotic through ensuring rules and routines and monitoring the child.

Authoritative parenting is interpreted differently across the field. with many different approaches claiming to be authoritative, from pop-behaviourists Latta (2012) and Phelan's (2010) strong parental control<sup>81</sup>, to child-centred Ockwell-Smith (2013), Adlerians, Faber and Mazlish (2001), and Nelson's (2006) positive parenting approach, who all reject rewards and punishment in favour of broad communication. This may reflect a certain ambiguity in the definition of authoritative parenting. For Baumrind, parenting style, or pattern, is a gestalt of different attitudes and actions that 'obtain their character from the whole' (Baumrind et al, 2010:185). Therefore, it is problematic to identify practices or techniques in isolation, as authoritative<sup>82</sup>.

Baumrind et al (2010:157) defines childrearing thus:

In all societies a prime responsibility of parents is to socialize their children to conform sufficiently to normative standards of conduct to function successfully in their community. The short-range socialization objective of the exercise of parental authority is to maintain order in the family, subordinated, however, to the encompassing responsibility of parents to shepherd their child from a dependent infant into a self-determining, self-regulated adult with the competence and emotional health to achieve prosocial goals and interact effectively with others.

In this definition elements of Locke's view of the child can be detected. Jenks and Prout (1998:16) name this model of childhood 'the immanent child' characterised by a belief that adults 'have knowledge and experience and are in a position to exercise responsible control over them. Through education children will become rational, virtuous contracting members of society, and exercisers of

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<sup>81</sup>Even Rosemond, the US parenting-guru who advocates strong parental control, ultimate authority and use of physical discipline, regards his methods as authoritative (Rosemond.2012).

<sup>82</sup> Baumrind talks about 'patterns of parental authority' rather than the effects of single parental variables 'and recognises that 'the strength or direction of an expected parent-child relationship might well be altered.' of Baumrind (2010:162) maintained that "it is more meaningful to talk about the effects of patterns of parental authority than about the effects of single parental variables" because "without certain other conditions being present. . . the strength or direction of an expected parent-child relationship might well be altered."

self-control.' James, Jenks and Prout suggest this model of childhood subordinates the everyday socialisation of children as beings to the concept of children as becoming, defined by their potentiality and futurity.

Within the childrearing discourse children are portrayed as passive recipients of parenting styles, lacking the agency to shape as well as be shaped by their circumstances. Also absent from this childrearing discourse is Rich Harris's (1999:25) observation a parent does not have a fixed, uniform parenting style; a parents' childrearing attitudes and actions fluctuate, with mood, circumstance and situations. As Jensen (2010) observes it is unlikely that real parents fit neatly into these parenting style categories.

#### *6.3.8 Positive parenting*

The 'positive parenting'<sup>83</sup> approach, emphasises parents modelling good behaviour, parent and child communication, and positive behaviour reinforcement, within an authoritative framework which limits punishment; pithily caricatured by Helen Reece (2013:42) as 'Be nice!' Concerned with changing parental (especially maternal) behaviour to eliminate smacking, shouting and neglect, positive parenting-pedagogy aims to create authoritative parents, through a mixture of Adlerian<sup>84</sup> principles and Behaviourist techniques. Many state-endorsed parenting-classes are based on this approach <sup>85</sup>positioning it as a culturally dominant model of 'Good Parenting' regardless whether parents are actually practising it. As I shall demonstrate, Positive Parenting has emerged from the childrearing discourse to incorporate both the intensive mothering of sensitive child centred parenting and the rules and discipline techniques of behaviourist approaches. The positive parenting authors advocate reflective mothering and high levels of supervision, consistency, through adherence to parenting 'skills' and 'techniques. Helen Reece's (2013:42) study of positive parenting concluded that 'such apparently innocuous advice could be regarded as damaging: positive parenting is arduous if not impossible, thereby setting parents up to fail, and partly as a consequence of this onerousness, it is arguably destructive of the spontaneity of the parent-child relationship.' As I will

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<sup>83</sup> The childrearing advice website [www.babysleepsite.com](http://www.babysleepsite.com) offers this description of positive parenting : 'Positive Parenting Basics:

- Prioritizes the parent-child bond, and emphasizes total respect for the child
- Views misbehaviour not as a wilful act of defiance, but as an expression of a child's needs (as well as a result of the child's relatively immature brain development)
- Focus on gentle, positive (obviously!) and empathetic guidance as opposed to punishments (including time-out) for misbehaviour
- Emphasis on guiding the child through modelling good behaviour, teaching through play, and talking to and empathizing with the child. Discipline techniques may also include things like sticker charts, and rewards for good behaviour'

<sup>84</sup> Follower of Adler's 1920's psychodynamic theory of inferiority

<sup>85</sup> See The CANparent Trial Evaluation, Cullen et al, 2014, for examples of state endorsed childrearing programmes.

demonstrate, positive parenting seeks to exert 'control of the chaotic' through reflective sensitive mothering.

#### 6.3.9 Optimising Development Potential

Within the childrearing books the desirability of concertedly cultivating and enhancing a child's development in a 'a deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children's development and to cultivate their cognitive and social skills' (Lareau, 2003:238) is assumed and explicit. For example, Webster-Stratton (2006:40) author of *The Incredible Years* urges parents to help their children 'Learn to play in ways that foster their self-esteem as well as their social, emotional and cognitive development.' Under the heading 'Seven ways to build a brighter baby' Sears (2005: 470) offers 'Smart play...age-and-stage appropriate brainy baby games, toy tips and... toys that help you interact more meaningfully with your baby'. Mewes (2012:25) encourages parents to 'choose activities in which you can teach him new skills, such as baking, doing jigsaw puzzles, creative artwork, making playdough figures, or even learning letters and numbers.' Claiming this 'helps you to understand your child's capabilities and personality and creates closeness between you.' Concerted cultivation is also present in Leach's detailed accounts of suitable play activities and their developmental benefits.

Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) observation that 'sensitive motherhood' obliges mothers to turn their domestic work into child development opportunities is explicit in the manuals. For example, in Jo Frost's (2005) *Supernanny: How to Get the Best from Your Children* Frost advises:

...get the child involved in what you are doing. Small children don't find tasks like cleaning, sorting, fetching and carrying as boring as their older brothers and sisters sometimes do. Small children love to help. Helping makes them feel responsible and gives them confidence...Chores may take a bit longer and things may get a little messier, but you'll get the chore done and your child will benefit from your attention.

The manuals' advice accords with the cultural script of sensitive, intensive mothering that the mother must shape the child's development through, shared activities and child-led play by scaffolding their learning in non-didactic ways (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). The child's desires are to pre-empted as part of a sensitive mother's attuned understanding of her child and her knowledge of child development.

However, there is an inherent contradiction within the childrearing advice, since at the same time as positioning the mother as acutely responsible for shaping her child's development and cultivating her potential, many of the books warn of over scheduling, over stimulating and too much formal education too soon. In *3 Day Nanny*, Mewes (2012) warns that 'over-stimulating your child can have adverse effects in the long term.' Palmer (2008:94) in *Detoxing Childhood*, states 'Parents who engage a tutor for their three-year-olds or send children to hot housing nurseries probably do much



more harm in the long term than good.’ Palmer (2015:188-189) evokes the interpretive repertoire of maternal deficit, attributing the trend for concerted cultivation to ‘parents who work long hours and attempt to compensate for their absence (or exhausted presence) by spending money on their children.’ She presents children as voracious and insatiable consumers of stimulation, and parents as manipulated and powerless, warning that:

Children whose lives are filled every moment of every day with structured activity don’t learn to think for themselves or exercise their own imaginations. They become dependent on others to educate, entertain and otherwise occupy them- and, in consequence, are easily bored. They then demand more activities or more stuff to ease their boredom, and parents- under the influence of that potent cocktail of love, guilt and anxiety- fork out more and more cash in a desperate attempt to keep them happy.

For Palmer (2009) structured activity is antithetical to the ideal of the romantic Apollonian child who ‘should be outside in the sunshine, laughing with their friends, playing imaginatively with whatever comes to hand.’

#### *6.3.10 Development versus Education*

A distinction can be found between child development and a child’s cultural education. The former is positioned in the childrearing manuals as responding to the child’s needs, the later as imposing the adult’s will. Play is framed as the ‘natural’ way to stimulate development (Palmer 2016:9, Webster-Stratton, 2005; Sunderland, 2016; Cohen, 2002) whereas the transmission of culture to young children in the form of more formal learning is unnatural and even ‘cruel’ (Palmer, 2016:17). This reflects a romantic construction of the ‘innocent’ Apollonian child, who must be protected from the world (Jenks, 2005; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998), including the world of knowledge. Child rearing books advocate the concerted cultivation of the child’s social, emotional and cognitive development, without acknowledgement of the parents’ role in the transmission of intellectual culture, knowledge or socially classed mores.

In answer to the question of how much should be taught at home Leach (2010: 418) answers ‘as much as the child herself invites’ and continues to warn that ‘if your child does lead you into teaching academic skills, I do try to do it by putting her in the way of discovering interesting things for herself.’ This negates the idea that parents have knowledge and experience not accessible through children’s self-discovery. The childrearing manuals are at pains not to advocate over-scheduling or early academics, rather the books reflect the current discourse of childhood innocence as influenced and exemplified by books such as Carl Honoré’s (2008) *Under Pressure*, or David Elkin’s (2001) *The Hurried Child*, which aim to ‘protect the joy and freedom’ of childhood from the adult world in the face of academic pressure and ‘too much too soon.’

A mother who practices building their young children's cultural capital through adult chosen activities and formal learning situations may be acting against the prevailing advice on sensitive mothering. Nevertheless, parents continue to engage their children in academic, sporting and cultural activities. According to Druckerman, (2012:170-171), as middle-class mothers: 'We believe that the pace at which our kids advance hinges on the choices we make, and how actively we engage with them...In America – and to a lesser extent in Britain – doing 'concerted cultivation' doesn't feel like a choice.' The emphasis on the mother's role in her child's development evident in the childrearing manuals may have inadvertently influenced the phenomena of the over scheduled child (Honore, 2008, Lareau, 2003) where children are so busy developing their potential through organised activities, they 'literally they have no free time to be children and relax' (Fureldi, 2011).

### *6.3.11 Maternal Deficit*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we can see the intensive mothering ideal strengthened by the pseudoscientific suggestion that separation from the mother inevitably causes the child stress, depression, behaviour problems and adult misery; to avoid damage children are said to need to be at home with a highly responsive intensive mother. Childrearing manual writer Markham (2016:49-50) draws on neuromania to claim that day-care is damaging, and mothers should stay with their babies giving them 'the attuned connections they need during that first critical year':

Research psychologists are still conducting the longitudinal studies that will give us the information we need about the effects of day care...And since so much of the brain development that determines mood, anxiety and depression tendencies in later life occurs during the first year, in some measure the results are already known.

In this passage Markham is convinced she knows the results even though the research is incomplete. Science is referenced only to justify a priori beliefs about sensitive motherhood and infant determinism. Palmer (2008:4), evokes science to justify a similarly reactionary viewpoint, demonstrating how childrearing is a repository for adult's fears about society:

Part of the problem with modern childrearing is that as women's roles in society have changed essential knowledge has been forgotten...Gradually however science has confirmed that much of the ancient wisdom was true. In a fast-moving, technology driven society many children's developmental needs are not being met.

The spectre of maternal deficit is present in the debate about day-care for babies and pre-school children. In this instance the 'problem' mother is not only ignorant of the child's developmental needs but absent. The script of 'sensitive motherhood' uses pop-attachment dogma to present mothers as the ideal primary carer for babies and children, reflecting the sentiment expressed in

Rousseau's (1712-1778) *Emile*, that "A child who passes through many hands in turn, can never be well brought up.' Sunderland (2016:54) utilizes the faux-scientific trope of 'toxic cortisol' to warn against out-of-home care. Although nominally respecting women's choice to work, manual writers such as Sunderland (2016:55) peddle a narrative of deterministic damage:

The consequences of high levels of cortisol in nursery school children are becoming apparent. Evidence suggests that when children are cared for extensively in a nursery early on, this can be associated with an increase in difficult relationships between parent and child and more aggression and non-compliance in the children.

In contrast, other writers favour day-care as one pragmatic option to manage family life, for example in *Toddler Taming* Green writes about 'the benefits of childcare' and reassures, 'At the end of the day if your child and you are happy that's all that matters.' Green's confidence in parental judgement of children's happiness contrasts with Sunderland's (2016:54) assertion 'Some parents think their child is fine at nursery, but her stress hormone levels may be very high.'

Theories of 'good' childrearing practice have been forged through work with children in institutional settings from Holt to Bowlby and onwards, or with children from very disadvantaged backgrounds (for example, Webster-Stratton's Incredible Years Program was devised 'for parents of preschool children who were at risk for a chronic pattern of conduct problems' (Posthumous et al 2012). The theories are then applied to universal domestic setting where they may not be as relevant. This distorts the picture of normal mothering, and deficit in maternal knowledge and practice is assumed. Advice forged in extreme conditions may assume a deficit of organisation, basic hygiene and care, or even of love which is not a true reflection of most families.

For example, attachment and neuro-parenting extrapolate from research undertaken in Romanian orphanages (or on laboratory animals) to form theories about universal childrearing practices. Emphasising maternal sensitivity and operationalising love as a method to enhance child development (see Gerhardt, 2014), and assuming a lack in maternal sensitivity which must be addressed through childrearing advice. Positive parenting, created in response to extremely deprived and troubled families, begins with the assumption that parents are prone to punishments, shouting and smacking, and must be persuaded into kindness.

Childrearing advice forged in conditions where parents and carers are seen as deficient is sold as enrichment childrearing advice to mothers who are 'good enough'. This may have created a false assumption of universal maternal deficit in childrearing knowledge and practice, and a false assumption of children's extreme vulnerability to parental action.

The warnings of potential harm in childrearing books serve to expand the idea of risk and abuse in an

example of ‘concept creep’ defined by Nick Haslam (2016) as the way by which ‘Concepts that refer to the negative aspects of human experience and behaviour have expanded their meanings so that they now encompass a much broader range of phenomena than before.’ The expansion of the concept of childhood harm and deficient motherhood does nothing to help those truly suffering miserable childhoods. Rather, it obfuscates the issues and weakens the power to recognise the rare cases of true parental abuse by conflating adult’s disapproval of others childrearing practices with a child’s experience of harm.

The assumption of maternal deficit is displayed within the childrearing book’s pedagogic techniques. Many books (such as Biddulph, 2003; Hogg, 2002; Faber and Mazlish, 2001; Sunderland, 2016) use illustrative examples, cartoons and sample scripts to demonstrate the author’s advice in a simplistic form. Quizzes and pages for notes may be included, enhancing the impression that the reader is participating in a learning activity from a state of ignorance. The minutiae of adult /child interaction are explained and simplified with an assumption of maternal deficit.

#### 6.4 Conclusion: A Crowded and Contradictory Field

Each approach presents the child/parent relationship differently. They rely on different knowledge claims and conceptions of childrearing (Hulbert, 2004). The childrearing books are also idiosyncratic, each version of an approach reflecting the individual experiences and interpretations of the authors (Hardyment, 2007). The childrearing advice can be framed as acts of persuasion, competing in a market of ideas.

Manual writers openly disagree about good practice. For example, in baby care advice books the use of routines is a source of contention. Under the heading ‘Beware of baby experts’ Sears (2003) claims routinised methods such as Ford’s increase parent insensitivity<sup>86</sup> to the baby’s cues. Whereas Ford (2006:33-34) claims attachment parenting and demand feeding (as advocated by Sears) can result in poor sleep for both mother and child and undernourished babies). As a child gets older advice continues to be divided. For example, punishment of children by parents is rejected by Faber and Mazlish, 2001; Nelson 2006:119; Ockwell-Smith, 2013:74; Bidulph:184:2003, but others stress the use of (non-physical) punishment as an important authoritative parenting tool (Latta, 2012: Mewes, 2012: Phelan, 2010).

But there is some limited agreement. Authors across the field<sup>87</sup> demonstrate the dual beliefs of

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<sup>86</sup> ‘Whereas attachment parenting is based on sensitivity, getting your baby into a routine requires insensitivity.’ (Sears and Sears, 2003:9)

<sup>87</sup>The pedagogy that does not explicitly emphasise parental determinism, is written by mothers and nannies. These authors elevate direct experience of raising children above theoretical models, but none-the-less are influenced by the 20<sup>th</sup> century

infant determinism and parental determinism. The two main intellectual sources behind the advice come from behaviourism and psychoanalysis, both of which emphasise the primacy of childhood in the formation of adult personality, and the importance of parents in shaping their child's future (Hardyment, 2007; Paris, 2013). To this is added the new neuroscientific discourse, which characterises the first years of life as highly determinant (Macvarish, Lee & Lowe, 2015). The models of childhood presented in advice books are pre-sociological and unimpressed by either social structure or mothers' and children's agency. Rather they represent two competing concepts of what children are and how they should be.

## Chapter Seven: What Children Are and How They Should Be

To demonstrate how perceptions of childhood generate particular advice I explore Sue Palmer's theory of 'toxic childhood'. Sue Palmer is of interest since, as in conjunction with writing childrearing advice, she has written four high profile books<sup>88</sup> arguing that modern lifestyles seriously damage children's development and well-being; she names this Toxic Childhood Syndrome. A teacher by training, her books are faux-sociology texts which include sections of parenting advice, with *Detoxing Childhood* (2007) being an overt parenting advice manual, prescribing a parenting agenda to combat alleged childhood toxicity. Palmer is not just addressing parents, she describes herself as a childhood campaigner, and has a political agenda to protect childhood, and to effect social change by changing parenting practices. She was named by the *Evening Standard* newspaper as one of the top twenty most influential people in the field of education for 2008. I demonstrate that her polemic is based on two contradictory models of childhood, the innocent child and the evil child which coexist within her work to create strong boundaries of childhood and an ethos of management and control of children.

I begin by referencing Lenore Skenazy to demonstrate an alternative view of childhood from Sue Palmer's contentions. American journalist, Skenazy came to prominence when she wrote an article for the *New York Sun* describing how she allowed her nine-year-old son to travel on the New York Subway unsupervised. The article garnered much attention and Skenazy (2010: xvi) claims '...the media dubbed me America's Worst Mom'. Her book *Free Range Kids How to Raise Self-Reliant Children* is both a childrearing manual and a justification of her own childrearing approach and has sold widely in the UK. Juxtaposing Skenazy (2010) and Palmer (2009,2015) serves to illuminate how assumptions about the nature of childhood and children produce advice; placing Palmer within an cultural context and making clarifying her ideological position.

### 7.1 Models of Childhood and Advice

Superficially there are many similarities between the two authors. Both authors suggest children should be encouraged to turn away from screens. Both stress the developmental importance of free play. Both authors want to encourage children to play outdoors and experience the natural world. These writers are participating in a cultural dialogue about children and nature, epitomised by Richard Louv's (2010:3) *Last Child in the Woods*, where he coins the quasi medical term 'nature

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<sup>88</sup> Sue Palmer's Toxic Childhood books: *Toxic Childhood*, 2006; *Detoxing Childhood*, 2007; *21st Century Boys*, 2009; *21st Century Girls*, 2013; *Toxic Childhood*, 2 ed. 2015

deficit disorder’ and expresses the desire ‘to heal the broken bond between our young and nature.’

But there is a fundamental difference in how each author understands what children are and how they should be. The model of childhood in Skenazy’s work is partly a sociological model in that it frames children as agentic; belonging to the same world as adults and possessing a right to access that world. Her work demonstrates what James Jenks and Prout (1998:6) call ‘the new paradigm’ of childhood sociology, ‘a call for children to be understood as social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstances.’ Whereas, as I shall demonstrate, Palmer’s argument relies on the conflation of contradictory pre-sociological models of ‘innocence’ and ‘evil’ within the child, to persuade readers of the need for adults (especially mothers) to protect, manage and control children and the boundaries of childhood.

For Skenazy (2010) middle childhood should include opportunities to broaden horizons and learn independence and responsibility. This is done by building children’s competency and trusting children to be unsupervised both at home and in the out-side world, Skenazy calls this ‘free-range’ childhood. Although Palmer (2015:59-63) also uses the phrase ‘free-range childhood’ she keeps the child firmly under adult control. Palmer (2015:280) laments that as children ‘grow older, they may increasingly wander abroad without supervision.’ Rather than reducing so-called ‘nature deficit disorder’ by allowing children to play free from adult supervision, Palmer advocates ‘loose’, ‘less intrusive’ or ‘semi-supervision’. According to Palmer (2015:62-69) mothers must manage their children’s freedom, by for example: scoping safe areas for play; accompanying children on outings ‘pointing out potential dangers and helping them choose safe routes’; using mobile phones or tracking devices to remotely supervise the child; sharing supervision with friends, neighbours and professionals. These initiatives are attempts to give the child illusion of freedom whilst keeping them firmly under adult management and control. In Palmer’s view of childhood all aspects of children’s lives must be under adult the adult gaze, from food to homework, leisure activities, media consumption and free play. Failing to intensely watch one’s child is framed as a dereliction of duty and produces ‘feral children’ either running wild or turning to ‘sedentary electronic entertainment’. For Palmer ‘toxic childhood’ is caused by lack of parental supervision.

Skenazy’s (2010: xvii) free-range kids movement encourages parents to ‘prepare their kids for the world rather than shielding them from it.’ She presents kids as ‘desperate to master the world’, as capable, trustworthy and responsible. In this she is reflecting what James, Jenks and Prout (1998:38) identify as an enlightenment view of the child as ‘born free and imbued with the a priori initiative of being an explorer’. Skenazy suggests adults should expand the socially constructed boundaries of childhood and encourage children’s independence and freedom. To do this, Skenazy’s (2010:104)

suggests:

‘The whole Free-Range idea is that the twin notions of constant supervision and perfect parenting are not necessary. Obsessing about every emotional, intellectual, and psychological boost we could give our kids is not necessary. Even being 100 percent Free Range is not necessary. Our kids are not solely formed by our input, nor will they be irreparably harmed by our bumbling oh-so-humanly along.

It is by freeing the parent from the extreme parental determinism prevalent within the twenty-first century cultural scripts of motherhood that Skenazy can advocate the liberation of children.

Whereas, as I will now discuss, by accepting a strong parental-determinist viewpoint, Palmer advocates control and management of children and a strengthening of the boundaries of childhood. This management and control of children stems in part from the romantic view of children as innocent and in need of protection, as James, Jenks and Prout (1998:14) explain that the legacy of Rousseau’s vision of the innocent child ‘meant that ‘Children can no longer be routinely mistreated, but neither can they be left to their own devices. Within this discourse, then, children have become subject.’

## 7.2 Toxic Childhood-Sue Palmer

In his history of Western Childhood Hugh Cunningham (2005:203) describes 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century childhood campaigners’ gradual adherence to a romantic vision of childhood, and the subsequent need to maintain the boundaries of childhood, explaining that ‘...“saving the child” came to take on a dominant meaning of preserving for the child what was thought of as a proper childhood; and this implied a childhood separated from the adult world in innocence and dependence.’

Palmer’s writing is firmly within this tradition, advising parents on how to preserve proper childhood and maintain the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. She represents optimum childhood as the obverse of modern urban adulthood, separated from commerce, knowledge and experience; childhood should be full of playful innocence, in a rural setting of tree climbing, running, and den making. For Palmer this is the natural context for childhood, and the only place where adult supervision and control may be relaxed<sup>89</sup>. Toxic childhood represents the breakdown of these boundaries, for example Palmer (2009) argues;

Little girls should be outside in the sunshine, laughing with their friends, playing imaginatively with whatever comes to hand – making dens, dressing up with old clothes



and scraps of material, choosing the roles they play...

They shouldn't be holed up indoors, staring at screens, learning how to pester their parents for the latest 'must-have' toy and being groomed for a lifetime of consumption.

The concern is that a fundamental aspect of childhood is intimately linked to the natural world, and innocent play and has been harmed by modernity. Cunningham (2005:185) suggests the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by concerns and fears about childhood:

It was not that people ceased to accord significance to childhood – far from it; rather they began to doubt that it was possible to preserve in any integrity the territory mapped out as childhood. Invasions threatened from every corner, and childhood, so it was argued could no longer survive. In consequence children became alien creatures, a threat to civilisation rather than its hope and partial salvation.

As I will demonstrate in this section, Palmer's parenting books are symptomatic of this fear, extending the threat to every aspect of contemporary childhood, and passionately espousing the need to protect her vision of a 'proper' childhood<sup>90</sup>, for the sake of future civilisation. Palmer (2015:3) claims that left on its current trajectory, 'To put it bluntly , the next generation may not be bright or balanced enough to keep the show on the road...' Palmer's (2009:3) argument is:

Junk food, poor sleeping patterns, a screen based sedentary life style, the wrong sort of childcare and educational experiences, family fragmentation ,the effects of consumer culture... Many youngsters now suffer from a combination of these factors- a dangerous cocktail that's bound to have an effect.

Palmer adopts the quasi-medical title of 'toxic childhood syndrome' to add a faux-scientific flavour to her polemic. In what she terms 'a perfect storm', she claims (2013:21) toxic childhood syndrome is produced by a combination of factors in modern lifestyles – stemming from competitive consumerism, technological innovation and mothers working outside the home. Palmer adapts a line of argument from Postman's (1982) 'disappearance of childhood', and Giroux & Pollock's (2010) 'end of innocence', to argue that childhood is under threat from technology, media and corporate culture.

### 7.3 Blaming the 'Parent Deficit'

Echoing the communitarian sociologist Amati Etzioni's argument in the Parent Deficit<sup>91</sup> (1993), she argues that the mechanism of toxic childhood syndrome rests on the premise that "Children are

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<sup>90</sup> In a 2017 interview with the UK Study Centre website, Sue Palmer explains: ' Outdoor play nourishes your curiosity, and that's what children are supposed to be doing, and we're sitting them down and telling them to pursue gold stars and smiley faces and marks on tests, and very often we just deaden the impulse.'

<sup>91</sup> Etzioni (6) argues that the competitive, consumerist culture of Britain and America has separated children from being 'properly' cared for in the home and that 'children who are not brought up properly' create problems for the community.

unhappy because of parental absence” (2015:253). She claims, children try to fill the parental void with consumption, screen time and consumerist technological culture which corrupts childhood. This determines the child’s character and future outcomes, potentially damaging children, and future society. Ultimately Palmer attributes poor-child wellbeing to mothers working outside the home, allowing children to be influenced by screen-based consumer culture, and of failing to protect the boundaries of innocent childhood. In *Toxic Childhood* (2015:140) Palmer paints a picture of ideal at-home-motherhood as opposed to deficient modern working-motherhood:

The withdrawal of mothers from the home left a yawning gap that was quickly filled by the products of technology. With no one around to sing, chat and listen to them, children learned instead to gaze mindlessly at the TV. In the absence of mum, cooking regular meals and encouraging families to eat together, the food industry plied our children with processed junk. Since there were no adults at home to supervise play, or to provide ‘eyes on the street’ so they could play outside, children turned instead to sedentary electronic entertainment. And if parents were too tired after a day’s work to supervise regular bedtime routines, the electronic entertainment fizzed on late into the night, rendering them ever more difficult to control. The results, in terms of disaffected, disengaged and self-destructive young people, are all around us.

According to this polemic mother’s alleged abandonment of maternal<sup>92</sup> duty is to blame for opening the boundaries of childhood to the corrupting forces of modernity. James, Jenks and Prout (15) note that the legacy of Rousseau’s ‘innocent child’ meant that children have become ‘everybody’s concern’ and now ‘constitute an investment in the future in terms of the social order.’ According to Palmer’s (2013:5) logic mothers choosing to work outside the home also becomes everybody’s concern, since ‘The way we raise our children determines not only the sort of adult that they become but also the sort of society they forge for themselves.’ Palmer (2006:2) claims parental deficit is the direct cause of a host of societal and individual problems and builds on parental fear as a persuasive technique to promote her vision of childhood.

The knock on effect of this epidemic [toxic childhood syndrome] are already obvious in statistics on drug and substance abuse among teenagers, along with binge drinking, eating disorders, self harm and suicide (attempted and successful). Add to this the figures for teenage crime and antisocial behaviour, and there is an awful lot for the parents of a ten-year-old with an attitude problem to worry about.

This is fundamentally a doctrine of mother blaming, since parents are portrayed as enabling the process through absence, guilt, ignorance and denial. It is also a doctrine of Infant determinism,

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<sup>92</sup> Palmer (2015:174-175) presents mothers as the natural care-giver: ‘Mothers, being hormonally assisted, usually find baby-rearing easier than fathers- although increasingly there are fathers who heroically stay the course.’

claiming the experiences of infancy have a profound and lasting effect on future behaviour, and personality. Throughout her work Palmer evokes the child's brain-science myths, to enhance an intensely determinist argument:

'Toxic childhood syndrome damages the brain of a growing number of children' (2009:3)

'The experience of childhood creates adult brains.' (2006:17)

'The experiences we give them influence their behaviour and personality for the rest of their lives.' (2007:19)

'neuroscientists have also shown that the overwhelming majority of connections between neurons in the human brain, and the chemicals that enable those connections, are created during childhood, and are affected by children's experiences.' (2015:308)

For the Toxic Childhood argument to hold Palmer must present children as **intensely** vulnerable and impressionable to the **worst** aspects of modern culture. Palmer is not simply promoting the model of the innocent child to be protected from corruption by the outside world. The children presented in Palmer's books are not credited with the natural goodness of Rousseau's Emile<sup>93</sup>. Palmer claims given the opportunity children are lazy in their tastes, actively seeking unchallenging pastimes and instant gratification. Children's consumption of media is labelled 'mindless' and their entertainment choices 'junk' and 'undemanding'. The computer gamer is 'passive and non-productive' (2009:12). They are 'addicted', 'slaves' to screens. If exposed to popular culture they will choose to respond to the worst possible role-models, and the most immoral messages:

"Marketers know that... the young male psyche is deeply attracted to violence, aggression and War" (2015:260)

"Successful marketing of 'cool' involves [...] pandering to children's enthusiasm for back-chat, sneakiness and challenging authority, it sends a message of endorsement – even encouragement – for breaking parental rules." Palmer 2015:261

She makes these claims superficially plausible by insinuating that children possess an innately dark nature, which can be exacerbated by modern culture. James, Jenks and Prout (1998:10-11) note that the pre-sociological discourse of the child as innately evil, is often present within contemporary discourses of concern, and public moralizing. In this discourse 'children are demonic, harbourers of potentially dark forces which risk being mobilized if, by dereliction or inattention, the adult world allows them to veer away from the straight and narrow path which has been bequeathed to them.'

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<sup>93</sup> As James, et al (1998:13) explain 'Rousseau sought to banish all consideration of original sin and argued that rather than treating children to a punitive journey to grace, we might properly idolize the intrinsic values they bring to bear on the world.'

Within this model, the very nature of childhood calls for parental management and control of the child's mind and body, since 'without parental constraint children are anarchistic'. This control includes keeping children occupied industriously, monitoring their companions, encouraging good habits and keeping children away from 'dangerous places' where temptation lurks. As James, Jenks and Prout (1998:11) state:

"'Dangerous places' – from the shopping mall to the 'dysfunctional' family – are thus those which conspire in the potential liberation of the demonic forces already present within the body (and mind) of the child. And it is these which point to the need for restraint."

The 'dangerous place' in the Toxic Childhood argument is the modern world: the most dangerous places are the virtual world of television, computer games and internet streamed into the child's home<sup>94</sup>. Palmer claims 'the electronic village now exposes her to far greater dangers than lurk in the average local park.' The local park is presented as the proper context for childhood, the world of technology improper. The language she uses to describe technology and commercial culture, has associations with sexual predators wishing to corrupt and despoil, for example, 'Many parents seem unaware – or are in denial- that behind the TV programmes and computer games that keep their offspring entertained lurks an army of anonymous manipulators.' (Palmer, 2015:248) and "Conveniently the absence of parents at home means children spend more time glued to screens, so there's plenty of opportunity to groom young consumers" (Palmer, 2015:253). This plays on current and real parental fears of children accessing harmful material or interacting with strangers wishing harm. Palmer expands this fear to encompass nearly all aspects of on-line interaction, commerce and gaming.

The restraint required is parental awareness and vigilance. Parenting is recast as an instrument to maintain the boundaries between childhood and modernity. Palmer advises parents to monitor, supervise and protect<sup>95</sup> of all aspects of a child's life; especially, children's engagement with technology, media and commerce. Palmer (2007:130) asks parents to "Monitor children's media diet as carefully as you monitor the food they eat." Palmer's (2006:296) ideal childrearing a form of is intensive supervision of the child and the wider world: "to keep children safe in the long

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<sup>94</sup> 'there's a real possibility of danger to children and teenagers in the highly unregulated climate that exists in much of the electronic village' (Palmer, 2015: 266).

<sup>95</sup> At the same time as recommending intense supervision of children including using 'tracking devices, so you can keep tabs on where they are' (2008:58) Palmer (2008:52) warns that 'In fact, the greatest danger to 21<sup>st</sup> century children is parental overprotectiveness, which now threatens every aspect of their development.' This hyperbolic statement is highly contradictory in a polemic that promotes intense protection of children. It is not 'overprotectiveness' in general that worries Palmer, but protection from nature, and 'loosely supervised outdoor play', which she perceives as the 'proper' context of childhood.

run...requires continuous hands on involvement by their parents... keeping a keen eye on potential dangerous developments in the outside world” As David Buckingham explains in the foreword to Thomson & Berriman’s (2018:loc 90) book *Researching Everyday Childhoods: Time, Technology and the Digital Age* the moral panic around children and technology is fed by an assumption that ‘media is somehow external to childhood and to children’s everyday lives.’ Buckingham argues that

This approach leads us to ignore the diverse ways in which children interpret media, and the diverse roles they play in their lives. Media may do things to children, but children also do things with media. Media are not outside children’s lives, impacting upon them, but deeply embedded within them.

For Palmer, the parental role is to preserve the integrity of childhood from the threat of modernity. Palmer (2015:14) claims this threat is strong enough to make the astonishing statement that parenting is now ‘more difficult than in any previous generation’. She defends this statement by claiming ‘In a complex contemporary culture, children are in greater need of parental wisdom, guidance and support than ever before.’

This claim may increase parental anxiety, but it may also reassure the middle-class readership that it their superior effort<sup>96</sup> and knowledge that bestows good child-outcomes rather than middle-class privilege. If parental determinism is taken to be the case, then a type of childrearing meritocracy must follow. If we accept that good child outcomes are due to effective parenting. Then the obverse can be claimed. Palmer claims, “The effects of toxic childhood are much worse for the children of the poor.” (2015:19-20). Palmer (2015:283) pontificates that ‘neglectful’ childrearing, where a parent gives ‘ children neither loving attention nor behavioural boundaries is ‘sadly common’ among poorer parents who ‘who are often the result of a neglectful upbringing themselves and too preoccupied with the dramas of their own lives to expend much effort on their children.’

In *Blaming the Victim* American sociologist and activist, William Ryan (1971:2) identifies this argument:

The “multi-problem poor, it is claimed, suffer the psychological effects of impoverishment, “the culture of poverty”, and the deviant value system of the lower classes; consequently, though unwittingly, they cause their own troubles. From such a viewpoint, the obvious fact that poverty is primarily the absence of money is overlooked

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<sup>96</sup> Palmer (2015:279) admits that there are some positive aspects to electronic media, and reassures readers that it is permissible to allow some technology use by ‘the sort of people who would read this book, and probably have broadband access, sophisticated viewing habits and a high level of media literacy. As such parents wise up to the pros and cons of twenty-first-century technology, they take steps to protect their children from harm and ensure they reap the many benefits of life in a digital world. ‘ She compares this, presumably, middle-class childrearing with ‘other’ less protective, or literate parents who allow: ‘Too wide an access to junk TV and mindless computer games, which shut down minds rather than opening them up (and, since many of these feature high levels of violence, may also cause increased levels of aggression).’

or set aside.

Palmer (2007: 153) dismisses poverty as a problem per se by claiming 'Today's gap between haves and have-nots can't be measured simply in material terms. Many of today's "poor" have plenty of consumer goods like widescreen TVs and cars.' She then claims people cause their own misfortune through participation in a culture of which Palmer (2015:20) disapproves: "My argument is that poor childhood well-being is not merely the result of social inequality but, in a screen based, hyper-competitive culture, it's also one of the most significant causes."

Since she claims mothers are culpable for allowing children to suffer 'toxic childhood', then it follows that she is arguing that poor mothers are especially blame worthy. Describing children in a poor community, Palmer (2015:85-86) insinuates that inadequate parenting, and boundary maintenance has led to children's baser natures being mobilized.

children wander in gangs, creating mayhem for local residents.... presumably, by the time most children are about eight or so, many parents have given up or lost interest in trying to protect them – or the children have become so ungovernable that they break out of captivity and begin to run wild...

In my experience, it takes ten years to turn human children into impulsive, unempathetic animals, so desperately anti-social that they destroy their own habitat. And the best way to do it is to raise them in captivity, malnourish them on junk food and expose them to all the other aspects of toxic childhood outlined in this book.

Through parental dereliction, inattention, ignorance these children have escaped the boundaries of a "proper" childhood and become alien creatures, a threat to civilisation; the children themselves have become toxic. James Jenks and Prout (10) describe how the model of 'the evil child' lends creates fear: "The liberation of these forces threatens the wellbeing of the child itself is self-evident; perhaps more significantly, it also threatens the stability of the adult collectively, that social order that children in time will aspire..."

Palmer uses a demonization and fear of working-class and poor children (and their parents) to persuade her reader to adopt her childrearing advice and police the boundaries of 'respectable childhood':

"Meanwhile the poor and poorly educated families tend to have lots of children, while the wealthy and well educated have fewer every year. It doesn't take a mathematical genius to work out where this is taking us. Unless we act soon our children will have to survive in an increasingly toxic world." (Palmer,2007:153)

## 7.4 The Boundaries of Childhood

As the child moves from the perceived innocence of childhood to the knowingness of adulthood the liminality of adolescence challenges the boundaries of childhood further, for Palmer, it seems the worst thing a child can resemble is a teenager. The first passage of *Toxic Childhood* (Palmer, 2015:1) begins:

I guessed from her face she was no more than ten years old, but the angry scowl and scrunched self-consciousness looked more like a teenager, racked with adolescent angst. Her clothes were too old for her too – a low-slung miniskirt and high-cut top, exposing a plump little midriff. And across the little girl's chest was printed her message to the world: 'I heart my attitude problem'.

The child's worldly self-consciousness, and emerging sexuality embody the disruption to the boundaries of childhood. After disapproving of the girls' appearance Palmer (2015:1) imagines the toxic childhood that caused the child's distasteful precocity:

I suspect the only thing that small lost soul wanted to do was to curl up in front of a widescreen TV and lose herself in something mindless – a cartoon, maybe, or one of the endless American sitcoms on the Disney Channel. Her feelings about life were written all over her: anger, self-obsession, boredom, lack of engagement – the multiple trademarks of the brat.

She deduced all this by a glance. Later she imagines the inadequacy of the child's parents, invoking parental absence and ignorance as causes of the child's presumed toxic childhood. Finally, Palmer fears for the child's adolescent future, problematizing adolescence to claim

The knock-on effect of this epidemic [toxic childhood syndrome] are already obvious in statistics on drug and substance abuse among teenagers, along with binge drinking, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide (attempted and successful). Add to this the figures for teenage crime and antisocial behaviour, and there is an awful lot for the parents of a ten-year-old with an attitude problem to worry about.

The implication is that by the time children reach adolescence the dark forces have been activated and the damage is done. Claiming 'the whole of the developed world... now teems with miserable little creatures like this one.' Palmer is inventing a narrative to claim cause and effect; bad parenting allows modern culture to unleash the innately dark forces within the child, which creates toxic childhood, which determines problematic adolescence. Thus, on reaching adolescence the toxic damage is done, the boundaries have been destroyed, and children are 'transformed into disaffected youths hanging about threateningly around the mall, teenage mums devouring taxpayers' money, or criminals who don't see why they should give a damn about the welfare of the moneyed classes.' (Palmer, 2006:226)

By evoking these clichés, Palmer is playing to established prejudice and fear. By equating young

mothers, and teenagers simply being in a public place, with criminals, Palmer heightens the sense of threat allegedly posed by adolescents, blocking empathy and understanding. Palmer's technique is one that Owen Jones recognises in *Chavs: The demonization of the working classes* (2011:78), when he observes that 'Social problems affecting particular poor communities are first exaggerated and then portrayed as representative.' The process can be clearly seen in the following passage, where Palmer (2007:153) equates poverty with bad parenting:

Children at the bottom of this heap now have little chance of moving up and out, and their parents are unaware of – or perhaps too locked in their own hopeless lives to care about the ill effects of toxic childhood.

So, children in poor, poorly educated families tend to have unhealthy diets, chaotic lifestyles, plenty of junk TV, marketing messages and computer violence, and little parental discipline as they get older. This toxic childhood erupts into toxic adolescence. Britain now has the highest level of teenage pregnancy in Europe, the highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases, the largest youth prison population and the biggest problem with drug and alcohol abuse.

As Imogen Tyler (2004:18) notes in her study of class discourse, the emergence of distorted and caricatured 'figures'<sup>97</sup> of working class 'types' such as those evoked by Sue Palmer,

[...]is always expressive of an underlying social crisis or anxiety: these figures are mobilised in ways that attribute superior forms of social capital to the subject positions and social groups they are implicitly or explicitly differentiated from.

The reader of Palmer's polemic can reassure themselves of their 'good' parent status in contrast to the 'poor and poorly educated'. By connecting teenage pregnancy to 'poor and poorly educated' families Palmer is tapping into the cultural stereotype of the problematic young mother, who does not conform to 'proper' motherhood. Imogen Tyler (2008:28) notes that the figure of the BBC television comedy *Little Britain's* (2003-2006) character of Vicky Pollard 'the incurably sub-literate, sexually promiscuous, pregnant, teenage chavette... is increasingly used as a shorthand within "serious" debates about the decline of social and educational standards.' Vicky Pollard embodies the stereotype of threatening motherhood, which promotes feelings of 'disgust' and fear. Palmer's writing illustrates Tyler's (2008:32) observation that 'within the representational regimes which dominate within contemporary Britain social class is only visible in highly stereotyped and often antagonistic forms.'

Upon reaching adolescence these children are no longer presented as innocent, vulnerable,

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<sup>97</sup> Tyler (2013:10) uses the term figure as 'both a theoretical concept and as a method to detail the ways in which the populations examined become fetishistically over determined and publicly imagined and represented in excessive, distorted or caricatured ways.'



impressionable and in need of protection; but as social problems, problems caused by parents. The parents have failed to maintain the boundaries of childhood, their ignorance and inattention has allowed the dark forces within the child to be mobilized by technological consumer culture. For Palmer (2015:20), when the boundaries of childhood are broken the children cease to be regarded as children imbued with innocence, but become 'other':

Young children in many rundown, inner-city areas of the UK are becoming increasingly feral. Visiting such places, I find them more terrifying every year. Many of the children don't have children's faces — they're pinched and angry, with dead eyes. For them, violence is a fact of daily life. Their parents — deprived, uneducated, often scarcely more than children themselves — are often junkies, alcoholics, involved in crime. Toxic childhood syndrome flourishes in such circumstances, and it's feeding this feral generation.

Palmer's work demonstrates, James Jenks and Prout (1998:38) assertion:

physical, conceptual and moral boundaries circumscribe the extent of children's wanderings. From the closed arenas of domestic space to the infinite horizons of cyberspace, boundaries forestall and contain the child's movement. Erected by gerontocratic hegemony and policed by discipline, these boundaries are legitimized through ideologies of care, protection and privacy.

To persuade the readers to join her campaign to de-tox childhood, Palmer constructs and polices multiple boundaries. These boundaries define what 'children should be' according to Palmer. Boundaries between children and adults, which confine childhood to the obverse of adulthood. Boundaries between children and adolescence, with adolescence, as the site where the boundaries blur, becoming intrinsically threatening, and problematized. Boundaries between childhood and modernity, which potentially undermine children's choices and participation in modern culture. Boundaries between "good" parents and "bad" parents. That is, those who conform to Palmer's 'good parent' ideal and those who do not. Classed boundaries, which privilege the parenting practices of the middle-classes, and present poor families as threatening to society. Palmer is probably sincere in her campaign to save childhood, but rather than protecting children, her approach may add to children's vulnerability. By constructing boundaries around "proper" childhood, she risks inculcating fear and distaste of those who exist outside the boundaries. The problems encountered in childhood and adolescence are unlikely to be helped by any campaign, so empty of fellow feeling and understanding, that it casually describes adolescents as 'threatening', prejudices a child as a 'brat' or can label any children as 'unempathetic animals'.

This chapter has explored how childrearing pedagogy is bound by ideological concerns about the nature of childhood and children. Transient conceptions of children are based on adult fears and desires which form cultural boundaries of childhood. Palmer and Skenazy have superficially similar

concerns and wishes, both expressing the romantic view that childhood should be 'magical'. However, the differences in how the authors imagine what children are and how they should be, means that whilst Palmer tightens the boundaries of childhood, Skenazy frames childhood as a process of boundary loosening and gradual participation. Skenazy suggests the boundaries of childhood have become too constraining, disempowering children of independence and competence. 'Childhood is supposed to be about discovering the world.' This fundamental difference in how each author understands what children are and how they should be, produces starkly different advice to parents.

## Chapter Eight: The language of 21<sup>st</sup> century advice

This chapter discusses the ambiguity surrounding the language used by the childrearing manuals by exploring the diverse meaning afforded to terms such as 'authoritative', 'consequences' and 'boundaries.' Through original empirical analysis of the childrearing manuals, I demonstrate how the tension across the childrearing manuals epitomises the tensions between the Dionysian and the Apollonian: order versus chaos, culture versus nature, innocence versus experience. I begin by exposing those tensions across the field and highlighting the subsequent ambiguity about childrearing approaches through discussion of routines, rewards and consequences and punishment. This section uses the interpretive repertoires identified for the textual elicitation method to drill down and interrogate the content of the childrearing manuals. I have grouped the interpretive repertoires into three areas; routines, discipline and children's potential. I examine the advice in each area and identify the pervasive cultural scripts, which will then be juxtaposed to the mother's testimony from the textual elicitation method in chapter nine to explore how mothers negotiate the conflicting demands of 'good' mothering presented in 21<sup>st</sup> century childrearing manuals.

### 8.1 Socialisation

Within the 21<sup>st</sup> cultural script of good mothering a mother must optimise her child's potential, but as the next section demonstrates this optimisation must be conducted within rigid boundaries of 'proper childhood'.

Jenks (2005:70) suggests 'to be socialized is to become one with the normative structure.' Within childrearing manuals socialization as a parenting goal has two distinct forms. The first concerns outward behaviour and the second inner development of the child. These forms represent contrasting models of childhood. The Dionysian child and the Apollonian, as Jenks explains:

... the Dionysian child is an instance of a social structure where the rules and beliefs are external and consensual: a society where people are less different, and it is the affirmation of their similarities that at the basis of their views of childrearing.

...the Apollonian child on the other hand may be seen to occupy a social structure permeated by panopticism. The rules and beliefs are more diffuse, people are different and isolated, and it is consequently more difficult to operate with a sense of shared values. Within such a world people manifest their uniqueness and children must be reared to express what is peculiarly special about their personalities.

Jenks argues that within both models of childhood there is an inherent need to control or police childhood. The Dionysian child is policed overtly through public punishment and the induction of

shame, whereas the Apollonian child is policed covertly through panoptic monitoring and the induction of guilt. As I will show, this distinction is clear within the childrearing manual field. The books promoting control of the chaotic Dionysian child emphasise good manners and normative behaviours as a childrearing goal. Whereas the books promoting sensitive mothering of the Apollonian child emphasise the active development of the child's potential under the mother's constant reflective gaze.

The cultural script of 'control of the chaotic' frames socialisation as an emphasis on a child's behaviour towards others. Children are encouraged to participate in the society by displaying and understanding of cultural norms and behaviours or 'good manners'. Manuals following this script suggest children as young as two should learn to say 'please' and 'thank you', be developing table manners, learning not to interrupt adults and to share, for example, Ford (56-61) states:

'The more a child is taught to take responsibility for his own actions, and so to understand the consequences of unacceptable behaviour, the easier it will be for him to learn to be polite and respectful of other people's feelings.'

This view of socialisation of children as instilling mores and manners is possible when authors have confidence in the mores of the culture to which the children are to be initiated. For manual writer and children's campaigner Sue Palmer (2007:14) modern culture has lost its coherence and thus the ability to control the Dionysian child: 'Moral guidance has suffered as societies become increasingly confused, while children are constantly exposed to manipulative advertising and the excesses of celebrity culture.'

The cultural script of 'sensitive motherhood' frames socialisation as part of a child's individual development, as exemplified by Sunderland's (2016:22) neuroparenting claim:

Good parenting has a dramatic effect on a child's higher brain. The frontal lobes are often referred to as the social organs because their optimal development is so dependent on having really good relationship experiences. When these happen, vital frontal lobe functions come on-line and your child's emotional and social intelligence develops, and with it his ability to learn, concentrate, reflect, plan, and control his impulses to lash out or run away, and to empathize, stay stable under stress, and problem solve.

From this viewpoint social mores take second place to the inner development of the unique child and the mother/child relationship is privileged as the source of good social development. The childrearing books present a dialogue between these two competing and incompatible views of what children are and how they should be. As I shall demonstrate, how the child is conceptualised influences how the mother is advised to interact with the child, from sensitively mothering the Apollonian child, to controlling the chaotic Dionysian child.

## 8.2 Routines

The conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian socialisation is evident in the manuals' varied approaches to routines. The experts advocating routines mainly draw their authority from working with children within a context removed from the ideological demands of sensitive mothering.; nannies (Ford, Frost, Hogg, Mewes), or teachers (Janis-Norton, Taylor). Routines are presented as a means to encourage a child to fit into family life and its surrounding cultural norms. Routines are presented as a framework to alleviate the emotional intensity of the other parenting approaches. The idea is that the routines work automatically in the background, leaving time for the relationship and day to day living to take precedence; allowing time and space for fun (Frost. 2005:48; Taylor,2009:107). Acknowledging the child as part of the family group, routines are presented as a practical framework to meet the needs of the family, and 'take the chaos out of everyday life" (Frost, 2005:51). These authors maintain routines help children thrive.

Many manual writers do not fully engage with the suggestion that children thrive in a routine<sup>98</sup>. There is a tendency to underplay routine and rely on a definition of well-being based on feelings and attachment within the mother/child dyad. Within the child-centred (Apollonian) manuals there is an ambiguity around routine, that can fall into explicit mistrust of the parent prescribing sleep, structured activities and set feeding. This may have its routes in an unwillingness to steer mothers away from 'demand' breast feeding, for example, Ockwell Smith (2016:Kindle Locations 989-990) warns mothers that 'While it may seem tempting to try to get your baby onto a schedule in order to get some predictability back into your life, this could inhibit breastfeeding and lead to lots of tears and upset for your baby.' Since breast feeding is constructed as a positive maternal identity (Lomax, 2014), the implication is that routine is antithetical to sensitive motherhood. This stance continues from babyhood into childhood and manifests as a reluctance to endorse family routine above spontaneity and an ambiguity about routines even when routines are nominally advocated. Mixed messages about routine can appear in the same text, for example in *Gentle Parenting* (Ockwell-Smith, 2016: loc. 2517) mothers are told that 'Young children need predictability and this means that

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<sup>98</sup> There is considerable evidence that routines may be beneficial. For example. Fiese et al (2002), in a review of 33 research publications found that routines and rituals may ease the stress of daily living. Feise et al (2002) found positive correlations between family routines and parenting competence and child adjustment. Regular bedtime routines promoting adequate sleep have been associated with children's health, good behaviour (Biggs et al, 2011; Kelly et al, 2013; Maski &Kothare, 2013). The presence of routines and structure throughout the day, may have positive influence on children's sleep acquisition (Koulouglioti et al, 2014:80) and this may impact on behaviour. It has been suggested that providing the security of consistency and predictable daily life routines may reduce children's behavioural problems (Henderson et al, 2011:758; Bridley & Jordan, 2012). This type of research suggests a strong case for recommending routine as part of a childrearing approach. However, it is problematic to imply a direct causality from routines to positive family life, since use of routines could be symbolic of greater family organisation and cohesion.

they need you to enforce any routines and boundaries consistently, otherwise life is highly confusing and quite scary for them.’, but also to ‘Question who am I putting first with this routine and slow down. So, what if they didn’t get their bath or teeth brushed? It can happen tomorrow. So, what if I’m late? This helps me to step back, go slow, get perspective and put my child first.’

The child’s perspective (as interpreted by the parent with guidance from experts) is placed above the parent’s perspective, and above social norms. Talking about two to five-year-olds Leach (2005:465) advises ‘A definite evening routine and ritual usually works best. But, whatever your family’s pattern or lack of one, don’t expect the child to break off in the middle of a game or television programme and come instantly to bed.’ Within this model children are not necessarily expected to fit into families, and adult lives. Children inhabit a separate sphere, their vulnerable development protected, enhanced and served by a vigilant and sensitive mother who is guided by experts.

Some child-centred and attachment manuals have recast routines as part of sensitive motherhood, for example Sears and Hogg (2002:68) note the power of rituals and routines to create regular moments of connection<sup>99</sup> between parent and child, including purposeful moments of affection and intimacy. Parenting culture academic Charlotte Faircloth (2014) argues that the dominant parenting culture transforms everyday tasks, such as touching, feeding and sleeping from ends in themselves to “tools which parents are required to perfect to ensure proper development of their children.”

Faircloth’s observation is confirmed by close reading of the manuals where routines are allowed to be employed as tools to promote secure attachment, desirable behaviour, ‘calm separation fears’ (Sears, 2015), ‘promote mastery’ (Leach, 2005) or to create regular ‘connection opportunities’ (Markham:2014:loc 751); but not be used for parent’s ‘convenience’ or family management.

Routines are employed within the positive parenting approach as a way of minimising conflict and poor parental behaviours, for example manual writers Saad and Saad (2015: loc. 751) suggest under the heading routines: ‘Use for: Replacing reminding and nagging, preventing power struggles, fostering independence and responsibility, mealtimes, bedtimes, morning issues, shopping struggles, homework.’ According to Saad and Saad routines should be created with the child and parents should not ‘expect a child to keep a to schedule’.

Sunderland (2017:180) promotes routines as a way of ensuring good behaviour:

We all have a psychological need for structure. Lack of structure can make adults feel depressed, anxious, or angry or lose focus and meaning. A society without structure is an

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<sup>99</sup> Under the heading ‘Tuck me in Dad’ Sears suggests that a routine can include special teaching moments of intimacy on a ritualised basis: “Bedtime stories can reflect your day and neatly tuck in a little teaching. Surround your child with pleasant thoughts and admirable values as she drifts off to sleep. Do this night after night and these bits of wisdom will be filed away in her library of experiences” (150).

extremely fertile ground for bad behaviour. Without the structure of rules and the law, we would have a breakdown in civilization. It's just the same with children. They need the structure of clear house rules and clear routines. Think of the structureless time for a child of waiting in a queue or following you around a shop. Your child suddenly becomes horrid. But when you do some structured activity with him, you have a great child!

The implication is that a parent must fill the child's days with structured activities lest the child's innate chaos unleashed. Sunderland is appealing to the pre-sociological model of the chaotic Dionysian child who must be controlled by adults. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) identify a similar model of 'the evil child' and observe that within this model is the fear that "without parental constraint children are anarchistic'. Reinforcing the model of the chaotic, Dionysian child is a Freudian<sup>100</sup> emphasis on the powerful Id, a primal force of libidinal drives within the child, which must be curbed and controlled through adult intervention and structure. As Jenks (2005:64) explains:

'The id, as we know, is that libidinal repository of insatiable desire. It is the dark driving force which acts as the source of all creativity, yet which is required to be quelled or 'repressed' such that people can live in relation to one another and have some regard for the mutual incompatibility of their systems of desire. The social bond resides in this repression; its story and its implications for childrearing are familiar, if more subtle.'

Across the field there is little consensus over the use of routine, let alone the preferable origin of the routine. Routines could be created by the parents (Hogg, 2002), or evolve from the parents' assessment of family life (Frost,2005; Taylor,2009), but it is more common for manual writers will advocate a different source of authority. This means that routines could be imposed by an expert (Ford,2006; Mewes, 2012), stem 'naturally' from the mother/child dyad (Ockwell-Smith,2013), be informed by developmental needs (Leach,2010; Sears,2005) or negotiated with the child (Eanes, 2016; Saad and Saad, 2005; Kohn, 2006). The same interpretive repertoire, that 'children thrive with routines' is drawn upon across the literature but is given markedly different meaning.

The equivocation or rejection of parent-imposed routines as a cornerstone of childrearing practice may be due to doubtfulness that the parent has the authority to declare when children should eat, sleep, wash etc., or has the wisdom to execute that authority in the best interests of the child. For example, Ockwell-Smith is only positive about the word 'routine' after she differentiates between routines and schedules 'Routine refers to doing the same things at roughly the same time each day, whereas schedules are artificially imposed by parents with little regard for the baby's needs.' This differentiation is based on where the authority resides, with the parent or the child's developmental 'needs'.

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<sup>100</sup> James, Jenks and Prout (1998) note that the Freudian model of 'the unconscious child' built from the Ego, Id and Superego draws on three previous models of childhood. The evil child, the innocent child and the immanent child.

### 8.3 Authority

This is symptomatic of an ambiguity throughout the literature, about the validity of parental authority itself. To avoid promoting authoritarian childrearing manuals either reject parental authority, favouring a democratic parenting style relying on negotiation and sublimating parental wishes (for example, Kohn, 2006; Leach, 2010), or rely on techniques to manipulate the child into accepting parental authority without making that authority explicit (for example, Phelan, 2010; Janis-Norton, 2012; Webster-Stratton, 2005; Nelson, 2006). For example, Saad and Saad (2015:loc 757) are clear in their recommendation that adult authority needs to be obfuscated in order to gain children's compliance: 'Creating Routines is a very useful tool for anticipating these kind of problematic areas, because when we draw up clear steps and schedules for dealing with routines, this list becomes 'the boss', rather than us.' In his exploration of modern parenting culture, *Paranoid Parenting*, Furedi (2009) criticises childrearing advice by arguing that parental authority cannot be shared without being diminished, but this observation under-estimates the possibility that diminishing parental authority is an active goal of some childrearing manual writers. Potentially stemming from the fear, expressed by Ockwell-Smith, that parents will impose their authority with little regard for their children's needs.

Within the child-centred, and attachment childrearing books the authority on the baby's needs belongs to the baby itself, interpreted by the mother by recourse to the authority of developmental advice. The 'good mother' is presented as sensitive and reflective (Reece, 2013), but without the authority to decide on the best ways to mother her baby herself. The child-centred advice-givers then seem to have difficulty providing a scenario where the mother assumes authority herself in the toddler years and beyond. As Glenda Wall (2011) identifies, the child remains the first authority on the child's needs, the second authority is the 'expert' and their techniques, and yet the mother remains wholly responsible for the child's cognitive and emotional development. Spock (cited in Hulbert, 2004:251) warned about this trend in the 1950's worrying that mothers were hesitant, rather than authoritative and had lacked an "air of cheerful certainty" because; "Child care experts who have imposed unnatural patience and submissiveness on her." This may mean both that mothers have lost authority as childrearing experts become more ubiquitous, and that the advice itself demands mother's step back from the authoritative role.

### 8.3 Punishment and Discipline.

In this section I demonstrate that within 'positive parenting' manuals' parental authority is obfuscated by attempts to eliminate punishment and the authoritarian model of parenting, whilst still promoting maternal control of the chaotic. I expose the tension between the cultural scripts of



‘sensitive mothering’ and managerial ‘control of the chaotic’ which leads to techniques designed to manipulate the child into compliance, rather than allow for explicit parental authority. Sensitive motherhood relies of a romantic conception of the Apollonian, ‘innocent child’, whereas the childrearing model of ‘controlling the chaotic’ frames childhood as darker and more ambiguous, Dionysian. For example, Palmer (2007:292) claims ‘One important truth is that children - even very small children - are naturally manipulative.’

Most manual writers devote considerable space to advising parents on approaches, techniques and ways of communicating that will discipline the child and potentially change the child’s behaviour. The techniques advocated include (but are not exhausted by) various forms of punishment, consequences, warnings, time-out, family rules, reflective listening, limit (or boundary) setting and rewards.

Baumrind (1996:412) argued the authoritative value of any discipline technique is reliant on context, presenting punishment as part of authoritative parenting, provided it is accompanied by warmth and firmness rather than coercion: ‘Authoritative parents endorse the judicious use of adverse consequences, which may include spanking, but in the context of a warm, engaged rational parent-child relationship’ Although the manual writers popular in the UK, are united in not advocating smacking, their interpretation of “judicious use of adverse consequences” is so vastly different, as to render the definition almost meaningless.

Following the cultural script of controlling the chaotic, Biddulph (2003, 180-188) warns that children raised permissively ‘may end up unhappy, unemployed, unmarried, lonely, angry, and perhaps even in jail’ whereas his methods will ‘produce young adults who are strong, loving and safe’. In *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer for Toddlers: How to calm, control and enjoy your toddler* Hogg (2002:271) suggests ‘Tantrums indicate the loss of parental authority’. And parental authority must be maintained by setting clear limits, consequences and following through. Responding to an illustrative example, Hogg (2002:272) warns that ‘By refusing to set limits – in effect abdicating authority – Philip’s mum and dad were unwittingly teaching him to be manipulative.’

Baumrind et al (2010:185) suggest authoritative parents use ‘minimally sufficient’ power to achieve their objectives. All experts claim their methods are ‘authoritative’ and thus agree in principle to minimal sufficiency, promoting their conception of economical methods of discipline. However, there is disagreement over what constitutes minimal sufficiency. For example, whereas in *Divas and Dictators* Taylor (2009:92-95) suggests punishments should be kept small and used sparingly and gives the example of reducing television time by ten minutes, or temporary confiscation of a toy. In *1-2-3 Magic* Phelan (2010:109) suggests a major/minor system of consequences: Minor

consequences include 'two days restriction to room after dinner' or 'four hours work around the house'; major consequences include 'two weeks restriction to room after dinner' and '15 hours work around the house'.

Across the child-centred and Positive Parenting manuals punishment is rejected because it inhibits moral teaching (Faber and Mazlish, 2001; Nelson, 2006:119; Ockwell-Smith, 2013:74), teaches children to "disguise their feelings" (Ockwell-Smith, 2013:74), creates fear of parents and disrupts the trust between parent and child (Bidulph, 2003:184), and exacerbates misbehaviour, through retaliation and resentment (Ockwell-Smith, 2013:76). Leach (2010:24) warns that cold calculated punishment does not work, and 'they will make him less rather than more inclined to listen to what you say and try and please you'. According to Laurena Charley (2018:58-59) in her book *Unconditional Love and Respect*. 'The positive approach to parenting advocates discipline and correction and rejects all forms of punishment'. In her book *Positive Discipline* Jane Nelson (2006:24) suggests the aim of 'positive discipline is to "eliminate punishment"'.

Infant and parental determinism<sup>101</sup> are firmly entrenched within the positive parenting approach. In dealing with misbehaviour the parent is envisioned as creating individual character and building the future adult. Nelson (2006:23) encourages parents to make a list of characteristics she wishes her child to develop, and these become the parenting 'destination'. Ockwell-Smith (2013:17) openly criticises the Nanny experts' 'focus only on today, rather than looking at who your child will become in twenty years time.' She implies that methods encouraging children's compliance 'will inhibit them from acquiring the qualities their parents so desire them to possess when they are older.'

Punishment is presumed to have long-term effects, for example, creating adults with a sense of worthlessness or rebellion (Nelson, 2006:99), lowering self-esteem (Hartley Brewer, 2005), and producing bullying, violent, neurotic adults (Sunderland 2007:31-32, 160-2). Associated with authoritarian parenting and negative parental behaviours such as shouting, threatening and smacking, punishment is framed as part of the problem of child misbehaviour, echoing Ginnot's (1972:151) assertion 'misbehaviour and punishment are not opposites that cancel each other out; on the contrary, they breed and reinforce each other'.

In rejecting the idea that parents should control and manage their children's behaviour, lest the parent resorts to authoritarian practices, positive parenting manual writers attempt to re-define parental authority, for example Laurena Charley (2018: loc. 58) defines positive parenting thus:

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<sup>101</sup> In his exploration of nurture and nature Steven Pinker (2002:249) is adamant that 'children do not allow their personalities to be shaped by their parents' nagging, blandishments, or attempts to serve as role models.'

‘Positive parenting begins with changing the way that you see your child and your role as a parent. Take, for example, the word authority. When people think about the word authority, they may envision someone over them who must be obeyed, at all costs. The person to be obeyed may be a boss, a political leader, or a child’s parent. However, the word authority actually comes from the word augment, which means to increase something. It is the same root as the word author or someone who is telling a story. In other words, your position of authority over your child is not one of demanding obedience but rather one of helping your child author his or her story.’

Nadim Saad (2016: loc. 159), writing from a ‘positive parenting’ viewpoint in his book *The Working Parents’ Guide to Raising Happy and Confident Children* suggests good parenting is like good leadership in that:

One of the broad definitions of leadership is that it is the process of using our social influence to guide people towards the achievement of specific goals or outcomes. And as former US President D.D. Eisenhower defined it: “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it”. Isn’t this exactly what we are trying to achieve with our children every day?

In rejecting overt parental authority and management of children Saad is recommending that parents attempt to encourage children to internalise the parental will. Claiming these methods help the child to ‘learn to respond from a place of trust rather than responding out of fear-based obedience’. Saad presents childrearing as a complicated endeavour, aiming to inculcate obedience without overt parental authority or management encourages a highly intensive mothering, as Saad explains:

However, leadership is not easy- not in the workplace or in our homes. It’s not as straightforward as ‘management’, and it’s far more time-consuming. It involves coaching, modelling, patience, do-overs, problem-solving, listening, teaching and being very thoughtful in our communication.

Within this model of childrearing the bond (or love) between parent and child is utilized to achieve the child’s obedience, for example Saad and Saad (2015:Loc 265-267) claim:

“Our connection and emotional bond with our children should be the base of our influence- rather than the use of power- because it is this strong connection with us, and their willingness to keep this bond, that motivates them to behave ‘appropriately’

The prioritising of the mother/child bond places children as extremely vulnerable to parental action. As in Sunderland’s (2017:181) assertion that ‘A child’s behaviour is often a barometer of parental stress, depression, anger, or grief. Persistent screaming and raging in a child can be a way of discharging his parents’ emotions.’ The child’s misbehaviour is directly linked to parental misbehaviour.

When an assumption that the mother/child dyad is the principle cause of children’s behaviour, is

coupled with an assumption of maternal deficit, (that mothers commonly lack essential knowledge, skills, time and sensitivity), the advice centres on changing the mother in order to change the child. For example, in *Positive Parenting*, Rebecca Eanes (32) claims:

Aha! My children weren't being defiant. They were being me. I made a promise that night to make changes. I would consciously watch my tone, speak respectfully, keep my mood in check, and behave how I wanted them to behave.

The mother is being encouraged to sublimate her moods and behave inauthentically. If children learn from parental modelling, then this form of advice may be teaching emotional inauthenticity.

Sunderland (2017:267) expands on this theme by suggesting a biochemical cause behind parents' frustrations with a child's behaviour. Not only is showing negative emotion problematic, so is feeling it:

Feeling frazzled, angry, and potentially explosive when your child does something naughty is a sign that you are biochemically dysregulated. Rather than using your higher brain to reflect on the best response, your RAGE system in your lower brain keeps getting triggered.'

Showing negative emotion is framed against the cultural script of the 'reflective' sensitive mother. According to this script the mother should reflect not only on her childrearing or her children's behaviour but upon herself, as demonstrated by Eanes (2016: 33) assertion: 'to effectively discipline your children, you must first discipline yourself.' (Eanes:33). This self-discipline is achieved through the mother attempting to understand how her own childhood shaped her, and her 'unconscious child' within. Thus, the mother is advised to control the chaos within herself in order to control the chaos of family interaction.

## 8.4 Consequences

We can trace this dismissal of punishment back to Rousseau's *Emile* first published in 1762:

Give your scholar no verbal lessons; he should be taught by experience alone; never punish him, for he does not know what it is to do wrong; never make him say, "Forgive me," for he does not know how to do you wrong. Wholly unmoral in his actions, he can do nothing morally wrong, and he deserves neither punishment nor reproof.

This romantic view of the 'innocent' child has prompted many childrearing writers to draw on the interpretive repertoire of 'consequences' rather than punishment as a discipline method.

Influenced by Dreikurs' nineteen-sixties childrearing manual *Children: The Challenge*, natural consequences do not require the parent to impose a sanction or intervention. For Dreikurs (1964: 81)

natural consequences, take the form of parental inaction, “What would happen if I didn't interfere?”

Child-centred manual writer, Ockwell-Smith (2013: loc. 2352) echoes Rousseau when she defines ‘natural consequences thus:

A natural consequence is the natural reaction that takes place as a result of something the child has or hasn't done. For instance, if the child refuses to wear a coat when they go outside and they subsequently feel cold, then this is the natural consequence of their own decision. If they refuse to tidy up their bedroom and they step on a toy and hurt their foot, that, again, is the natural consequence of their decision.

Natural consequences are one of the most important ways that children learn about the world, providing that they are safe and never used as a form of punishment or chastisement.’(Ockwell-Smith, 2013:Loc2352)

Faber and Mazlish (2001:94-120), followers of Dreikurs, see natural consequences as an opportunity of showing the child how to make amends and solve the problem. Nelson (2006) advises parents using a natural consequence, to express empathy and understanding for what the child is experiencing, and not to add more “blame, shame or pain” to the experience. However, in *Positive Discipline* Nelson also (2006:101) warns against rescuing the child and undermining the lesson of responsibility and accountability.

‘Natural consequences’ are criticised by Kohn (2006:66) in *Unconditional Parenting* where he describes disciplining by parental inaction as a form of punishment. Arguing that

If a child is late for dinner, we're supposed to let her go hungry. If she leaves her raincoat at school, we're supposed to let her get wet the following day. This is said to teach her to be more punctual, or less forgetful, or whatever. But the far more powerful lesson that she's likely to take away is that we could have helped but didn't.

Kohn argues that parents' authority is not merely about meeting out sanctions. An authority is someone to turn to for moral and practical guidance, refusing to do this could be framed as punishment by love- withdrawal, since children may experience their parents' love partly through the help and nurture they receive.

However, within the childrearing manuals, the interpretive repertoire ‘consequences’ is not limited to parental inaction. Dreikurs (1964:81) also cites ‘logical’ parental action as a consequence, giving the example: ‘Since you do not feel like staying in the yard, you may not go out’. Ginnot et al (2003) frame a parent confiscating a toy as a ‘logical consequence’ of a child's action. They suggest a child who shoots his baby brother should be told “people are not for shooting”. On the second instance, the popgun is calmly removed. This recognises that parents cannot be totally inactive when a child is at risk of harm. Yet, framing the confiscation of the toy as a ‘logical’ consequence does not acknowledge that the child may experience the confiscation of toys as punitive rather than a logical

extension of their own actions. The promotion of logical consequences as distinct from punishment, relies on the idea that children understand the logic. This requires an understanding of both cause and effect, and the connection that the adult intended. The punitive potential of 'logical consequences' leads manual writer Ockwell-Smith (2013: loc2353) to advise that:

Logical consequences focus on the outcome of a child's behaviour based upon the parent's reaction: for example, the child refuses to stop playing a game and so the parent decides to take it away from them for a certain number of days. In essence, logical consequences are just another form of punishment, used by the parent to teach the child a lesson. However, they rely on a certain degree of brain development that a child of this age does not possess.

Reflecting the 'sensitive mothering' script which seeks to eliminate punishment, Ockwell-Smith (2013: loc. 2638) warns that 'the "lessons" of logical consequences [...] generally do not have the desired effect and can cause friction and a lack of connection between parent and child.' Similarly, in *Positive Discipline* Nelson (2006:98) observes that logical consequences 'misused more often than they are used effectively', and 'most logical consequences are poorly disguised punishments.'

Dreikurs (1964:80) also sought to eliminate punishment and maintained that high parental demandingness is essentially illegitimate. He expressed concern that his concept of logical consequences would be misused, 'When we use the term logical consequences, parents frequently misinterpret it as a new way for parents to impose their will upon children. The children see this for what it is – disguised punishment.'

But it is not only parents that may misinterpret the concept. Throughout the literature 'consequence' is used as a synonym for punishment.

Webster-Stratton (2005:111 -115) evokes the interpretive repertoire of logical consequences and extends it to mean a negative consequence, designed by the parent, inherently related to the child's behaviour. Webster-Stratton asserts that consequences should be not punitive, without defining punitive, but implying that it is a sanction that is too harsh, and not logically connected to the behaviour. Her list of logical consequences includes:

If a child refuses to eat her dinner there will be no snacks or desert

If a child watches more television than allowed, then the same amount of television is taken away the next day.

If a child doesn't put her bike away in the garage, then use of the bike is restricted that evening.

Whether or not one accepts this list as reasonable parental responses, they are not easily

distinguishable from punishment<sup>102</sup>. For manual writer Taylor (2009:94) it is the inevitability of a negative consequence that is punitive. Therefore, punishments/consequences can be minimal, but must be consistently applied, noting that 'Bigger, more dramatic punishments won't change behaviour. The inevitability of the consequence will. If a child does something wrong, then the consequence must happen.'

Authors overtly following the script of controlling the chaotic through pop-behaviourism blur the distinction between consequences and punishment further. For example, in *1-2-3 Magic: Effective discipline for children 2-12* Phelan (2010:39) presents 'Groundings, fines, chores and losses' as consequences. In *What Every Parent needs to Know* Sunderland (2007:167) states: 'Children need to know what the consequences are for breaking a rule, whether you use time-out, toy confiscation, or imposing a household chore.' Phelan and Taylor are clear that consequences are synonymous with appropriate punishment:

Consequences can also be what some people call logical or natural, which means the punishment fits the misbehaviour. (Phelan, 2010:39)

Logical consequences: making the punishment fit the crime. (Taylor, 2009:93)

The distinction between punishment and consequences is blurry. Terming adult action 'logical consequences' may be a way of making punishment palatable to adults by obfuscating parental power; but it creates confusion about the legitimacy of adult authority and parental demands. The interpretive repertoire of 'consequences' is employed to denote a range of different adult child interactions from cooperative problem solving and empathic engagement through love-withdrawal and parental inaction to the meting out of covert and overt punishments.

## 8.5 Time-out

The discord between the Dionysian and apollonian views of the child continues to manifest in the advice whether to use time-out. The interpretive repertoire of time-out is evoked both to symbolise punishment, to control the chaotic child and as a sensitive non-punitive approach to calm the child. For example, whilst Sears (2005:180) maintains 'Time-out is a correction strategy... not a punishment; it seldom works when it is used that way.' Mewes (2012:232) claims time-out is 'a consequence for bad behaviour and incorrect decisions. The child is meant to dislike the process'. Latta (2012:191) concurs stating 'Time-out is punishment. It works best as punishment.' Jo Frost famously calls time-out 'the naughty step'.

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<sup>102</sup> Especially as she also advocates use of time-out as a consequence.

Based on the pop-behaviourist belief that behaviour and character are shaped by contingencies of reinforcement, time-out's purpose is to 'stop the conflict and withdraw the reinforcing effects of negative attention for misbehaviour' (Latta: 2012:100). The method advocated varies slightly but the principle is to remove a child and place them apart for a set length of time. The temporary withdrawal of adult approval and attention is implicit in the method, for example, Webster-Stratton (2005:91) defines time-out thus:

The term Time-Out is short for "Time Out from positive reinforcement" and is actually an extended form of parental ignoring in which children are removed for a brief period from all sources of positive reinforcement, especially adult attention and are given the opportunity to calm down.

Those who claim it is not punitive, concentrate on the opportunity for calming down. Hartley Brewer (2005) and Nelson (2006) reinterpret the concept in Adlerian terms, encouraging a child to take a few minutes alone to calm down, without imposing adult control. Sunderland (2007:174-175) reaches for the interpretive repertoire of 'brain benefits' to advocate time-out, claiming 'it will engage your child's higher brain' and make the child "think twice" about further mischief. In *The Complete Secrets of Happy Children* Steven Bidulph (2003:184) frames his version of time-out (stand and think) as not 'a big issue or a punishment -just a way forward through a problem. The emphasis is on the child finding a solution that is acceptable.' According to Webster-Stratton (2005:99) time-out 'gives the child a chance to self-regulate and reflect on what they have done.' This aspect is highlighted in the re-naming of time-out as 'The Thinking Chair' (Sunderland:172), or 'Thought Space' (Mewes, 2012:55). The assumption that a child would use timeout as 'a chance to think about what you have done' (Webster-Stratton, 2005:97) does not engage with the possibility that the child may interpret the time-out differently. The child could, for example, use the time to plot retribution, feel sadness, self-pity and injustice or simply daydream; the child's thoughts are not under adult control. It is highly intrusive and coercive to represent a child's thoughts as within parental control. Webster-Stratton (2005:91) proposes time-out teaches the child 'which behaviours are inappropriate'. It is less clear whether the technique can teach why those behaviours are inappropriate. Time-out deals with surface behaviour, it works by attempting to discourage behaviours that cause parents to inflict this negative consequence. The negative consequence is some form of isolation.

In *Kiss Me! How to raise your children with love* Carlos Gonzalez (2012:209) argues that time-out could inadvertently teach exclusion as a legitimate way of treating people. Gonzalez claims 'The time-out method is not the solution, because even though it stops the child from hitting, it doesn't teach him to treat his friends with affection, only to "exclude" them.' Ockwell-Smith also (2013:74) describes time-out as a love withdrawal technique, which makes parental love conditional on good behaviour, and is deeply distressing for the child, who learns to 'disguise their feelings'. Faber and



Mazlish (2001:264) reject time-out on the grounds that it is punitive and may breed resentment, retribution, or feelings of negative self-worth, and loss of parental love. Sunderland (2015:239) expresses concern that time-out could damage the child/parent relationship, by imaging a six-year-old's response to this punishment:

Time Out can damage parent-child relationships. For example, a six-year-old who is always being put in Time Out for the slightest offence may start to prefer it to the company of her repeatedly critical mother."

In line with sensitive motherhood it is the mother's perceived criticism of the child that Sunderland finds fault with. Banning a child from a parent's presence whether it is the demand 'to go to your room' or a more formalised 'time-out from positive reinforcement,' is interpreted by Kohn (2006) as punitive rejection or love-withdrawal. Banning a child from a parent's presence as a symbolic withdrawal of love, may be why such punishments sometimes 'work', as Bettelheim (1987:128) noted:

Those who in childhood had such distancing imposed on them by a parent whom they loved will recall how lost and lonely they felt when sent to their room. This powerful reaction would be incomprehensible if they had not experienced being sent to their room as a withdrawal of love, which in their unconscious, revived separation anxiety.

Yet, for Bettelheim (1987:129-130), love-withdrawal is an appropriate<sup>103</sup> display of the parent's feelings, and he sees no problem in utilising it, however he warns that parents use love-withdrawal to punish the child must not fool themselves 'that they were not acting out their hostile feelings, but only wanted to correct the child'. The promotion of time-out to correct the child, potentially fools us all, by sanitising the parents' hostility and love-withdrawal. Advocating time-out as part of a consistent method of discipline goes further; encouraging parents to make their child experience love-withdrawal, even when the parent is not feeling hostile. An indirect threat of love-withdrawal is also implicit in the advice to ignore the child engaged in minor bad behaviours; giving no reinforcement, thus removing incentives to misbehave. (Webster-Stratton, 2005:81-88; Green, 2006:88; Latta, 2012:69; Sears, 2005:83-84; Sunderland, 2016:66).

Leach (2010:378) does not advocate time-out, but she accepts that some parents may use it. Acknowledging that time alone to calm down, can be beneficial, she warns that it may become 'a kind of punishment that can seem shockingly violent and humiliating'. Maintaining time-out is only acceptable if children can cooperate, she questions whether cooperative children need a time-out

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<sup>103</sup>Although Bettelheim recognises that the child will see being isolated from its parent as a punishment, he claims that it only works if not done for punitive motives, but to to avoid further anger that will disrupt the loving relationship. "As a planned punishment, such physical distancing loses much of its emotional impact, because what makes it work is not the carefully reasoned and executed action, but the strong emotional statement" (129). This is the recognised in Nelson's positive time-out technique ((129).

punishment. Leach suggests, rather than be isolated, the child runs around the garden to let off steam (assuming everyone has a big garden). In *Your Baby and Child*, Leach (2010:524) suggests,

you may be able to get right through his childhood without ever thinking about his discipline at all. If you can do. An absence of rules and rows in your house doesn't mean you are being lax...If you are getting on with life together, treating each other as human beings, that may be all there is to it. If so, do not bother with this chapter.

The implication is that a sensitive mother can eliminate discipline through the power and quality of her relationship with her children. Although ambiguous about many forms of punishment Leach (2010:532-533) suggests it is parental disapproval of the child that the child responds to rather than the punishment itself.

Whatever punishment you announce when you are cross it is your crossness that punishes...Your disapproval or anger is your most effective sanction. If it leads you to immediate and spontaneous "punishment" so that the child can clearly see that his behaviour has directly caused it, the punishment may strengthen your point.

Like Leach (2010:378), Biddulph (2003:204) asserts that 'Naughty kids don't need isolation – they usually need more intense contact'; suggesting a sensitive and non-punitive alternative, where the parent and child take time-out of the situation together, as a chance to calm down, reflect and problem solve together.

Manual writers working from a script heavily influenced by sensitive motherhood reject 'time-out' in favour of 'time-in'. Eannes (2016:40) gives a description of time in:

'To use time-in, bring the child onto your lap or to a "calm-down area" in your home. When my children were younger, we had a calm-down area that consisted of books, a drawing pad, a calm-down glitter jar (see pg. 154), rice for sensory play, and balloons to pop. I would bring my child to this spot and sit with him to do some calming activities. Once he stopped crying or struggling against me, I knew his thinking brain had come back online. You will be able to tell when your child moves from aggression or high emotion to a state of calm and being receptive. Once you perceive receptivity, tell the child briefly what boundary she crossed and how she can better manage her behaviour.'

Leach (2010:378) similarly argues 'The toddler whose behaviour has gone beyond the pale doesn't need pushing further out but bringing back in.'

Time-out can be framed as part of the cultural script of controlling the chaotic.

'Overall, Time-Out must be implemented only as a last resort and on rare occasions. It must occur somewhere that is safe, well-lit and warm. Time-Out is not about punishment, it's just about removing your attention from your child – a bit like turning off a tap.' (Byron, 2007:75)

Tanya Byron (2007) claims time-out 'stops smacking occurring by allowing you to calm down and

gather yourself if necessary, in those few minutes of separation.’ Webster-Stratton (2005:91) also advocates time-out as it stops parents ‘lecturing and spanking’ and ‘provides a cooling off period for both children and parents’ As such, it is advocated as a means to manage the parent as much as the child.

Time-out is promoted as part of an authoritative parenting approach by many authors across the field including Frost (2005) Palmer (2016), Webster-Stratton (2005), Green (2006) Latta (2012), Sears (2005) and Sunderland (2016). However, this does not necessarily reflect Baumrind’s conception of authoritative parenting. Baumrind et al (2010:903-904) proposed the use of “direct methods of influence which include cognitive appeal and power, rather than indirect methods such as “nurturance withdrawal or guilt induction” adding that the less the child ‘is manipulated by guilt-inducing techniques of discipline or indirect threats of loss of love which condition his behaviour while bypassing his conscious will, the more capable he should become of responsible (i.e., chosen) action.’

The tensions between ‘sensitive mothering’ and ‘control of the chaotic’ are played out across the discourse through adoption, rejection and transformation of time-out techniques. The interpretive repertoire of timeout can be adopted to mean a punishment, a way of enabling a child to calm down or love-withdrawal. It is not clear how a child interprets the experience.

## 8.6 Boundaries

Children are placed in time-out when they have crossed ‘boundaries’. The interpretive repertoire ‘children need boundaries’ is similarly called upon across the field, but with vastly different meaning. Boundaries could be interpreted as rigid family rules, routines and behavioural systems, as in Taylor’s (2009) manual, or as guidance, communication and expectations as in Ockwell-Smith (2016). Boundaries are the line between what an adult subjectively perceives as desirable and undesirable child behaviour. Boundaries of childhood emerge from adult conceptions of what children are and how they could be, as such the boundary shifts from adult to adult.

## 8.7 Warnings and Expectations

Manual writers, including Webster-Stratton<sup>104</sup> (2005:94) Mewes (2012:223) Sunderland (2017:236), suggest that when a child crosses a ‘boundary’ a warning should be issued, providing a chance for the child to change their behaviour before punishment. Warnings are often framed as choices, choose to continue misbehaving and suffer the consequence, or stop now (Webster-Stratton,

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<sup>104</sup>Webster-Stratton does not advise using warnings for aggressive behaviour, just non-compliance.

2005:114). The aim is to encourage children to take responsibility and make good choices about their own behaviour, but the writers do not consider children's agency, or the possibility children recognise a Hobson's choice. The difference between giving a warning, and issuing a threat is unclear.

Phelan's (2010) book *1-2-3 Magic: Effective discipline for children 2-12* presents a method of discipline based on counting at non-compliant children. The parent is encouraged not to debate, just firmly count until the child complies. When the parent reaches three, the child is placed in time-out. Within counting the threat is explicit: 'If you don't come here by 3, then punishment: 1...2...3'.

Threat is implicit in, 'If-then' warnings and follow through as advocated by Phelan's (2010), Latta (2012:199) and Sunderland (2016:150), Webster-Stratton (2005:102), Ford: (2006:49) and Frost, (2005:82). The way children comply or the reasons for complying are immaterial. The motivation for compliance is to avoid the threatened consequence. If it is assumed children are influenced by parental modelling, this use of 'warnings' could cause children to see threats as a legitimate means to assert power. Hartley-Brewer tells parents to 'stop shouting, issuing threats and conditions' (86). Janis-Norton (2009:248) warns 'threats can backfire; they frequently make an angry child even more rebellious'. Webster-Stratton (2005:77) observed that threats 'tend to cause children to be defiant and negative rather than compliant', further explaining that a direct positive command is preferable. However, the interpretive repertoire of warnings is also evoked as a way to ease transition from one activity to another. For example, giving a child a two-minute warning playtime or bath time will end can allow the child time to adjust. Sunderland (2017) frames this a 'disengagement' strategy. Thus, the advice to 'give warnings' can have different meanings and be either punitive, threatening or informative.

## 8.8 Rewards

Rewarding good behaviour, is an essential component of positive parenting. Reward systems introduce artificial reinforcers to change behaviour. The proposed systems vary in complexity, but they are all based on the premise, do this and you'll get that.

Ford (2006) and Frost (2005) recommend using star charts for short term transitional behaviours such as learning to dress, stay in bed or for potty training. Rewards are presented as tools that may get children over the hump of learning a new behaviour but not a major component of childrearing. Frost (2005:86) includes a caveat against over-use of tangible reward schemes, for fear it encourages the child's manipulative behaviour.

Other writers are more enthusiastic about the benefits of rewards. Webster-Stratton (2005:53-69) puts rewards at the heart of her childrearing advice. She provides a complex reward system, with 17

points, designed to improve a wide range of specific behaviour problems, by replacing them with positive behaviours. In *Divas and Dictators: The secrets to having a Much Better Behaved Child* Taylor (2009:67-68) promises a consistent reward system 'will change the most ingrained, challenging patterns of behaviour', he frames rewards as a pleasant parental technique, since 'they are a lot more fun to dish out than punishments'. Rewards form a major part of the method for Janis-Norton (2012:256) in *Calmer, Easier, Happier Parenting*, claiming children who see good behaviour as a way to access "the goodies in life... become very motivated to cooperate". For Janis-Norton (2012:258) moral conscience is defined in behaviourist terms:

If we are consistent with our praise and rewards, cooperation starts to become a habit. Eventually your child chooses to do the right thing because he feels better about himself when he does the right thing. This is the birth of conscience.

Sunderland (2016:230) again draws on the interpretive repertoires of neuro-parenting to make a similar claim:

Stickers point systems, and privileges are all types of reward techniques that will engage and develop your child's higher thinking brain, because they involve weighing up the pros and cons of behaving in a certain way.

Taylor (2009:66) suggests we are all motivated by a need for appreciation, and 'we like that need to be backed up with something tangible'. In contrast, Nelson (2006:28) sees this need for approval as negative, since rewards do not increase self-esteem, but a need for external confirmation, denying the opportunity 'to self-evaluate and reflect on right action internally'.

Other manual writers also claim rewards may decrease intrinsic motivation (Kohn,1999:68-96), making the task 'less appealing in its own right'. Authors, such as Ockwell-Smith (2013:79-81), who reject reward systems claim rewards act at a superficial level, not teaching 'right and wrong' but temporary compliance. These authors suggest the assumption of self-interest as a prime-motivator, is a reductionist and mechanical view of moral conscience. For Kohn (1999:174) rewards devalue the moral, altruistic and empathetic reasons for good behaviour and undermine self-perceived altruism.

Those who advocate rewards suggest rewards are necessary in order to curb parental tendencies toward either permissiveness or authoritarianism. Sunderland (2007:168) proposes the depressing notion that gifts can only be bestowed conditionally or not at all, claiming 'Families who have no clear reward systems sometimes fall into giving the child a diet of criticism with all too little praise.' Sunderland places the parent who rejects reward systems as overly authoritarian, whereas, Janis-Norton (2012:251). utilises the stereotype of the indulged and ungrateful spoilt (Dionysian) child, of permissive parents. Showing a distaste for parental generosity she suggests children should be given the basics, but always earn the luxuries. Thus, placing continued systems of material exchange at the

heart of the parent/child relationship; enacting the fear of critics such as Hendrick (2016) that behaviourist childrearing advice defines family life as an extension of the economic order. Cagan (1980) and Hendrick (2016) have expressed concern that when individual selfishness is stressed as the driving motivational force collective effort, altruism and empathy are undervalued.

Moving away from the material, Webster-Stratton (2005:41), Taylor (2009:67), Frost (2005:174), encourage parents to see praise, hugs and smiles as a social reward. Helen Reece's (2013) critique of positive parenting questions this concept suggesting when praise and approval are instrumentalised and consistently contingent on behaviour, it could create a barrier to spontaneous parental affection and expression of feelings for fear of reinforcing the 'wrong' behaviours. If parents resist the opportunity to model spontaneous generosity, children may learn all affection and giving should be conditional.

Webster-Stratton warns against mixing reward schemes with punishment, but others see the threat of punishment as intrinsic in reward schemes. Kohn (199:174) suggests the threat of not earning the reward may be as punitive as being denied a treat as a sanction. The punitive aspect of reward schemes is made explicit by manual writer Janis-Norton (2012:251) when she says, 'If we shift our focus from indulging to rewarding, a very effective consequence for misbehaviour will simply be that the child has not yet earned a reward'

Kohn (1999:175) suggests reward and punishment schemes<sup>105</sup> based on control and manipulation do not encourage children to act responsibly they demonstrate how to act through control, manipulation and self-interest. Author of *Toddler Taming*, Christopher Green (2006:86) makes a distinction between rewards which are given after the event as unexpected prizes, and bribes<sup>106</sup> which are promised prior to the event; 'a form of blackmail, as you dangle the carrot to get what you want.' Working on that definition, Janis-Norton, Webster-Stratton, Sunderland, Taylor, Phelan, Mewes, are putting bribes and blackmail at the heart of their parenting strategies<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup>With typical pragmatism Green (2006:87) explains he would like parents to use rewards, but "if a bit of old-fashioned bribery achieves the desired effect, then go for it".

<sup>107</sup>In *Horrid Henry Eats a Vegetable* Simon imagines her hero's response to a reward system: "I'll make a deal with you Henry," said Mum. "What?" said Henry suspiciously. Mum and Dad's "deals" usually involved his doing something horrible, for a pathetic reward. No way was he falling for that again" (Simon2006:88). The hilarious story involves Henry imaginatively lying and cheating, and ultimately fooling his parents into giving him the reward. I have read this story to many kids, who root for Henry, giggling with recognition and understanding.

## 8.9 Conflict

The cultural script of controlling the chaotic assumes that the needs of the parent and child are in conflict. Much of the advice follows the same guidelines as inter-adult conflict mediation – attentive listening, de-escalation, avoiding negative generalisations, offering compliments.<sup>108</sup> Many books focus on the parents need to reduce conflict and elicit cooperation, for example Janis-Norton (2009:15) claims:

Parents generally show up at my seminars desperate for more effective ways to reduce misbehaviour and to improve listening and cooperation. Parents realise that what they are doing isn't working, but they are not sure how to get their kids to do what they are told.

Parents are portrayed as deficient in the skills of conflict reduction and in need of teaching. This trend was identified by Ricard Smith (2010:360) when he observed that the shift from childrearing to 'parenting' 'does not tend to depict the relationship with one's child as an easy or comfortable one.'

Within Positive parenting manuals parental authority is obfuscated by attempts to eliminate punishment and the authoritarian model of parenting, whilst still promoting maternal management and control of the chaotic. The tension between the cultural scripts of 'sensitive mothering' and 'control of the chaotic' leads to techniques which aim to gain the child's compliance without recourse explicit parental authority. It is difficult to distinguish between the practices deemed negatively authoritarian (Love-withdrawal, threats, blackmail, bribes, punishments) from the practices promoted as authoritative (time-out, warnings, rewards, consequences). The differences lie in intent and language rather than practice. Although adults may differentiate by intent it is difficult to know whether a child would experience the two sets of techniques differently.

Jenks (2005:70) suggests the 'public' acceptance of model of the Apollonian child within a culture that emphasises individuality rather than shared values creates a 'social structure permeated by panopticism', where the observed child internalises adult demands:

'Within such a world people manifest their uniqueness and children must be reared to express what is peculiarly special about their personalities. All of this difference is, of course, both volatile and subversive and must be policed if collective life is to be sustained at all. The control moves subtly in response to such a potentially fragmented social structure; as few symbols are shared, externality it is an improper arena in which to uphold the sacred. Consequently, the control moves inside, from the public to the private, and so we monitor and examine and watch the Apollonian child; he or she in turn

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<sup>108</sup> For an example of an inter-adult conflict mediation approach, see Orme-Johnson, C. and Cason-Snow, M. (2002) Basic Mediation Training: Trainer's Manual Mediation@MIT retrieved from: [http://www.campus-adr.org/CR\\_Services\\_Cntr/MIT\\_all.pdf](http://www.campus-adr.org/CR_Services_Cntr/MIT_all.pdf)

learns to watch over him- or herself and shame is replaced by guilt.'

Whereas the methods for controlling the Dionysian child may activate a shame mechanism in the child, the approaches advocated by those writers who wish to create sensitive authoritative parenting without recourse to direct parental authority may be activating the child's guilt as a method of gaining compliance.

By rejecting the word punishment, but maintaining the need to demand compliance, and impose sanctions, the positive parenting writers have produced a complex and onerous system of techniques and intensive mothering. Rather than eliminating punishment these techniques redefine punishment and parental authority as something which must be obfuscated and hidden. The systems of routine, reward, time-out and consequences become the authority. Techniques that are framed as non-punitive involve psychological manoeuvres, designed to persuade the child, into complying with parental demands, without recourse to obvious punishment or overt acknowledgement of parental authority. This demands a high level of parental monitoring and observation. Within the positive parenting ethos, the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic' is played out covertly whilst seeming to endorse 'sensitive motherhood'.

## 8.10 No Settled Curriculum for Childrearing

Childrearing advice books claim that their advice is universal, 'it works' and produces pro-social and happy children who will become well-adjusted adults. The books claim to be infallible, claiming privileged knowledge about the 'right' way to raise a well-behaved well-adjusted child. They claim their advice is universal - it works for all families - and produces pro-social and happy children who will become well-adjusted adults. But this supposedly infallible and efficacious advice is highly contradictory. One piece of advice from one manual-writer is often negated by another. Authors openly refute each other claiming disastrous consequences for other approaches. There is no settled curriculum for childrearing. Within the discourse the validity and efficacy of childrearing advice is a matter of faith, with little robust evidence to support many of the claims made. Science and research are misrepresented within childrearing discourse to justify ideological positions and close debate.

As I have shown twenty-first century advice has emerged from the childrearing theories of the twentieth century and yet is not reducible to them. Ideas are rejected, adopted and transformed to reflect ways of thinking about what children are and how they should be. Throughout this chapter I have suggested that the advice manuals present different (pre-sociological) models of childhood and these models inform how the mother is conceptualised. Competing cultural scripts of motherhood



are informed by the different models of childhood. The different models of childhood co-exist within the discourse to create contradictory cultural scripts of motherhood, each underpinned with claims of, parental determinism, knowledge and authority. The cultural scripts are thus informed by a dialogue of opposing beliefs concerning 'what children are and how they should be'. Different accounts are influenced by philosophical attempts to understand oppositional forces such as: innocence versus experience, control versus chaos, culture versus nature, good versus evil. Childrearing manuals can be regarded as treatise on childhood and by extension personhood.

#### *8.10.1 Contradictory Advice and Obfuscating Language*

The two scripts are simultaneously active, and the same manual-writer may draw on both scripts. As I demonstrated in this chapter, this is further complicated since the same language is employed to by different authors for different goals. A set of interpretive repertoires are consistently called upon, but these phrases are given different meanings and values depending on the childrearing manual writers' idea of what children are and how they should be. Children are portrayed as either needing control and management or needing intensive empathy and sensitivity. In both scenarios' children are portrayed as needing a vigilant and responsive mother, and as extremely sensitive to adult actions; but their varying individual interpretation and experience of adult action is given little credence. The cultural script of management and control posits children should be obedient and cooperative, as exemplified by Janis-Norton's (2009:6) claim that:

Parents always tell us that their biggest frustration is having to repeat instructions numerous times before their children listen and cooperate. As you read this book, you will see that the Calmer, Easier, Happier Parenting approach gives you a step-by-step method to solve this problem (and many other typical family problems). Using positive and respectful techniques, parents can guide children into the habit of cooperating the first time and without a fuss most of the time.

Whereas the cultural script of 'sensitive motherhood' emphasises the mother/infant dyad as the source of future well-being and independence, as epitomized by Ockwell-Smith's (2013: loc1481) assertion that 'True independence is not learned through rewards, punishments and forced separation; it stems from a loving, secure relationship with caregivers at a young age'

The two approaches intersect and borrow ideas and language from each other, in a messy battle of persuasion. Given the lack of agreement across the field it is difficult to predict how mothers interpret authoritative parenting. A mother must negotiate the meaning of tropes such as 'punishment' 'rewards', 'consequences' and 'routine'. As I will explore in chapter seven, two mothers who both evoke the interpretive repertoires of 'consequences', 'routine' 'warnings', 'boundaries', 'timeout' and 'rewards' could in practice be raising their child in fundamentally different ways.

### 8.10.2 Common Ideas Across the Manuals

Despite strong ideological differences between the texts there are common elements across the field. The manuals share a belief in parental determinism, promote 'intensive mothering' and present successful childrearing as too difficult to perform without expert guidance. Throughout the childrearing texts children's problems are presented as resulting from their parents' actions. Mothers especially are presented as Pygmalion sculptors of their children in the present and future. There is an implicit promise of the perfectibility of the child through the actions of the parents. Conversely there is the threat that the wrong parental behaviour will do lasting damage to the child.

It is agreed that Childrearing must be authoritative – parents must interact with children in a manner which demonstrates warmth and firmness (responsiveness and demandingness). However, what constitutes authoritative parenting is contentious. The books are prescriptions for parental change. Crucially they want to change parental behaviour<sup>109</sup>, in order to change the child and the future. Across the field is an assumption that children's behaviour reflects the quality of their upbringing.

The cultural script of intensive mothering, as identified by Sharon Hays (1998), that good childrearing should be child-centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive is still operative across the field. Yet it has become further complicated, diversified and intensified as manual writers argue about what children are and how they should be. Within intensive motherhood, scripts of 'sensitive motherhood' are presented in conjunction with contradictory cultural scripts of 'control of the chaotic'.

## 8.11 Conclusion Two Dominant Cultural Scripts

It is my contention that within childrearing culture there are two distinct contrasting and incompatible scripts which mothers must position themselves within; meaning that a mother must negotiate the tension between two sets of incompatible demands. These scripts represent the ideas a mother negotiates when raising a child in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. As Vanessa May (2008:281) found her work on mothers' moral presentation of self, 'individuals cannot simply choose which social norms to engage with; for example, there are some ubiquitous social norms that all mothers must position themselves in relation to in order to claim a moral self.' I identify these culture scripts of 'good' childrearing as 'control of the chaotic', and 'sensitive motherhood'. I choose to use the word 'sensitive' to imply both requiring exceptional skill or caution in performance, and an empathic attunement of a mother towards her child. The phrase 'sensitive motherhood' was coined by

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<sup>109</sup>In accordance with their different models of childhood and motherhood.

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989:83) to represent mothers “chained by an awareness of her child’s cognitive and developmental needs’. I choose the phrase control of the chaotic, to denote not simply a controlling attitude towards the (potentially chaotic) child, but a desire to bring order to the family environment and protect against chaotic forces of the outside world. As epitomised by Frost’s (2005:51) stated desire for her pedagogy to ‘take the chaos out of everyday life’. This chart shows the main tenets of the two scripts, identified through my close reading of thirty-six twenty-first century childrearing manuals.

<b>Sensitive Mothering</b> <b>Apollonian Child</b>	<b>Controlling the Chaotic</b> <b>Dionysian Child</b>
Behaviour is learned through reinforcement strategies.	The mother/child relationship is the prime determinate of children’s current and future wellbeing.
Children need boundaries	Children need gentle guidance
Children need to be taught	Childrearing should be child-led
Adults must ensure children’s needs are met	Adults must be responsive to children’s needs
Parents are authority figures	Parental authority should not be explicit
Children need to be guided towards healthy sleep patterns	Sleep training methods create suffering
Children thrive in routines	Children need freedom and spontaneity
Children respond to rewards	Rewards decrease intrinsic motivation
Negative consequences should follow undesirable behaviour	Natural consequences help children understand their actions. Children should not be punished
Play is something children do. Teach children to tidy up and share toys.	Play to enhance developmental potential
Teaching children to respect other people	Helping children feel good about themselves
Socialisation means teaching acceptable mores and manners of the group	Socialisation means emotional and social development of the individual child.
Concerted cultivation of knowledge and skills. Encourage children to pursue success.	Concentrated cultivation of children’s development. Encourage children to fulfil their individual potential.

The differences are at times stark, and at times subtle, but there is little compromise between the two positions. Each position presents a picture of what children are and how they should be, which creates templates of behaviour for the adults who raise them. The positions are conditional on adult perceptions of the ideal childhood; centring on oppositional concepts such as chaos versus order, nature versus culture, and innocence versus experience<sup>110</sup>.

The next step is to understand how mothers interpret and negotiate the contradictory advice, the cultural scripts of good motherhood, and the dominant beliefs about what children are and how they should be. Chapters ten and eleven examine how mothers negotiate the language and ideas presented childrearing pedagogy. The next chapter examines mothers' explicit relation with parenting pedagogy and childrearing knowledge.

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<sup>110</sup> Appendix one shows how the topic cards can be sorted by cultural script.

## Chapter Nine: Sources of Knowledge

### Introduction to Chapters Nine to Eleven

The following chapters refer to my interviews with eleven British mothers<sup>111</sup>, exploring how mothers negotiate childrearing pedagogy. Chapters ten and eleven discuss the data generated by my textual elicitation interview method designed to explore the language of childrearing pedagogy and uncover mechanisms of adoption, rejection and transformation of childrearing advice. I explore how mothers negotiate the cultural scripts of 'sensitive motherhood' and 'control of the chaotic' when negotiating childrearing pedagogy. Chapter ten demonstrates how the many mechanisms involved in negotiating childrearing ideas produce the diverse array of approaches; all eleven mothers I talked to had interacted with childrearing pedagogy but negotiated it slightly differently. In chapter eleven I explore mothers' interpretations of the language of childrearing pedagogy, finding that mothers will quote the culturally acceptable childrearing script, even when it may be at odds with quotidian reality. I conclude chapter eleven by looking beyond the pedagogy and seeking to understand mothers' own ideas about what children are and how they should be.

Chapter nine reports on the responses to the interview questions<sup>112</sup> about sources of childrearing knowledge; demonstrating how tacit and experiential knowledge is valued above 'expert' knowledge; family and friends being a more important and trusted source of knowledge than 'experts', and a mothers' intimate, experiential knowledge of her own child is valued most. Mothers who attended formal childbirth or childrearing groups expressed an appreciation for the peer support group it provided above the knowledge content of the course. Mothers cite their own childhood, both negatively and positively as forming their childrearing beliefs and practices. 'Expert' and 'scientific' knowledge claims that chime with existing childrearing beliefs are quickly accepted and reiterated, but scepticism is employed for knowledge claims which contradict either personal experience, or belief.

### 9.1 Seeking Confirmation

In *The Contradictions of Motherhood*, Sharon Hays (1998) suggests according to the cultural script of intensive mothering 'good childrearing' should be 'expert guided'. In previous chapters I questioned the childrearing manuals' claim to be sources of privileged knowledge. I suggested that there was no settled curriculum for 'good childrearing', but rather a messy dialogue between competing cultural

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<sup>111</sup> See section 5.6 for participant information

<sup>112</sup> See appendix 2 for the interview questions

scripts. This chapter explores how mothers negotiate this dialogue when choosing advice, starting with the varied responses to childrearing manuals and websites and then ascertaining how mothers negotiate other sources of knowledge, from professionals, to friends and family. The vast amount of often contradictory childrearing advice available means that a mother must evaluate and negotiate the ideas, adopting, rejecting or transforming ideas whilst protecting her own 'good mother identity'.

Mothers talked about seeking out childrearing advice which reflects their own views and confirms that their approaches are valid, receiving comfort and reassurance through interacting with childrearing books and websites. They want to 'connect' with the advice.

Miranda, a Twentynine year-old mother of a two-year-old boy, explained her sources of childrearing knowledge, ranging from health professionals, to friends, family and social media:

Miranda: Baby cafe and like health visitors were OK, y'know people like that who knew about stuff. Rather than books telling me. Then there's some people you speak to and you think, you don't know what you're talking about so I'm not going to take your advice. Like my mum. Then Facebook... you know Facebook groups. You've made friends with Mums with children of similar ages and I guess they've got bits from elsewhere, or they've got books, you kind of speak to them about it.

Through the varied use of sources of knowledge, both formal and informal Miranda is participating in childrearing culture where knowledge is communicated and evaluated. Miranda doesn't want to be told what to do, but rather she evaluates the validity of the source before adopting a suggestion. Although she does not read childrearing books, she is privy to the knowledge from friends who do, and can justify her dismissal of childrearing books by claiming other sources of expert knowledge keeping her within the remit of 'good' intensive motherhood.

## 9.2 Connecting with the Books

I started the interviews by asking the mothers to tell me about the childrearing books they had read. Miranda and Amy both forcefully rejected the concept of childrearing manuals at the start of the interviews:

Miranda: I am not particularly into reading books about childrearing at all. I mean I started reading a couple when I was pregnant, and just thought this is a bunch of crap and I'm not reading these anymore [giggles]

However, Miranda's dismissal of childrearing books did not extend to all childrearing pedagogy. In line with intensive mothering Miranda's childrearing is still 'expert guided'. She followed several 'natural parenting' advocates on social media. She also talked to friends who had read childrearing

manuals and was familiar with the ideas promoted by different types of books. Miranda used websites for affirmation and reassurance of her 'sensitive motherhood' approach:

Miranda: Yeah there's one website where I agree with everything she always puts, that's *The Milkweg*<sup>113</sup>, so...

J: So, what is her stance, her ideas?

Miranda: She's just always refuting all those stupid ideas about leaving them to cry, she's like pick up your baby, breast feed your baby. Yeah, it's fine if they do it for comfort, yeah? It's fine to if they do this, they do that and the other.

Amy, a mother of two year -old twins, was more oppositional towards childrearing pedagogy; talking about her husband's enthusiasm for childrearing pedagogy she had a strong negative reaction to the advice: 'He is really into Supernanny and all that stuff. Sorry you can't see rolled eyes on a tape. I just find them judgmental, and immediately I want to smash their faces in.'

Yet, Amy was familiar with the ideas and described practicing some of the techniques advocated by Supernanny, which could be due to her husband's enthusiasm. Although she rejects 'expert guided' parenting, she does so by emphasising another intensive mothering doctrine, that good childrearing is 'child-centred.' Amy critiqued childrearing pedagogy as unrealistic, and unable to respond to the individual child, observing that 'the minute that we start to try and do rules that fit everybody, we're a bit screwed really, because we've missed the point. Is my take on it.'

### 9.2.1 Choosing Childrearing Books

Charlotte and Jess both started reading manuals whilst expecting their first child. For both mothers this was about information gathering but also about discovering and exploring their new maternal identity. As Charlotte explained:

Charlotte: I started reading before I had Edward, bearing in mind that I was, retrospectively appallingly prepared really, was erm... The Baby Whisperer: How to Calm, Connect and Communicate with your Baby by Tracey Hogg. And erm, that I liked the idea of a baby-centred approach I think, as opposed to the kind of this is your structure make your baby fit into it.

Even before the birth, Charlotte weighed up the 'good mother' scripts of 'sensitive motherhood' and 'control of the chaotic' ready to adopt and reject childrearing ideas. Jess also described how she spent time sourcing a book she could connect with, and discovering her relationship with the opposing cultural scripts of motherhood:

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<sup>113</sup> American Meg Nagle has a Facebook page, website and blog and has written a childrearing book on breast feeding (2015). Showing the multi-platformed nature of current advice.

Jess: I spent ages in the big Waterstones in [...] looking through loads of books. In the end I got a Penelope Leach one because it was full of development information. I got Gina Ford because it offered a plan. I like a plan. Plans are good. Then I got a Robert Winston book, which is just about development rather than parenting – that was really lovely to read and get excited. I think I read another one then too, Continuum or continuous something? But that was a bit hippy-dippy, all about carrying your kid like a stone age mama – I didn't buy that one it was given to me.

Jess was looking for information, she wanted knowledge about children's development rather than advice. Her reason for choosing Gina Ford and her rejection of The Continuum Concept (Liedloff, 1975) demonstrates her desire to 'control the chaotic' and a scepticism about 'natural parenting' dogma. From pregnancy Jess, Charlotte and Miranda responded to the tenet of intensive motherhood that 'good' childrearing should be expert guided and began to negotiate the tension between the competing cultural scripts of 'control of the chaotic' and 'sensitive' motherhood.

Mother of eight-year-old Harry and five-year-old twins, Lucy and Jake, Becky was an active reader of parenting books. Becky's approach reflects the intensive motherhood script of expert guided childrearing, as evidenced by Becky framing her reading of childrearing books as 'research' and part of her strategy to resolve issues:

Becky: Well I do actually, read a few. Jason [Becky's husband] thinks I'm a bit crazy...erm... but occasionally. I wouldn't say I'm on them all the time. If we have an issue, then I probably would talk to all these people and as well as try and do some research as well. Yeah, I've bought a few. In fact, I just started reading... Playful Parenting. Have you got that one?

Alison also valued information, she talked about a Miriam Stoppard childrearing book she has owned since her eldest son (now thirty) was two:

Alison: it's quite a general comprehensive sort of book. It covers everything from late pregnancy up to the child as a toddler. So, it covers things like weaning the baby, and general ideas in terms of behaviour. It's quite a general book. Lots of information. Easy reading, that was quite useful because it didn't come across as judgmental or moralising – as in this is what you ought to do. Y'know, so I quite liked that and I dipped into it over the years.

This relationship with a book, that has been referred to over the course of five children, does not mean adherence to its orthodoxies. Alison saw books as a useful resource rather than a formula for childrearing:

Alison: So, I think some of these things are quite useful if you can take the gist of them, but don't follow them like a format... use them more as a guide, rather than something you've got to follow to the letter. Just to pick ideas out of, y'know?

The theme of taking the 'gist' of childrearing pedagogy rather than following it 'like a format' was



repeated across the interviews. Jess said she 'picks and chooses' from 'bits and pieces' that she reads to 'find what would suit us'. Alison observed 'I think you pick and choose out of books or people's advice what's going to work for you and your children.' This corresponds to Hardyment's (2007:361) suggestion that mothers 'cherry pick' advice. Ideas were cherry picked, tried and evaluated, then adopted, rejected or transformed, Charlotte explained:

Charlotte: Yes. There are different stages where I have read things. Like you've got time-out and the naughty step. And I did have a little go at trying a naughty step on the stairs and it didn't totally work for us. And y' know it was an idea at a time when you are trying out ideas because you're trying to find a way of managing a particular set of behaviour shall we say? You know it was something. I It works for some people, so we'll try it. I guess the things that do work you stick with. The things that don't really work just slip away and you try the next thing. So there are some ideas that... again, it's down to what your child is like.

In this scenario childrearing style is fluid, situated and contingent. Charlotte is open to trying techniques which 'fix' individual problems without having to endorse a particular childrearing approach. The pedagogy is a resource to be evaluated in practice and will 'slip away' if it doesn't deliver.

Mothers also talked about seeking out childrearing advice which reflects their own views and confirms that their approaches are valid. The mothers I talked to wanted to 'connect' with the book and will reject books that do not reflect their own ideas. For example, Jess talked about 'feeling a connection' with ideas expressed by Pamela Druckerman (2012) in *French Children Don't Throw Food*, a book that challenges Anglo-American 'sensitive' and 'intensive' motherhood. Miranda (who rejected childrearing books as 'bunch of crap') and Hannah used websites and social media for affirmation of their 'sensitive motherhood' approach, and Charlotte described books as potentially giving 'some comfort and reassurance.'

The mothers I talked to had strong preferences for the type of childrearing pedagogy they value, as exemplified by Maris's reaction when I showed her a selection of current childrearing books, looking at the books she said, 'The majority of these books I've read, and some I don't like to be honest. I got some little books from natural parenting; I'll bring them to you. It's what's important, not things, people, interactions...' Charlotte rejects Gina Ford manuals because she didn't 'connect' with the ideas:

Charlotte: A book I didn't connect with, was the Gina Ford one, but I don't think I read more than the first few pages of. But it was just the pressure, that other people were living by it that I thought "oh there must be something in it", then I thought there was something, but it wasn't for me.

When Hannah found she owned a copy of Gina Ford's *Contented Little Baby* she claimed; 'This one I

don't read. I didn't even know, I didn't even realise that I had this, I would have burnt it!'

Childrearing books can provoke strong responses of resistance or connection. A mother of five children ranging in age from thirty to seven, suggested that in contrast to when she had her first child and relied on one book, the market has now become saturated:

I think that parents are being over-whelmed by the choice. And either stymied by the choice or thinking you you've got to have them all. Then you read them all and still not feel any wiser.

The amount of advice available, and the contradictory nature of the advice was a repeated trope throughout the interviews. As one mother suggested, 'whatever you're doing with your kids, there is a book or expert that will tell you it's all wrong.'

Mothers resisted parenting pedagogy which does not seem compatible with other important beliefs and experience; they are sceptical readers.

### 9.3 Scientific Advice

The resistance to childrearing ideas notably lessened when the books claimed a scientific nature. This was evident when I invited the mothers to browse a selection of childrearing manuals and share their thoughts. Charlotte, Alison and Jan demonstrated an openness to Margot Sunderland's *What Every Parent Needs to Know* because of the supposedly scientific basis. A typical reaction is Charlotte:

Charlotte: It looks sciencey. It looks interesting. It probably is interesting; it's saying stuff about the brain and about how different bit of the brain work, it looks technical but in a readable, approachable way, because the text is all broken into sections. It's probably inspiring confidence that you are reading about how the brain really works, so its erm... helping you understand how that little brain is thinking. So, lots of interesting stuff. It does look a book that probably would have told me a lot.

This chimes with mothers' preference for information, but also opens the possibility that making scientific claims can undermine a reader's scepticism and make her willing to accept a viewpoint if in Alison's words, 'it looks like it has some proper science behind it.'

The next section examines how mothers negotiate 'scientific' childrearing claims, using the example of 'toxic stress'. Finding that these claims are adopted and reproduced when they shore up existing beliefs.

#### 9.3.1 'Toxic Cortisol' and 'Settled Science'

The mothers I talked to were open to the idea that science could provide childrearing knowledge and valuable information. The interpretive repertoires of 'settled science', and the trope of 'toxic cortisol' were included in several participant's accounts to justify their own childrearing practices,

such as bed-sharing, rejection of sleep training and being a stay-at-home mother. For example, Maris drew on this interpretive repertoire, to suggest ‘natural parenting’ approaches (which she favours) are verified by settled scientific understanding.

Maris: Now science is catching up. Yeah, about the first couple of years that you’re bonding, you’re in physical contact and you’re talking and how crucial all these things are. Which is what natural parenting says all along. Where other people say you’re just being silly, and it makes no difference. Of course, it makes a difference. And you instinctively want to do these things, so it is the evolution of humanity that plays a part in that. We do things for a reason don’t we?

Maris used the interpretive repertoires of settled science as well as of the ‘natural’ mother ‘instinctively’ following an evolutionary destiny, to justify her childrearing against her perceived critics. Although she evokes science, experiential knowledge is given higher status. In this narrative ‘science is catching up’ with both mothers’ ancient tacit knowledge and her own childrearing beliefs.

Becky draws on the neuroscience discourse she encountered in her job as a teacher. She described THRIVE<sup>114</sup>, a current school-based intervention which identifies children by their behaviour as having perceived brain-damage caused by parental action in babyhood:

That’s all to do with brain development and when you’re doing it in a school context it’s about patching up parts that have been missed in a baby’s brain development and how you can make those connections that have been lost, through... well for whatever reason.

Although she was initially reluctant to attribute blame for damage to a child’s brain development on parents, her following statement makes the link explicit:

Becky: The damage has been done in the really early years. So, yes as a parent it’s really important to make sure you don’t cause that damage in any way. And know how to avoid it happening. I mean I think being a good enough parent usually does the job, I think it’s quite major things that go wrong that cause those problems. It’s the kind of stuff you should be taught as a parent.

Becky’s comment simultaneously suggested ‘good enough’ mothering avoids this perceived harm, and that parents should be taught about brain development and how to avoid harm by utilizing the trope of brain damage to suggest parents need to be taught about being ‘good enough’.

The interpretive repertoire of ‘settled science’ served different interpretive purposes; showing how language tropes create categories which are “constructed and drawn on for many *different* actions” (Potter & Wetherall, 1987:137). In most cases the interpretive repertoire of ‘settled science’ was adopted by participants to justify and intensify practices that were already in place, rather than

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<sup>114</sup> For more information on THRIVE see <https://www.thriveapproach.com/the-thrive-approach/>

representing a mechanism that changed practice; suggesting the repertoire is evoked to support pre-existing childrearing ideas.

The trope of inadequate mothering producing ‘toxic cortisol’ which damages a child’s brain is evoked to judge other mothers, and to position ‘sensitive motherhood’ as superior. Alison evoked science and presented a reading of attachment theory as settled science:

Alison: I think...well when you read all the scientific literature about cortisol and stuff, what it’s saying is that when you have your baby in... physically with you, as much as possible within reason, then they develop positive, confident steady bonds with the main caregiver, which is usually the mother isn’t it.? If a child is in another nursery, people don’t come immediately when it cries, all those things people used to do before like leave them to cry it out, leave them. You feed them at ten, two and six and nothing else and all the rest of it, y’know to me that seems barbaric, y’know.

Equating science and cortisol research with pop-attachment ideas, Alison used the objectivity of ‘science’ to position her own practices as good ‘sensitive mothering’, in contrast with other approaches which she identified as barbarous.

Miranda drew on the interpretive repertoire of ‘settled science’, particularly the trope of ‘toxic cortisol’, as she explained her approach to her two-year-old’s night-time crying:

Miranda: But then that thing about cortisol, when you leave them to cry and y’know they just shut down emotionally. I always thought that’s a really good point and that’s really put me off, you know- leaving him. I wouldn’t want him to shut down and think no one’s coming. So, I’ve always thought that’s good research, because you can tell all those people who let them scream. They’re not trained, they’re just not crying out loud, and it doesn’t mean they’re all right and they’re happy.

According to Miranda the ‘cortisol’ trope was “good research”, because it validated her own practices (high responsiveness, and bed-sharing) and could be used to evangelize. But it not only validated Miranda’s childrearing style but intensified it; it ‘really put her off’ leaving her two-year old son to fall asleep on his own, or to sleep in his own bed. According to this trope even a child who is not crying, may not be ‘all right’ or happy if the mother is using the ‘wrong’ childrearing technique – the idea of ‘toxic cortisol’ acts as a causal mechanism, to increase anxiety and reduce the validity of the mother’s empirical observation of her child (a non-crying child is “all right”). Miranda’s maternal identity was set against ‘those people’ who follow different childrearing practices. The *idea* that sleep training a child may risk enhanced cortisol levels and cause the child to emotionally shut down, can be regarded as *demi-real* as it has a real effect on childrearing practice, through maternal perceptions of the child and ideals of ‘good mothering’. The effects are not inevitable, other mothers may respond to the idea differently, rather Miranda’s reflections highlight possible *causal tendencies*.

These accounts use ‘toxic cortisol’ in the same way as the writings of Sue Gerhardt (2004), Margot

Sunderland (2007, 2016), Laura Markham (2014) and Penelope Leach (2010) and represent a new orthodoxy of sensitive motherhood. It is possible that the dissemination of the 'toxic cortisol' trope causes mothers to intensify the practices of 'sensitive motherhood' and judgement of those not adhering to the cultural script. The trope of 'toxic cortisol' was only evoked as 'settled science' by those mothers who were very sympathetic to 'natural/attachment- parenting' and the cultural script of 'sensitive mothering'.

Only Jess, evoked 'science' to reject the demands of sensitive motherhood and include herself in a definition of 'good' motherhood.

Jess: Research shows your child can be securely attached whether you are an earth-mother or not. It's dishonest to call one way 'attachment' and have mums suffering all that nonsense for the sake of the 'bond'. Kids love parents who love them, even strict ones like me [giggles].

Jess, who practiced sleep training and routines is, in her own words, 'strict' with her children, was defending herself against the criticisms made by natural/attachment parenting advocates of sensitive motherhood of her preferred approach. Arguably, Jess is correct in her reading of the current scientific evidence around attachment as discussed in section 3.3. . However, Jess experienced negative judgement from other mothers for her choices when she refuted the idea of toxic cortisol. Using interpretive repertoires of 'children's needs' to counter the argument Jess explained:

Jess: Babies need sleep, children need sleep, I need sleep, my husband needs sleep. I don't believe all that stuff about babies being stressed out and damaged for life if they are left crying for two minutes. They need to learn about night-time and sleep, in a gentle but firm way. If not, then everyone is bloody stressed.

Here Jess is evoking the cultural script of control of the chaotic, to diminish the 'sacrificial motherhood' arguments against sleep-training and the use of the 'toxic cortisol' trope, and to preserve her status as a 'good' mother. The use of the word 'gentle' acknowledges the script of 'sensitive motherhood', whilst advocating 'control of the chaotic'.

From a critical realist perspective, reproduction of the 'toxic cortisol' trope, initially used by academics to explain isolated phenomena (such as, extreme neglect), has been co-opted, extended, transformed and spread to justify specific ideological practices in childrearing literature. The new claim is irreducible to the original empirical findings. This 'concept creep' (Haslam, 2016) may have created a causal mechanism that shores up more universal claims of parental determinism and the desirability of intensive sensitive mothering. Moving far away from the empirical findings of the original academic sources, from whence it emerged, a hypothesis of the potential risks of extreme neglect is transformed into a demi-real deterministic knowledge claim that common-place parenting

practices can cause damage.

Identifying and following the trope of ‘toxic cortisol’ exposes relationship between childrearing ideas, knowledge claims and parental beliefs. The trope of ‘toxic cortisol’ may be based on an over-extension or misunderstanding of scientific research but as an idea has a real effect on a parent’s childrearing choices and beliefs. Whether it is adopted as coherent with existing beliefs and practices (Maris and Alison), used to transform existing practices (Miranda), or rejected in a way that defends a mothers’ childrearing practices (Jess); the trope of toxic cortisol has a real effect not only on how children are raised but on how mothers judge each other.

Mothers are responding to a very narrow and partisan presentation of the ‘science’ of childrearing. Research such as that discussed in chapter three, suggesting sleep-training could be both efficacious and beneficial was not evoked, even by those who practiced sleep-training. This is the triumph of advocates and lobbyists such as writers Gerhardt (2004) and Sunderland (2007;2016) who have popularised an interpretation of scientific evidence to support the script of ‘self-sacrificial’ motherhood. Maris, Miranda, Alison all frame sleep training as unscientific and old-fashioned and potentially harmful. But as I discussed in the chapter two the attachment authors do not represent an academic consensus on sleep-training and there is evidence that it may be efficacious and beneficial for many children. The scientific knowledge available to mothers is mediated through childrearing pedagogy, where science is presented as supposedly infallible to serve the cultural scripts, rather than evaluated for validity and presented as fallible and contingent.

#### 9.4 Advice from Mother’s Mother

As I discussed in chapter three, supposedly ‘Scientific’ parenting pedagogy sets itself against and above intergenerational childrearing knowledge. Miranda and Becky explicitly cite their mothers as their most important source of knowledge. Becky explains, ‘I’m close to my mum, anyway. In terms of emotional support, she’s like a rock. She’s brilliant. If there’s any problems. It’s always me ringing her to moan...’ But it is not didactic childrearing advice that Becky is seeking or being offered:

Becky: My mum’s very good at not really offering advice. So she’s a bit like a counsellor, so she’ll say “What I think you’re saying is this...” or she’ll ask me questions like “Has he had some busy days?” Or “Do you think he’s coming down with something? Are there any signs of that?” or “Has he had some late nights”, so she’ll kind of question it, and make me think more about er... what could be.

J: So, she helps you with your thought processes... and working it out?

B: Yeah. Yeah. I couldn’t stand it if she was very overbearing and said, “Well I think this is the problem and this is what you should do.” Well she wouldn’t...she just doesn’t say that and she’s always very in tune with me, I think.

In this anecdote Becky's mother is helping Becky with a reflective process, herself fulfilling the role of 'sensitive mother' in tune with her daughter and her daughter's own sensitive motherhood.

When asked whether she would use a childrearing book as a source of knowledge Miranda said, 'I'd rather do what I feel like or what my mum says.' She referred to her mother as an authority throughout the interview, defending practice by stating 'It's what my mum did with me and my sister'. Only at one point does she question her mother's advice when it clashes with her own beliefs and preferences.

**Miranda:** Yeah, like now my Mum's like "well, he should really start sleeping in his own bed, or go to sleep in his own bed." But if you're comfortable with what you do and your child's comfortable with what you do, then where's the "should"?

Miranda's experience is conflicting with her mother's advice, and she questions the imperative nature of the advice. Mary described a defensive relationship with her own mother and a feeling of judgement, which reflects the tension between the opposing cultural scripts of 'good motherhood'.

Amy: My mum is a great believer in massive judgement. Because I was quite placid when I was younger, and neither Charlie or Olivia are placid so therefore that somehow becomes something about how you're bringing them up... Rather than they might just be a different child who... you know they are very very physically active. Erm... so she will say to me things like "What are you going to do about that child?" in very much the same way that Supernanny does.

Her mother's demand that Mary 'control the chaotic' conflicts with Mary's 'sensitive motherhood' approach that values responding to her children's innate natures above control. Mothers' mothers have themselves participated in a childrearing culture and negotiated their own cultural scripts and maternal identities that may or may not be in accord with their daughters'. Mothers' mothers are both a source of affirmation and criticism, reassurance and tension. They provide knowledge to adopt but also to reject or transform.

## 9.5 Advice from Professionals

The mothers I talked to did not report often seeking out professional advice on childrearing, preferring informal sources of people, books and websites. Several mothers mentioned visiting Baby Café to help with initial breastfeeding and framed this as helpful and practical. Mother of Callum age six and Alexander age two, Claire said, 'I think health visitors are fantastic' and felt supported and informed. But other mothers were more critical of some advice offered by professionals such as health visitors. For Hannah, health visitors were helpful when they supported her choices, but not when they challenged her

Hannah: Health visitors... some of them are OK, and have been supportive of my childrearing practice, but only to a certain age. As soon as it got to like nine months it's like "oh well, they should be sleeping through the night, oh are you still breast feeding?" And it's all as though it changes and suddenly, they don't need that comfort or that assurance anymore, because they are now a little bit older. They can't fend for themselves, but yeah...

Hannah used the cultural script of sensitive motherhood (and the interpretive repertoire of toxic stress) to reject health visitors' advice:

Hannah: And health visitors don't have the most up to date information. they still advise cry it out and formula feeds and a lot of the stuff that goes against, you know, toxic stress. Health visitors, from both my experience and what I've read on Facebook, actually feed into the toxic stress, and the guilt and the judgement.

For Hannah, the attachment-parenting ideas she followed were more modern and scientifically valid than the information disseminated by health visitors. Miranda questioned the disparity in advice between different health visitors and the limited nature of the information given:

J: Were the health visitors helpful?

Miranda: Not particularly. We never really discussed how to raise children, the main thing was you know, if the child's growing, are you feeding it? Which is fine, it's the basics, I guess that's all they have the time and the resources for. She was actually really good about breastfeeding and stuff. The one I had had breast fed, but I know a lot whose health visitor was like "oh it's fine" because they hadn't. Maybe they could have said more and made their role a bit more about how you bring up the children, not just if you feed them, clothe them and if your house is OK.

Miranda's respect for the health visitor is grounded in the health-visitor's experience as a fellow breast-feeding mother, rather than her formal qualification.

The oppositional feelings towards health visitors were shared by Jess, who talked of a lack of valid information and the feeling of judgement. Jess felt under-surveillance, rather than supported:

Jess: With Eliza I hated having the health visitor visit. I'd really liked my midwife. But the health visitor was different, I felt I had to prove something to her. She seemed quite removed and judgey. I don't think she was a mum herself. I asked for information, but she didn't really have anything to tell me. It's like she was looking to catch me out. I was breast-feeding well, baby fed, clean and lovely, nice routine, it was all going well. But she seemed to want to find fault. She made me stressed, when I was actually fine. I dreaded her visits.

As Hannah evokes the interpretive repertoires of sensitive mothering, Jess evokes 'control of the chaotic' to prove her good mother status, stressing the good routine, cleanliness and feeding. Both mothers are protecting their 'good mother' identities from criticism. Jess initially regarded the Health visitor as a source of information but came to view her as an obstacle to Jess's own happiness as a



mother. As for Miranda, the health visitor's status as a mother or non-mother mattered to Jess when she evaluated the value of her advice.

The midwife's alleged criticism of Hannah's extended breast-feeding reflects the narrow definition of 'good' breastfeeding practice and the continuing stigma towards breastfeeding beyond early infancy (Brockway & Venturato, 2016; Zhu and et al, 2019). As Lomax (2014) explored breastfeeding has been imbued with a moral dimension and is a signifier of an ideal of 'good motherhood'. The women above all evoke breastfeeding to confer a 'good mother' status. However, the experience itself is not unproblematic, one mother confided that it was 'painful and difficult at first', and another that 'when you're breast feeding it can be very lonely'. Lomax (2014:103) found that 'midwives' construction of breastfeeding as a positive experience of maternal identity appears to gloss over mothers' embodied experiences, such that mothers who are experiencing problems breastfeeding have difficulty giving voice to their experiences.' It maybe that a shared experience of breast feeding between mother and professional helps mothers to feel understood in the face of a dominant discourse of unproblematic, morally sanctioned feeding practices.

## 9.6 Advice from Childrearing Groups

The mothers value information and critique pedagogic sources for not being 'informative'. Parenting classes and groups, such as *The National Childbirth Trust* (NCT) are judged on how informative they were. Baby Café (a drop-in breast feeding service) was praised by all the mothers from the sample who attended, in Jess's words 'they knew their stuff and really helped'. But most respondents were unhappy with the information given in formal pedagogy circles.

Becky, Charlotte, Hannah, Jess and Claire all participated in NCT classes, and critiqued the lack of information available about motherhood after the birth. As Jess said, 'It's all about having this perfect birth, but not a lot about what happens next.' Claire talked of NCT promoting 'this way of childbirth is the best way' rather than offering more impartial information. There was a suggestion that some mothers would welcome childrearing advice at the beginning of motherhood, if it was practical and informative:

Becky: I mean the NCT classes that we did they were fun, but they weren't that informative really in terms of... it was all about the birth and then a little bit about changing nappies and breast feeding. There wasn't a hell of a lot about how you actually raise a child at all, that kind of practical stuff, and I think a lot of parents need that don't they? And you don't get it.

Formal groups such as NCT may not be described as particularly useful sources of childrearing knowledge by these mothers, but they do provide a network of other parents who become friends and provide informal support. Jess, Charlotte, Claire, Maris, Hannah and Becky all talked of the

valued support found by making lasting friendships with other mothers at pre-natal and baby groups. For example, Becky formed a support group from women she met at NCT classes. When asked if she goes to any parent groups she replied:

Becky: Well I did do NCT classes before I had Harry and made a group of friends, I'm still friends with now. I mean I went out with them on Friday night. But I don't think that really counts does it, because we're not that group now, we're just friends, I don't know?

J: Do you support each other, I bet you talk about your kids... [giggles]

Becky: All the time! Constantly! And our husbands [giggles]. So yeah, I guess you could call it a support network. Quite often we support each other, I mean I count them as friends now. And I don't go to any parent groups now the children are older.

The need for parenting groups is negated when an informal grouping of peers can replace it. Maris describes her friends made at a Natural Parenting Group as 'a life-line'. Jess says of her friends she met at a baby group with her first daughter:

About once a month we leave the kids with their Dads and go for drinks. It's good to talk through things with other mums, ideas and stuff about kids – you know, put the world to rights over a class of Sauv. Blanc. I'm glad I went to the group because of that.

The importance of mothers' groups seems to lay not in any formal curriculum or purpose but in the friendships initiated in the groups and the ready-made support network this provides. Although mothers appreciate 'information', a need for parenting pedagogy may not be the primary reason mothers attend parenting groups.

Friends who were also experiencing motherhood were cited as an essential source of knowledge, support and company by all the mothers I talked to, as Louise said: 'It can be lonely. Especially when you're breast feeding it can be very lonely. But I do, I think a good set of friends that have got children the same age keeps your sanity.'

But pre-natal, baby and pre-school groups often cost money, as Claire points out, and baby groups are only available in some areas:

Claire: Baby groups are good, but even that comes down to money. Like in my village I have two mother/ baby groups that cost two pounds each. Whereas, in other areas, where you probably need it more you might not have that opportunity. So, some people don't have that.

Opportunities for mothers to form such peer-to peer support groups at an affordable rate may be of greater value to mothers than universal parenting-pedagogy initiatives. None of mothers I talked to express a desire to attend parenting classes. All the mothers had at least one child under eight years old and were reflective about their childrearing, but when asked whether they would attend classes

the mood can be summed up in Miranda's words, 'I wouldn't need that, I wouldn't want that'.

## 9.7 Advice from Social Media

Mothers engaged with other mothers on social media platforms such as Facebook, Mumsnet and Netmums, citing social media as a source of childrearing knowledge. Miranda talks about seeking Facebook pages that reflect her childrearing beliefs. Jess said she used a mothers' social media site to 'chat with other mothers and get top-tips, for kid's activities and stuff'. But also, mothers expressed concern about the validity of the information available, as Jess said 'there's lot of crap bandied about online, like the anti-vaccine stuff – so damaging.' Alison suggested that, 'I think in a way the explosion of the internet has been bad for parenting because there's so much conflicting information.' Alison is also concerned that 'you are opening yourself up to judgement when you post stuff on-line.' Expressing concern both about a surveillance culture and the ethics of parents posting about their children:

Alison: If people post something about their family life anywhere on social media, you're either praised or castigated. There's nothing in between. So maybe the onus is on the parents not to post all and sundry on-line. Or it risks turning your child's life into the Truman Show or something.

Jess explains social media interaction in terms of childrearing tribes that correspond to the two cultural scripts<sup>115</sup> I have identified, she warned that social media exacerbated division and judgement:

Mumsnet and stuff is very tribal. You've got like the 'have it all' yummy mummies, the hippy-dippy earth mothers, tiger mothers, free rangers and whatever. Then these tribes argue and judge each other over every little thing. You'd go mad if you took it seriously.

Social media was also criticised for exacerbating a mothers' self-criticism, and putting pressure on mothers to present a 'good mother' identity, for example:

Becky: There's the Facebook thing as well the whole social media, and that's terrible for feeling judged, and judging yourself against what other people's lives seem to like. Trips out, baking, Crafts. And you know, you know it's not real.

Social media may be less a source of valid knowledge than an exercise in fantasy identity construction. It is a means of participation in a wider childrearing culture, which can bring reassurance and belonging, but participation comes with the risk of tribalism and judgement, since as Claire points out, 'people say stuff on there that you wouldn't say to someone's face.'

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<sup>115</sup> "Have it all' yummy mummies' and 'tiger mothers' correspond to control of the chaotic. 'The hippy-dippy earth mothers' and 'free-rangers correspond' to the script of 'sensitive motherhood'.

## 9.8 Conclusion – The Primacy of Experiential Knowledge

Alison: There's a lot of stuff there isn't there? If you looked at all those things as a whole, at all those books, you'd think "what the hell am I supposed to do with these children?"

The mothers' responses to childrearing pedagogy varied, but all were critical readers. Childrearing manuals and websites can provide positive reassurance and a ready-made maternal identity, such as attachment parent, or Gina Fordist which may offer protection and a defence against judgement.

There was strong evidence of the rejection of childrearing-manual advice, whether it is Jan observing that advice gets between you and your relationship with the child, Amy's visceral rejection of judgemental childrearing experts, Becky throwing away a copy of Gina Ford or Hannah, Jess and Charlotte's concern that some books potentially make women feel inadequate. The mothers I talked to demonstrate an appetite for information but were concerned with the idea of universal childrearing pedagogy. This concern was exacerbated by a perceived threat from childrearing pedagogy to 'good mother identities that can be summed up by Claire's question 'what are they teaching you to be?'

Mothers acquisition of childrearing knowledge comes from participation within a parenting culture. Expertise is valued, but only when it corresponds with a mother's own preferences and experience. The primacy of experiential knowledge is explicit when mothers justify their use of 'expert' knowledge by claiming it chimes with tacit and experiential knowledge.

Adoption of childrearing advice happened when mothers felt a 'connection with the ideas', as typified by Charlotte's description of *The Baby Whisperer* (Hogg):

Charlotte: It was useful, and it was a book which gave some sort of comfort and reassurance, which is perhaps a useful purpose in itself. [...] Nothing really prepares you for how that feels and the intensity of that experience. But that was a book that I felt some sort of connection with the ideas in it.

Expert knowledge is listened to if it is judged to be informative, but experiential knowledge is given a higher status. Jess, Becky, and Hannah all dismiss manual writer Gina Ford's expertise on the basis that she does not have her own children. Miranda and Jess are wary of health visitors who haven't experienced breastfeeding or motherhood. Experiential knowledge gathered herself from raising a child, or from family, friends or professionals who have experienced childrearing is valued as authentic. A typical example of this respect for authenticity is comes from Charlotte talking about the childrearing manual *No Cry Sleep Solution: gentle ways to help your baby sleep through the night* (Elizabeth Pamply and William Sears, 2002),

Charlotte: And it's a lovely book. The very cover of the book is something you can

connect with, the lady (Elizabeth Pamply) sat there with her five children. She was writing the book at the time; she describes having her little one nestled in front of the keyboard in her arms being settled. And there she is the mother of these lovely children and you're thinking, yes, she's been there. This isn't just something that somebody has thought would be a good idea. It's something that's tried and tested and come about because of her experience with her own children.

J: With her own children, so it was from a mother.

C: It was from a mother, and it was real as opposed to somebody deciding that this was a scheme that would be applicable, it felt very genuine and very warm.

Experiential knowledge is pitted against mere theory, the reality against the realm of ideas. By selling their book to Charlotte as experiential knowledge Sears and Pamply (2002) have imbued their highly ideological, attachment-based theory of childrearing with the authenticity of experiential knowledge.

The sources of knowledge and support are interrelated, as the following description from Charlotte demonstrates:

Charlotte: Way back when Edward was small. I went down the NCT route pre-natal and post-natal and had some classes where I met a circle of friends. And it was sometime after that when one of those prenatal friends told me about the baby-centre, and I then was turning to that for advice on... the issues that you have with a young child that you have to just kind of learn and manage.

The formal pedagogy of an NCT group provided the friends who recommended the pregnancy and childrearing advice website. In this example Charlotte is actively looking for advice that 'controls the chaotic' and helps her manage issues. Mothers describe being recommended ideas, books or websites by friends, and sharing their own discoveries with friends. That is not to say that childrearing ideas found through informal means are accepted. Miranda rejects her mother's advice on bed-sharing. Alison, Jan, Jess and Becky discussed receiving a recommendation from other parents but then subsequently rejecting the guidance.

The rejection, adoption and transformation of ideas is communicated to other mothers participating in the culture, both face to face and on-line. Childrearing fashions and knowledge, as presented in childrearing books, are spread through participation in parenting culture, rather than representing a hegemonic imposition from 'expert' sources. Explicit imposition of a cultural hegemony around childrearing is resisted, as evidenced by the reaction to health professionals and parenting groups. Neither is it a homogenous culture, as Claire says 'My NCT group, we've all done different things. Some breastfeeding, some bottle feeding, some bed sharing or not bed sharing.' Participating in the culture does not mean uniform practice or following the same ideas. Rather it is a discussion, a reflective sharing of ideas which may be adopted, rejected or transformed. As Jess says, 'It's good to

talk about it with other mums and get a bit of perspective, find out what other mums do – doesn't mean you'll do the same but it's good to talk it through'.

But this discussion has pitfalls as Alison explains:

Alison: I sometimes find myself being careful how I talk, because I know that some people don't approve of certain things.... Even when you're just talking to someone in the playground, everybody seems so much more opinionated now. Rather than y'know live and let live, there's 'oh, you shouldn't have done that like that. This is how I do it. This works for me' And then you're made to feel wrong or a failure because that thing didn't work for you. I think we all need to be a little bit better at minding our own business.

Maternal identities of 'good' motherhood are open to judgement by others. Since the two dominant cultural scripts conflict a mother cannot be certain that she is presenting as 'a good mother'. A mother presenting as a good mother by 'controlling the chaotic' can be criticised for not demonstrating 'sensitive motherhood'; a mother presenting as a sensitive mother is open to criticism for not 'controlling the chaotic'. Participation in twenty-first century parenting culture involves negotiation of the conflict.

The following chapter explores mothers' negotiation of the cultural scripts at the level of individual childrearing techniques. I examine how the language, dictates and ideas as presented in popular twenty-first century childrearing manuals of childrearing are understood and negotiated to find the mechanisms of adoption, rejection and transformation.

## Chapter Ten: Interviews with Mothers – Negotiating Childrearing Ideas

This chapter explores how British mothers respond to the ideas, techniques and language presented in twenty-first century childrearing books; illuminating the relationship between childrearing pedagogy and what mothers think, say and do.

### 10. Introduction – Mechanisms of Adoption, Rejection and Transformation

Starting from the critical realist perspective that culture is real, as it has real effects on people's actions (Maxwell, 2012:15) this chapter explores the responses to my textual elicitation method designed to access the ideas, language and mechanisms involved in the construction of childrearing culture. The ideas we hold about childrearing are essential to the society since: 'Society can only exist in so far as human agents are reproducing and transforming the social structure. And human agents act in accordance with ideas.' (Collier, 1994:171) I propose that mothers' ideas, beliefs and feelings have a real effect on childrearing culture, transforming the culture through participation and negotiation of the dominant discourses.

This chapter examines the responses to the 'topic cards' from the textual elicitation activity to demonstrate the detailed response of mothers to small aspects of the dominant cultural scripts. The mothers could choose to respond to 50 different topic cards. It is through examining the negotiation of specific techniques and ideas presented in the childrearing books that the relationship between mothers and the dominant advice can be understood.

The topics on the cards can be grouped together to reflect the dominant cultural scripts (see appendix 1) For example topic cards promoting 'control of the chaotic include 'teaching manners', 'foster obedience', 'Foster good routines', 'reward systems' 'limit screen time', 'set clear expectations', 'sleep training' and 'time-out'. Topic cards promoting 'sensitive motherhood include 'praise and encouragement', 'natural consequences', 'Love bombing', 'bed sharing', 'stop negative parental behaviour (shouting, nagging etc.)', 'foster creativity', and 'time-in'. I have indicated the topic cards the mothers were responding to, by using bold text.

## 10.1 Myriad different Childrearing Approaches

Table3: Mothers Use of Childrearing Techniques

	Rewards	Routine	Time-out	1-2-3	Warnings	Consequences	Removal of privileges
Alison	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Amy	No	No	Yes	No	Maybe	With one child	Yes
Becky	No	Yes	Yes	Sometimes	Yes	Natural	No
Charlotte	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Claire	No	Loose	Yes	Sometimes	No	No	No
Hannah	No	Loose	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Louise	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Miranda	Maybe	Loose	No	No	No	No	No
Maris	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Natural	No
Jan	No	Maybe	Sometimes	No	No	yes	No
Jess	Sometimes	Yes	No	No	No	Natural	No

This chart shows how differently this small sample of mothers follow versions seven<sup>116</sup> of the childrearing techniques discussed in contemporary childrearing manuals. No response is exactly the same. Take into consideration all the different techniques and approaches a parent must negotiate and it becomes clear that within one parenting culture there are myriad ways of bringing up children.

This suggests contemporary British childrearing culture is neither homogenous, nor hegemonic in practice. The parents I interviewed did not accept all advice without examination and reflection. All

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<sup>116</sup> These seven were chosen as they can illicit simple 'yes, I use' or 'no, I do not use' responses.



the mothers interviewed rejected some childrearing techniques, and accepted others; but which technique they favoured differed. The mothers reflected on the ideas, they experimented with them – adopting some, transforming some and rejecting some; thus, creating many different overall approaches. As I will demonstrate, there are varied mechanisms or processes of evaluation working simultaneously to create a diversity of approaches.

The parents talked about cherry-picking advice and adapting their childrearing practices in response to their child's individual temperament, showing scepticism about techniques that claimed universal success. The mothers I interviewed tended to adopt these techniques sparingly, and inconsistently, perhaps to address issues in the short term, such as potty training or table manners. Techniques were reportedly employed in response to certain contexts and individual children, rather than representing a blanket parenting style. All the mothers I talked to who had more than one child, agreed that they used different approaches with different children. For example, mothers Amy, Jan and Becky rejected Time-out as a technique for one child but found it useful for another. If the application of parenting techniques is not consistent within the same family, it is unlikely that it is nationally homogeneous. Yet, beneath the diversity of childrearing approaches I found that mothers share ways of negotiating the childrearing advice and the cultural scripts of 'good motherhood.'

By identifying some of the shared mechanisms guiding mothers in their negotiation of the minutiae of childrearing advice, the next section uses the data from the textual elicitation exercise to understand what causes a mother to adopt, reject or transform a childrearing approach.

## 10.2 The mechanisms of adoption, rejection and transformation

Listening to the participants evaluate childrearing ideas during the textual elicitation exercise provided a way of glimpsing the mechanisms of rejection, reproduction and transformation of ideas employed by mothers negotiating childrearing ideas. As I explained in chapter five within critical realism mechanisms represent the causal processes leading to an event. The causal processes could be material structures, or ideas and feelings. As Maxwell (2012:38) explains critical realism allows for 'values, beliefs, motives and meanings' to be regarded as legitimate causation. By identifying shared mechanisms of evaluation, I am not suggesting mechanisms produce predictable outcomes across the cohort. Maxwell (2012:36) contends that 'mechanisms are not seen as general laws, or as having invariant outcomes, but as situationally contingent; their actual context is inextricably part of the process.'

As I will demonstrate, these mechanisms are not predictive of outcome. The same mechanism may cause different outcomes. Different mechanisms may be simultaneously operative. Yet beneath the diversity of childrearing approaches I found that mothers share ways of negotiating the childrearing

advice and the cultural scripts of 'good motherhood.'

#### 10.2.1 The Mechanism of Practicality

Some ideas are adopted or rejected on practical grounds, the material reality of life dictates whether an idea can be entertained. For the mothers I talked to, these practicalities were centred around time, money, work and resources. For example, Miranda browsed a Jo Frost Supernanny manual and dismissed her advice on the grounds that it was not practical and would not fit with her circumstances:

Miranda: Well this is stupid. "Scheduling tips: I'm in favour of five to five-thirty for the evening meal". Well I'm not home from work. What about everybody who has to work, you can't fit everything around...

Jess, mother of eight-year-old Eliza and three-year-old Verity, describes the practical constraints on following advice to encourage children to play outside:

Jess: Now we have a house and garden I am always chucking them both outside to play, but I didn't have that option when Eliza was little, because we lived in an apartment with no garden. Going out, getting fresh air was a big rigmarole, an event. Now it's simply opening a door. It makes a big difference.

Once a practical barrier (no garden) was removed Jess changed her childrearing approach.

#### 10.2.2 The Mechanism of Salience

The mothers I talked to were very familiar with the language of childrearing presented to them in the textual elicitation exercise. From 'cry-it-out' to 'baby-wearing', from 'naughty steps' to 'love bombing' the language was recognized and meaning attributed. This suggests the mothers are participating in the same childrearing culture, and that the ideas presented in childrearing books have cultural salience in twenty-first century Britain. This finding corroborates Stearns's (2003) suggestion that mothers assimilate the language of childrearing presented in childrearing pedagogy. However, as I shall demonstrate in chapter eleven, mothers do not interpret the language in a uniform way.

Occasionally techniques may be adopted because of their culture dominance. For example, Jess evokes salience when she describes her choice to breast-feed 'all my friends were doing it, I didn't really think about it, I just assumed I would too'. But salience as a mechanism for adoption has limits; responding to the 'time-out' topic card Claire explains, 'I think I just used them because I couldn't think of an alternative. I don't think it really works.' Claire initially adopted the technique with her two sons, due to salience then rejected it after reflecting on its efficacy. The textual elicitation

exercise demonstrated that culturally dominant ideas were reflected upon and salience was overridden by other mechanisms of evaluation.

### 10.2.3 The Mechanism of Efficacy

Childrearing books claim that their advice ‘works’ for all children. The mothers I talked to often evaluated childrearing advice through the interpretive repertoire of ‘what works’, stating a technique ‘works’, ‘works quite well’, ‘doesn’t always work’ or ‘doesn’t work with my children’. The adoption, rejection or transformation of a technique is in part driven by a mechanism of efficacy.

It is at times unclear what ‘works’ means, whether a technique ‘works’ is dependent on the aims of the mother employing it. The books provide headline aims as varied as ‘controlling obnoxious behaviour’ (Phelan, 2010), creating happy children (Biddulph 2003), creating well-behaved children (Taylor 2009) promoting calm confident parenting (Ford 2006) and promoting ‘children’s social, emotional and academic competence’ (Webster-Stratton 2005). A technique may ‘work’ to produce one outcome, but not ‘work’ in terms of another. For example, mothers discussed the topic card ‘rewards for good behaviour’ there was a view that rewards ‘worked’ to produce temporary compliance. Louise used this to set short terms goals with her three-year-old daughter Elsie:

Louise: A reward chart is a goal isn't it. Yeah, we got that. We haven't used that as much; it was more when she had to learn to clean her teeth. We haven't used that in a while, but It did work, and I would certainly use that again.

She uses the technique sparingly and with a particular learning objective in view, in these circumstances she found rewards charts ‘worked’. But although most mothers I talked to agreed that rewards helped to obtain the child’s temporary compliance, some mothers expressed doubts about whether the technique ‘worked’ for the child’s moral development. For example, Maris responds to the ‘rewards for good behavior’ topic card, thus:

Maris: I don’t think you need to treat good behaviour. I think there’s right and wrong. And good behaviour reaps its own benefits. It’s like Lily, I don’t want her to feel that life is a rewards and points system. A bribe might work, but it’s not right.

What ‘works’ is highly subjective. A mother seeking to ‘control the chaotic’ may find a technique efficacious but responding to the script of ‘sensitive motherhood’ she may not, and vice versa.

Mother of two-year-old twins, Olivia and Charlie, Amy opined when talking of Supernanny Jo Frost’s advice, ‘I don't understand that kind of one size fits all ludicrousness.’ Jess concurs saying, ‘the kids in the books aren’t real, real kids are don’t behave like that. They’re all different’. The idea that a technique may ‘work’ universally was rejected by all the mothers I talked to; the individual child’s temperament was cited as determining approaches which ‘worked’. This was explicit when mothers

claim a technique 'works' for one of their children, but not another. For example, Jess has reservations about using rewards with her eight-year old and four-year old daughters, but claims they 'work' for one of her children:

Jess: I don't like reward charts. I don't think parents should bribe their children to be nice. I've never used them with Eliza, she'd see through it. But Verity gets them at nursery and really responds, she's so proud of her stickers. So, we do have some stickers to give her, it works for her, but I hate it.

In this scenario the child is leading the approach. The stickers are framed as 'working' from the child's viewpoint, but in tension with the mother's ethical beliefs.

Efficacy was discussed when a mother had tried a technique and found it positive, as Charlotte did with rewards, or negative, as Claire did with time-out. But the interpretive repertoires of efficacy were also evoked based on the mother's predictions based on her tacit knowledge of her children, as when Amy declares, 'that wouldn't work for my children'. Miranda uses her tacit knowledge of her own childhood experience and of her son when responding to the rewards topic card:

Miranda: Reward systems he's too young for that really, but I think they work quite well. I enjoyed having a star chart. I feel that it's something Max would respond to well, because he likes rewards. I think it would work well, but maybe not yet.

Like Jess, Miranda bases the efficacy in the child's potential enjoyment. Efficacy is an evaluative mechanism, but what is deemed efficacious is dependent on other beliefs about who the child is and who they should be.

#### 10.2.4 The Mechanism of Ethical Concern

As we saw in Jess and Maris's responses to the 'rewards' topic card, ethical concern can override efficacy as the primary mechanism of evaluation. The mothers who rejected reciprocity and conditionally as a means of creating good behaviour - asked where reward systems 'lead you in the long term?' These mothers worried that rewards taught children that 'you only had to be good to get something' - reflecting Kohn's (1999;2006) criticism of reward schemes as working on a superficial, level, not teaching 'right and wrong' but temporary compliance. For example, as I highlighted in section 5.9.1 mother of three, Becky responded to the topic card 'rewards' thus:

Becky: **Rewards** yeah, been there, we've done the jewels in the pot. We've got away from that then because probably when Lucy and Jake were about two- they loved it but they were only doing it so they would get a prize at the end. When your jar's full you can have a prize. I thought hang on a minute this teaches them that when you behave good you only behave good to get something. Whereas now we've got much more of a focus on, well you behave well because you want to live in a family where everyone gets along and

it's happy and pleasant to be here."

She did not suggest the technique did not 'work', to the contrary, she says the children "loved" rewards. What made Becky reject this approach was an objection to the moral message the technique 'teaches'. She rejected the technique as inconsistent with her own ethics of childrearing and family life. Ethical concern is the operative mechanism in Becky's rejection of a standard piece of childrearing advice. The mothers rejecting conditionality suggested that pop-behaviourist approaches bypass the reasons why a child misbehaves. Obtaining compliance is secondary to understanding their children and guiding their children towards their own moral understanding. Pop-behaviourist techniques are rejected because they do not address the underlying causes of behaviour or offer children moral guidance; indeed, there is concern that these techniques may legitimise the manipulation of others through threats and bribes.

Ethical concern was mostly evoked to counter the script of 'control of the chaotic', however, this mechanism of ethical concern does not work in one direction only. For Charlotte, ethical reflections led her to adopt 'rewards' as means to encourage a work-ethic and "a philosophy of life" for her son:

Charlotte: I feel that I would encourage my child and make sure that things for school happened; to encourage the working hard ethic. The idea that no you are not going to get stuff given to you on a plate you have to work for it. You have to realise that that's the way that rewards will come. Erm... So yes, it's just trying to encourage a philosophy of life as well.

Ethical concern is apparent when mothers draw on the interpretive repertoire of 'right or wrong'. For example, Jess describes 'setting clear boundaries' as 'the right thing to do' for the child's well-being. And Maris draws on right and wrong in response to the topic card 'smacking'; 'I don't believe in smacking. It's wrong. Absolutely not under any circumstances. I don't care what parent's excuse is.'

An evaluation mechanism of ethical concern causes mothers to adopt, reject or transform childrearing approaches in order to correspond with their subjective moral beliefs about children, who they are and who they should be.

#### 10.2.5 The Mechanism of Maternal Empathy

The mother's empathic feelings for a child can lead her to reject, adopt or transform childrearing ideas. For example, Jess responds to the topic card 'removal of privileges' with an empathic explanation, 'I don't do that, I wouldn't like that done to me, so I don't do it to them.'

Mothers evoke the interpretive repertoire of "feelings", to explain adoption or rejection of a technique. This may be the mother's empathic feelings such as when Miranda 'feels' that her two-year old son would respond well to a star chart and rejects consequences because they 'feel like a

threat. 'Or it may be an evocation of the child's potential feelings, such as Maris's suggestion that 'Children need boundaries to feel safe', and explain her use of 'love bombing'<sup>117</sup> to counter times 'when we get lost and a bit frustrated and we feel a bit sad in life'.

The mechanism of maternal empathy was explicit in the rejection of pop-behaviourist approaches such as sanctions and time-out. Miranda imagines how her child would feel being on a naughty-step and rejects the technique as a cruel punishment that would make her child 'feel miserable, then carry on being naughty.'

Claire frames time-out as an adult-centric method that ultimately rejects the legitimacy of the child's feelings by telling the child to hide their unacceptable emotions.

Claire: But there's no point sticking him on the naughty step for two minutes, because he's doing it for a reason which is that he's massively over-tired. so it's like... we're kind of saying to them "Don't get angry at all. Don't get upset." rather than saying like, this is a way of getting through, a way of calming down. Instead it's "Don't do it. Don't feel that. We don't want to see you like that so just go and sit down there until you can..."

Claire's empathy with her son helps her to guide him towards understanding his own emotions. She frames time-out as bypassing maternal empathy and consequently rejects the technique.

Responding to the 'time-out' topic card, maternal empathy prompts Maris to reject sending Lily to her bedroom as punishment:

Maris: I never send Lily to her room; I don't want her to think it's a bad place. I don't want her to have negative associations with a place that should be peaceful and restful, and meant to be her, her cave... her sanctuary.

Maternal empathy is one active mechanism behind mother's rejection of punishment in favour of guidance and communication in line with the script of sensitive motherhood.

However the mechanism of maternal empathy is operative in both sensitive motherhood where the interpretive repertoires of 'feelings' are evoked to critique sleep-training, routines and punishment, as unemphatic, and 'the control of the chaotic' when the interpretive repertoire is called upon to justify routines and boundaries and as helping children to 'feel secure'.

Empathy also caused mothers to change her approach in response to the child. Charlotte talked about sleep routines with her seven-year-old son, she begins by explaining,

Charlotte: Then when all that readiness has happened and then having another routine after that to settle down and know that when that's happened it's the time for being

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<sup>117</sup> Maris: It's like... what to you call it? **Love bombing**? Giving them plenty of attention, physical attention as well. Spending time at home. Being with each other, just being with each other.

asleep in bed. And occasionally he might try it on a bit, but he'll run out of time and bed is bed and that's that.

But Charlotte then modifies her claim:

Charlotte: But any true...um.... worry or...um... issue that comes up, as opposed to a trying it on type one, and it's a judgement here, a worry that's keeping somebody awake and they need to talk and they start to open up, and they need to talk it through. That's always... the doors always open...it's always possible...

The mechanism of maternal empathy causes everyday approaches to be disrupted, and mothers to justify inconsistency. The mantra that child rearing should 'be consistent' found within the childrearing pedagogy was resisted through the mechanism of maternal empathy. As Claire said, responding to the 'consistency' topic card, 'So yeah, no means no, but there are exceptions. Like when they ask nicely.'

Mothers talked about actively fostering an empathic connection, for example Maris describes her approach with seven-year-old Lily, 'we'll talk about things and I'll ask her how it makes her feel inside'. This empathic connection is presented as helping the mother build up a tacit knowledge of her child as an individual. The mothers I talked to showed that parenting is not a task to be performed, but a complex and changing relationship. As one mother explained, you spend time with your children, and 'if the relationships good, then everything else follows'. This way of raising children is antithetical to the universal application of a set of techniques or advice, since as another mother explains in the section below, parenting advice potentially 'gets in the way' and 'overrides your family relationship with your own child'. 10.2.6 The Mechanism of Experiential Knowledge

In Chapter two I discussed the view that experiential and tacit knowledge was being replaced by expert knowledge as the legitimate source of childrearing ideas (Furedi, 2011: Lee2014) Experiential knowledge stems from one's own childhood experiences, gained from other mothers and is further forged through experience of mothering.

The mothers I talked to use their experience as mothers, their experience of childhood, and their deep knowledge of their own children, to evaluate salient techniques. As I demonstrated in chapter nine, often experiential knowledge is valued more highly than 'expert' advice.

Jan did not read childrearing manuals and, reflecting Helen Reece's (2013) criticism of positive parenting, suggested that:

Jan: It [childrearing advice] gets in the way and it makes you question your own actions, I think, as a parent. I'm sure they aren't all bad ideas, I'm not saying that, I'm saying it overrides your family relationship to your own child

Maternal knowledge formed through relationships and experience is not only valued above expert

knowledge, but Jan suggests expert knowledge may threaten experiential knowledge. When I asked, 'If you were writing a childrearing manual what piece of advice do you think you'd like to give to other parents?' Jan's reiterated the value of experiential knowledge over outsider knowledge. 'Put this book down and go and go and experience being a parent and learn from your experience.'

The mechanism of experiential knowledge operated in conjunction with empathy and efficacy when mothers claimed they 'knew' how a child rearing approach would make their child 'feel', and whether it would 'work' with their child. For example, Amy is responding to the time-out topic card by explaining using this technique with her two-year-old son:

Amy: So he's got away with an awful lot more than... he's cuter and has got away with more, but we are beginning to clamp down. To my mind we have to do something to... to... but it doesn't always work. I know when it's going to work with Charlie, and I know when we are going to have to do something different. And I also know which battles we're tackling - which things we're going to tackle.

She is responding to the cultural script of controlling the chaotic when she talks about having to 'clamp down' and 'do something' to address her son's behaviour but doing so in line with sensitive motherhood's emphasis on child centred empathy. She evaluates the technique through the mechanism of efficacy, and then employs her experiential knowledge of her son to evaluate when to use the use the technique.

The mechanism of tacit experiential knowledge was evident by mothers' use of the interpretive repertoire of self-evident 'common sense' or 'obviousness'; representing childrearing ideas that feel intrinsically right because they chime with a mother's experience. For example, Alison uses the interpretive repertoires of common-sense and 'my childhood' to approve of the topic-card 'natural consequences':

... And some of these things are the way I was brought up, so it's all very old school, but it's actually quite common sense... erm... because I don't want them growing up thinking it doesn't matter if I'm not home for my tea, she'll make me something else. Erm... She won't. Y'know... you need... I think it's sort of teaching them a little about having a little bit of consideration for somebody else.

Common sense is used to mean that teaching certain social and moral behaviours is self-evident. Jess also evokes common sense in this manner when she describes instilling good manners in her children as 'simply common-sense'.

Other things that were interpreted as 'obvious' included Claire's observation that different approaches were 'obviously' needed for children of different ages, and Charlotte's assertion that different families 'obviously' have legitimately different approaches. Amy claimed it was obvious that a mother would want to promote her child's development, Becky suggested that it was obvious that



parents 'do shout at their children' and Miranda suggested that Supernanny's advice not to shout and to use praise was 'a bit obvious'. These varied examples of 'obvious common sense' suggest a tacit and largely unreflective knowledge of childrearing culture which the mothers use when evaluating their own position and approaches. This includes an element of cultural salience, what is considered 'natural'; or 'common sense' by these twenty-first century British mothers may be alien to mothers in other times and places. (The contingent nature of 'common sense' approaches to childrearing is discussed in detail in Deloache and Gottlieb's (2000) *A World of Babies*.)

Tacit knowledge is also apparent when people cannot put their reasoning into words. In *Tacit Knowledge and Spoken Discourse*, Zappavigna (2014) describes tacit knowledge as the experience of knowing something. Embedded experiential knowledge may feel instinctual and have roots in, values, beliefs and cultural salience. Tacit knowledge is at time ineffable and can be spotted in the unspoken assumptions behind a statement. In answer to the question 'what advice would you give to other mothers?', Hannah is explicit in valuing tacit knowledge over 'expert' knowledge; 'My advice would be about going with your gut. And if something feels wrong it probably is.' Experiential knowledge is formed through reflection, and as I demonstrated in chapter four the reflective mother is a core tenet of 'sensitive motherhood'.

The interpretive repertoire of 'natural' was also evoked to represent ideas that chimed with a mother's experiential or tacit knowledge. Techniques are evaluated as to whether they 'feel' natural. Jess claims star charts 'feel unnatural' and forced, preferring 'the natural conversations with a child, that can be teaching moments'. Miranda values approaches which she considers 'natural' and is interested in 'natural-parenting' websites and social media. She suggests mothers should do 'what comes more naturally' and categorises approaches which conflict with her tacit knowledge such as sleep-training as 'unnatural'. Likewise, Maris categorises her approach as 'natural' and justifies her highly involved and affectionate mothering style as 'perfectly natural' in the face of her estranged husband's accusations that she is a 'a smothering mother'.

Miranda uses the interpretive repertoire 'natural' to describe her own childrearing approach, she suggests the Gina Ford approach, 'Just seemed so unnatural, like don't pick them up all the time, and let them just cry and I'm like "No". It just seemed stupid.' She wants to do 'what comes more naturally'. Rejecting Gina Ford type structure and 'control of the chaotic' Miranda uses the same interpretive repertoire to explain her interest in attachment/natural parenting advice:

Miranda: But that one [attachment parenting] it's more natural anyway, so I think even if I hadn't seen it in any books or face-book or things like that, I don't think I've really parented that differently. It's what my mum did with me and my sister, and I would have just done that anyway.

This statement shows both the privileging of what seems 'natural' and the primacy of experiential knowledge (as discussed in section 9.8). However, like the other mothers I talked to, Miranda will reject some aspects of her preferred childrearing approach if it conflicts with experiential knowledge. For example, Rapley and Murkett (2008) promote their infant feeding advice manual *Baby-led Weaning* as natural, timeless<sup>118</sup> and in tune with tacit knowledge. Miranda justifies her rejection of baby-led weaning advice firstly through efficacy 'I found it didn't really work for me' and then by recourse to what is 'natural':

Miranda: And I thought, I'm going to have to give up on the idea of baby-led weaning- not because I don't like the idea of it, but because it was too stressful. Then I just thought, they're telling me that this is the best way to do it, more natural etc. but for me it feels like it's not. Maybe it was more natural to just mash up what I'm eating, because he doesn't have any teeth. I kind of did that for a bit or did a bit of both. I thought it was a good idea, but I'm sure people have just been mashing up bits of their food to give to babies for years and then why did they suddenly go "no, only give them full solids". So, I didn't like that so much...

By rationalising that what she did was both more natural and more traditional she could reject and transform advice which itself made claims to being natural. The evidence for whether an approach was 'natural' is situated in Miranda's own feelings. Miranda also demonstrates a wariness about being told what to do, and a desire to discover her own path. During the textual elicitation exercise Miranda surveyed the topic cards and commented:

Miranda: I just wouldn't get these ideas from books or anywhere else. Yeah? It's like this is what you are supposed to do. That's not natural to me. I don't see why you'd need a book to tell you how to be a parent. I wouldn't.

The interpretive repertoire of 'natural/not natural' is used to express a mechanism of tacit knowledge for the adoption, rejection and transformation of childrearing advice. When childrearing advice and ideas conflict with a mother's experiential knowledge. The reality of the child and the relationship is likely to override the constructed discourse. When I asked mother of five children, Alison 'If you were writing a childrearing book, what knowledge or ideas would you like to pass on to another parent?' She replied:

Alison: Lots of hugs, doing stuff together, having a laugh together and teaching them to cook. I think they're the big things. Then other things sort of come out of that, if that makes sense.

A mother's childrearing knowledge emerges from the relationships with her children, built up

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<sup>118</sup> 'Baby-led weaning is safe, natural and easy-and, like most good ideas in parenting, it's not new. Parents the world over have discovered it for themselves, simply by watching their babies.' (Rapley & Murkett, 2008:12)

through a myriad of quotidian moments.

#### 10.2.7 The Mechanism of the Child's Agency

A mother's knowledge of her individual child acts as a mechanism of rejection or adoption of childrearing ideas, as demonstrated by Charlotte's evaluation of childrearing advice:

Charlotte: There's always lots of things that aren't useful. Sometimes just because it's not relevant to the child that you have. And it takes a long time to realise that there's lots of advice, and lots of ideas that might work brilliantly for some children. But that's because their child already is that type of child. And your child, you begin to realise, isn't going to respond to any matter of advice of a certain type, because that's just not your child.

Charlotte is framing the child's set nature as a determinant to the efficacy of different childrearing approaches. But children's agency also determines childrearing approach. Amy rejected several childrearing techniques in the grounds that they would not 'work for my children'. The technique must be in the interests of all participants. Parents may adopt a technique for one child but not adopt it for another. Jan, Becky and Amy did this with time-out. Jess rejected rewards with her eldest daughter but gave out 'stickers' to her youngest daughter on the child's insistence. Children will react differently to a childrearing approach. The mechanisms of children's own reject, adoption or transformation of childrearing approaches is beyond the scope of this study, but it seems reasonable to suspect complex multiple mechanisms at work.

The mothers do not frame childrearing approaches as something imposed upon children, but forged through action and reaction, between parent and child. This was evident when mothers of more than one child discussed the different approaches needed for different children. A typical example is Claire:

Claire: Calum was always just very... he's all about imaginative play and very dreamy and self-contained. He loves being at home, always did, he would be happy just to play - you could go off and cook tea when he was very little and he'd be happy playing. Whereas, Alexander very much needs to be building something or ripping something down and you need to be involved. You need to be... if you are doing something else, holding a cup of tea or reading a book, he wants you to put it down. They are different.

Alexander and Calum are guiding their mother's response to them. This is not simply the child-centred approach of responding to children's needs as advocated by childrearing manuals. This is relationship where the choices and desires of the participants shape each other's actions. This sentiment was explicit in Jess's comment, 'Kids teach you to be a parent, to be the parent they need.'

#### 10.2.8 The Mechanism of the Mother's Childhood

Tacit and experiential knowledge is also linked to mothers' own experience as children. Mothers

used the interpretive repertoire of 'my childhood' to justify both adoption and rejection of childrearing ideas.

Mothers cite their own childhood, both negatively and positively as partly forming their childrearing beliefs and practices. For four of the mothers their own childhoods gave them a picture of what not to do, and a clear idea of how they wanted their children's childhoods to be different. For example:

Pamela My childhood left a lot to be desired. I was a day dreamer because I didn't have toys to play with, I didn't have books to read, and I weren't allowed to touch anything or do anything, and the only time mum communicated with me was to shout at me and tell me off. Because I learnt so acutely from what happened to me, I knew how I wanted my children to feel, and I knew how I didn't want them to feel. So, I had a very clear idea of that.

Kirsty: My childhood was quite disruptive. My mum had husbands who were quite abusive, to kids and her. There was a lot of alcohol involved. It was very disruptive. There was a lot of smacking, there was a lot of shouting. There was a lot of 'get to your room'. There was shutting out. There was a lot of conditional love based on a lot of things. I have done the complete opposite to what my childhood parenting was and I think I've done that on purpose as well.

These mothers frame their practice of attachment/natural parenting and the cultural script of 'sensitive motherhood' in part as reaction to their own childhood misery. Sometimes reflections on one's own childhood are more ambiguous, for example Mary remembers her childhood fondly but also wants to give her children something she feels she lacked in her own childhood and cites her childhood experiences as informing her need to 'control the chaotic'.

Mary: My parents were lovely, just scatty and disorganized. Mealtimes and bedtimes were quite random, and house was pretty chaotic. We were totally loved. They were great at the fun stuff, but it would have been nice if they remembered to wash our clothes or pack a lunch more. I guess I have reacted against that a bit, my kids have more security and everything's more predictable. I don't want them to be the kid with the wrong PE kit and stuff.

The same mechanism of 'childhood memory' is causing different childrearing approaches to be favoured. The mechanism of 'childhood memory' causes Mary to reject some of aspects her upbringing, yet the same mechanism causes her to replicate other aspects. Mary maintains she had an 'idyllic childhood' and was loved. She cites her parents' instilling a knowledge and love of music, books and nature as something she has replicated with her own children.

Childhood memory is highly selective and subjective as Karl Sabbagh (2011) explains in his book *Remembering our Childhood*, autobiography is a dynamic, reconstructive, not reproductive, process. Memory is continually prone to shaping by other information. This means that when mothers interpret their own childhood other information, including the current dominant cultural scripts of

‘good’ childrearing, will inform the current interpretation. Sabbagh (2011:194) suggests ‘we sculpt our memories to fit within the outline of who we are, or, just as often, who we would like to be.’ In Jess’s recollection she creates an explanatory narrative that shores up her current identity as good mother who offers ‘security’.

Some mothers also cited having a ‘good childhood’ as a resource for good mothering. Childhood memories (positive and negative) supply a mother tacit knowledge about how she wants to raise her own children

Karen: I know it’s a bit trite to say that some of it’s instinctive, but some of it is. Erm... and if you yourself have grown-up in a half decent family with good ideas of right and wrong and those sorts of things, I mean most of my childhood was absolutely fantastic. So, if you remember all the positive things and try and recreate that, either subconsciously or consciously, for your children. That can only be good.

Mothers use their childhood as a test of the legitimacy of current childrearing ideas. In this quotation the mother’s tacit knowledge is presented as instinctual. The interpretive repertoire ‘It’s how I was brought up’ is used throughout the interviews to conclude an argument or prove the legitimacy of a childrearing approach.

#### 10.2.9 The Mechanism of Self-criticism

Throughout the textual elicitation exercise mothers would confide ‘I need to work on that’ or ‘I don’t always get it right’. For example, Maris responds to the topic card ‘Stop negative parental behaviour’ with this reflection:

Maris: This is something that I feel is like an issue for me at the moment and It’s nagging. I am getting in that place where I am repeating myself a lot to Lily. I’ve got to remind myself that it’s not about her reaction, it’s about how I’m doing it. Nagging is very unhelpful. So, what I need to do is be a bit more direct, be clear about what I except and then follow through with any consequences if it has one. And I think it’s because I’m getting so bogged down that I am just nagging instead of being more thoughtful about what I am doing. So that’s something I’ve been thinking about over the last few days.

The approach with daughter that Maris feels she ‘needs to do’ is closely aligned to positive parenting advice and the script of control of the chaotic. Nagging and ‘being bogged down’ are the chaotic that ‘the good mother’ seeks to control. The means to control the chaotic is to change maternal behaviour, through the tenets of ‘sensitive motherhood’ being more thoughtful and responsive to the child’s viewpoint. This can be compared to Louise’s response to the same card:

Louise: Nagging, I do, do a lot of nagging, to be honest, she doesn't listen. I feel like I'm asking her to put her shoes on from eight o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock. I do nag, quite a lot (laughs). She gets told off, generally because she's not done what I've asked

her to do, so yeah, she does get told off.

Louise is responding to control of chaotic without recourse to the script of 'sensitive motherhood' it is the child who needs to change her behaviour or risk being told off.

Mothers were aware that they were self-critical. For example, I asked each mother if she were writing a childrearing book, what knowledge or ideas would she want to pass on to other mothers.

The replies included the sentiment 'don't be too hard on yourself':

Becky: ... I think the thing that my mum's always saying to me, and..er...that I've learnt from being around other mums; is that, actually being a parent is really hard. So just do your best and don't beat yourself up about it. I think that is actually... It'd be a rubbish book [giggles], that would be it really.

Louise: It's OK to have bad days and feel that you're not doing very well, even though you are. It's a very hard thing isn't it? I don't think you can know what it's like until you've gone through it.

Becky and Louise evoke tacit experiential knowledge to ward against mothers' self-criticism.

Reflection produces the mechanisms of rejection, adoption or transformation of 'expert advice' and yet the pressure to reflect can induce guilt and self-criticism and undermine maternal confidence.

#### 10.2.10 The Mechanism of Defence Against Judgement

The mothers I talked to reported feeling they had to justify everyday decisions around feeding, sleeping and discipline to other mothers, family members and childcare professionals. As Hannah commented:

Hannah: I think you are judged on everything as a parent. You are judged on how your baby is sleeping at night, how you feed your baby. You're are judged on is your toddler behaving in the right manner, or with the right manners.

Even when a mother is clear about her own childrearing beliefs there is an element of defensiveness. Feeling pressure that they 'should' or 'ought' to be following different childrearing codes, and a need to justify their rejection. For example, Becky said, 'I think people feel very judged. I think I'm guilty of feeling that I've got to respond in a certain way.'

The tension between the two incompatible cultural scripts creates space for negative judgement between mothers participating in childrearing culture. As Alison comments, 'You're damned if you do and you are damned if you don't.... Erm... because there's so many different opinions and everybody thinks theirs is right.' A mother may evoke one cultural script to protect herself from being judged by the tenets of the other. For example:

Amy: There is a pressure that you are meant to find marvellous disciplinary techniques with your toddlers. But I still... I wouldn't regard myself as uneducated or think I'm

inadequate... Because actually they're little people, and the minute that we start to try and do rules that fit everybody, we're a bit screwed really, because we've missed the point.

To counter the perceived judgement against the script of control of the chaotic, Amy evokes the script of sensitive motherhood, stressing the child's individuality. Amy also elides uneducated with inadequate, using her class status (educated middle-class) to provide motherhood status. She is clear that any perceived her failure to 'control the chaotic' is a choice, not an inadequacy. She criticises disciplinary techniques as negating the personhood of children and thereby failing to adhere to the child-centred ideal of self-sacrificial motherhood. A similar reaction against judgement is evident in Hannah's description of a dialogue with her mother:

Hannah: My mum was up at the weekend and I was breast feeding her [one yearold daughter], and my mum says 'Doesn't she take it from a cup or bottle now?' and I was like, yes but why? It's not just about the nutrition, it's about the comfort. she was overwhelmed with people she wanted to snuggle in with her mum. But straight away my mum was like 'can she not do that with a cup?' I was like 'of course she can, don't see why she should'. So yes, judgement wise there is lots.

Hannah's mother's advice to 'control the chaotic' and insist the child conforms to her norms of infant feeding are rejected by Hannah evoking the 'script of sensitive self-sacrificial motherhood and the mechanisms of maternal empathy with the emotional needs of the child. The cultural script empowers Hannah to reject her mother's opinion.

Jess performs a similar defence but in the other direction when she defends sleep training and routines against judgement that she is not performing 'sensitive motherhood' by evoking the script of 'control of the chaotic' to defend sleep training and routines. But Jess also uses the script of 'sensitive motherhood' to defend her approach to discipline, 'Kids need love and understanding, not bribes, threats and punishment'.

Becky described a childrearing moment when potential judgement of a stranger changed Becky's approach to her children, showing the power of the cultural scripts of 'good' motherhood:

Becky: We were in the supermarket car park the other day and it was a Friday, and I had to get some cat litter. So, it was after school and everybody was tired. And they'd been playing with something in the car and couldn't find it. So, I said I want to find it before we go into the shop, as when we come out it will be dark, and I won't be able to see it. Anyway, Jake started panicking as he does "Oh it's going to get dark; it's going to get dark mummy. We're not going to get back in time." Erm... and Lucy was messing about and Jake started to try and stop Lucy from messing about because it was delaying things and she kicked him in the shin. And there was another mum putting her children in the car next to me. And I thought if I don't do something now, she's going to think I'm a really bad mother for letting my child just kick my other child. So I got hold of her arm and I grabbed her and I put her into the front seat of the car, and I was really cross and shouty,

all the time doing it, thinking this is wrong you shouldn't be doing this. You actually seem like a bad mother now. But I was trying to react to it and do something about it so they would think I was a good mother. And I was doing the whole thing because I thought somebody was watching. So yeah. If you were at home, you'd deal with it completely differently, but because I was in public, I thought about what people think.

In order to be judged a 'good' mother, Becky tried to prove she was in 'control of the chaotic' by reacting strongly to her children's misbehaviour. But this approach was contrary to the script of 'sensitive motherhood' and left Becky feeling she was being a 'bad mother.' As Becky 'performs good motherhood' she is caught between the contradictions of the two scripts and this leads her to change her response to her children. The other woman in the car park may not have noticed Becky, she may have been sympathetic rather than judgemental, but the fear of judgement is enough to change the 'performance' of motherhood. Defending oneself against judgement can be seen as a mechanism for adopting, rejecting or transforming childrearing practice.

The mores of 'respectable' motherhood demand supervision and control without recourse to smacking, shouting or nagging. Also, outside 'respectable' motherhood is those who do not eat together at a dinner table, or supervise their children's screen time, or encourage children to play in nature. This reflects the dictates of Sue Palmer's high profile against 'toxic childhood'. All the mothers I talked to demonstrate an awareness of being judged against these mores of 'respectable' motherhood. This corresponds to Helen Lomax's (2014:103) findings in her study of infant feeding discourse, that mothers are 'acutely attentive to and troubled by' the discourse promoting an ideal motherhood.

As I will demonstrate in chapter eleven the mechanism of potential judgement mean mothers may obfuscate what they do with their children. Performative claims to adhere with one cultural script may obscure the real approaches employed.

#### 10.2.11 The Mechanism of Maternal Identity

When choosing advice, the efficacy of the advice appears to be secondary to the feelings of maternal identity that the advice offers. Miranda, a twenty-nine-year-old mother of a two-year-old boy, said 'Sleep-training? ... I just can't, I'm not that kind of person.' Miranda's maternal identity is invested in her responsiveness to her child, and commitment to his happiness and development. However useful or efficacious a sleep training technique may potentially be, she could not countenance being the kind of mother who would allow her child to cry alone. Using this technique would disrupt Miranda's maternal identity, an identity in part formed through her difference from mothers who sleep-train and formula feed.

As I show in the discussion of the use of Gina Ford as an interpretive repertoire (chapter eleven),



different maternal identities allow for different techniques to be adopted, rejected or transformed. The cultural scripts of 'control of the chaotic' and 'sensitive motherhood' provide contrasting 'good mother' identities linked to adoption and rejection of particular childrearing techniques.

As the mothers moved freely from topic to topic and responded to complex issues and ideas in their own ways, some participants grouped and ordered the cards - making their own categories such as "I like", "this is me", "maybe use" and "would never use". Throughout the interviews it became increasingly apparent that this method demonstrated a process of maternal identity construction. As the participants negotiated the ideas presented on each card, they were creating a picture of themselves as mothers through their adoption or rejection of childrearing ideas and techniques

It also became clear that these groupings reflected the dominant cultural scripts of 'good motherhood' with mothers either emphasizing their 'good' mother credentials through 'control of the chaotic', or 'sensitive motherhood'. Alison chose to sort the cards into 'soft' and 'regimented' categories, Jess into 'strict' and 'soppy' showing a clear awareness of the two cultural scripts.

Claire sorted the cards into 'this appeals to me' and 'definitely not me' groups, which demonstrated her rejection of controlling, authoritarian or behaviourist techniques and built a picture of an intensive, responsive and loving mother at the centre of the family. Claire describes herself as loosely following the tenets of 'natural' or attachment parenting (as do Hannah, Maris and Miranda). For these mothers the current trend for attachment parenting provides a readymade sensitive motherhood identity - a shorthand explanation and validation of their status as 'good mothers'. In contrast Becky responded positively to topic cards such as 'limiting screen time', 'setting boundaries' 'following through' and 'No means no', 'family rules' emphasizing the role of the authoritative mother in line with the script of 'controlling the chaotic'.

However, these divisions were tendencies and each mother broke the general pattern in some way. For example, although for both Jess and Becky the general picture they presented was one of 'control of the chaotic' but contrary to the script, through the mechanisms of empathy and ethical concern they rejected conditionality and reward systems as childrearing approaches and emphasized their child's individuality in line with 'sensitive motherhood'. As they responded to the various topic cards each mother evoked *both* cultural scripts of motherhood as they positioned themselves within the discourse and claimed a 'good mother' identity. This means that it is difficult to characterise mothers simply as following one script.

### 10.3 Conclusion: Multiple mechanisms

Critical realism suggests within complex open system, such as childrearing, there will be a multitude

of mechanisms with varying effects. When identifying the mechanisms, I do not suppose that this list is exhaustive. But rather, they serve as examples of how ideas, beliefs and feelings in childrearing can act as mechanisms that produce real causal tendencies and effects on mother's description of their childrearing beliefs and practices. The mechanisms identified through the textual elicitation exercise demonstrate both an emotional and ethical element to childrearing which is highly subjective, situated and contingent. The same mechanism can produce different outcomes. One mother may evaluate the same technique differently at varying times, or for different children, for example ethical concern causes Jess to reject rewards with her eldest daughter, but maternal empathy causes her to adopt rewards with her younger daughter. The complex mechanisms involved in negotiating childrearing ideas produce the diverse array of approaches illustrated in table three (section 10.1). Although a common childrearing culture can be identified and mothers were very familiar with the language and ideas presented in childrearing pedagogy, twenty-first century British childrearing culture is not homogenous. Mothers do not share this culture unconditionally; they participate in the culture evaluating ideas and adopting, rejecting and transforming elements. This suggests childrearing pedagogy produces a dialogue rather than hegemonic influence.

The next section shows how these mechanisms interact to create idiosyncratic approaches to childrearing which respond to the contradictory tensions within twenty-first-century British childrearing culture. This analysis serves to demonstrate how ideas are presented in childrearing manuals are interpreted by the mothers and begin to illuminate the relationship between childrearing pedagogy and maternal understandings of childrearing.

## Chapter Eleven: Negotiating Childrearing Ideas

In chapter six I suggested that childrearing books work as persuasive treatises expounding beliefs about what children are and how they should be. Concluding that there are two dominant cultural scripts of childrearing, which are inherently contradictory. I demonstrated that Hay's cultural script of 'intensive motherhood' is not only still dominant within the childrearing literature but has been further intensified. Scripts of intensive motherhood include the contradictory cultural scripts of 'control of chaotic' and 'sensitive motherhood'. This chapter examines how mothers negotiate these two inherently contradictory cultural scripts of 'good' childrearing, suggesting the inherent tension between the scripts of 'good motherhood' threatens negative judgement of mothers. A mother attempting to follow one cultural script of 'good motherhood' can be judged as not fulfilling the other script of 'good' motherhood.

In chapter nine I identified the dominant mechanisms which cause mothers to adopt, reject or transform dominant childrearing ideas. This chapter will explore how these mechanisms work when mothers are negotiating the dominant cultural scripts of 'good motherhood'. I start by examining the divide between sensitive motherhood in the form of 'attachment/natural parenting', and control of the chaotic in the form of 'Gina Fordists' as evidenced in the interview data. I find the cultural scripts have influence mothers' presentation of their childrearing approach. I then use the data from the textual elicitation exercise to examine mother's responses to the minutiae of childrearing techniques and choices. I find both cultural scripts are simultaneously operative, and a mother must negotiate both scripts of 'good motherhood' in her response to childrearing pedagogy. I find mothers publicly speak the language of the dominant cultural childrearing scripts; but do not necessarily adhere to the tenets in practice. Performing a cultural script, but not living by it. When a cultural script of 'good' childrearing threatens to exclude the mother, the script is reinterpreted to include her.

The first section explores mother's negotiation of the two dominant cultural scripts of childrearing identified in chapter Four through exploring mothers' responses to the childrearing ideas attributed to Gina Ford. As I shall demonstrate, the mechanisms of ethical concern, maternal empathy, efficacy and maternal identity work together to create strong reactions for and against the idea of Gina Ford and the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic'. I find the argument around Ford's model is less about her actual advice and more about the meaning she has been imbued with as a symbol of the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic'; and the antithesis of 'sensitive motherhood'.

The second section explores the mother's responses to the textual elicitation exercise examining how mothers respond to the minutiae of childrearing advice and exploring how the both differences and

similarities between mothers are obfuscated by the cultural scripts of childrearing advice. First, I examine how the cultural scripts influence mothers' understanding of three common childrearing techniques. Finding that there is often a significant difference between what mothers say and what they say they do. I then build on this by using the responses to examine the relationship between maternal authority and parenting pedagogy.

The third section uses the textual elicitation data to examine how the tension between the cultural scripts problematises mothers' approaches to mother/child conflict and the idea of maternal authority and knowledge. The chapter ends by looking beyond the childrearing books' focus on parental determinism, conflict management and the need for control or maternal sacrifice. I asked mothers to describe a good day with their child. The responses show that a shared objective of these mothers is a hopeful picture of warmth, family togetherness and fun.

### 11.1 The Contradictory Scripts: Natural Parenting Versus Gina Ford

The two cultural scripts I have identified in the childrearing manuals can be clearly observed in the mothers' responses to childrearing manual writer Gina Ford. This section explores the mechanisms of rejection, adoption and transformation of Ford's methods. In this section I show how the mechanisms of ethical concern, maternal empathy, efficacy and maternal identity work together to create strong reactions for and against Gina Ford. As I shall demonstrate, the argument around Gina Ford is less about her actual advice and more about the meaning mothers attach to her as a symbol of the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic'; and the antithesis of 'sensitive motherhood'.

#### 11.1.1 *Rejecting the 'Idea' of Gina Ford*

Responses to Gina Ford fall in a pattern that reflects the tension between the scripts of sensitive motherhood and control of the chaotic. The mothers I talked to who expressed sympathy with 'natural parenting' ideas, evoked Gina Ford to represent rigid and controlling childrearing practices that conflicted with tenets of 'flexibility, child centeredness and responsiveness expressed in the script of 'good' sensitive motherhood. These mothers had a strong negative reaction to Ford, Hannah and Miranda both suggested the books should 'be burnt'. However, it is important to note that they had not read much of Ford's work, at most they had read 'sections', 'flicked through' or knew someone who they thought followed her. These mothers are not offering a critique of Ford's actual work, but a critique of their idea of 'Gina Ford' and those mothers who follow her advice. As I shall demonstrate, in rejecting Ford these mothers are performing a particular 'sensitive motherhood' identity. This rejection as performance is clear from Miranda's response to Gina Ford and sleep-training. Miranda forcibly rejects Ford as incompatible with her beliefs in 'good' mothering,

demonstrating the mechanisms of maternal identity, ethical concern, maternal empathy and tacit knowledge:

Miranda: I don't know... I remember reading something... books like Gina Ford books and stuff like that. Ooh. I think they should probably be burnt, they're really not... I read a bit, sections and I was like [*pulls a face*]. Ooh no, this is not for me... I have a friend and she did like the cry it out method, and there'd be like a baby crying and I'd be like how can you do this? How? It was awful and I just didn't want to be there.

J: So, it was hard for you?

Miranda: Yeah, it was horrible. I wanted to pick up the baby.

J: Why do you think parents follow Ford?

Miranda: I think she did that because that's what she did with her oldest child that she had when she was sixteen and that's what her mum told her to do. And she was like, it works, that method works because she does go to sleep. And I was like yeah, maybe your child does go to sleep, but it's not happy. It just doesn't bother crying anymore. But I know she does that because of her mum telling her to that when she had her first.

J: Yeah?

MB: When she had her first one at sixteen. then she had one a couple of weeks before Max. So, they are a very similar age, but we've brought them up so differently. Like we're friends but... I mean... she bottle-fed from the start, she didn't even try and breast feed any of her children. And I get that some people can't, but try! Y'know, but yeah...very different, she was like no, didn't even... just straight to crying to sleep and... I just can't, I'm not that kind of person.

Miranda is clear that not bottle-feeding or sleep training are an important aspect of her maternal identity, she cannot entertain being the 'that kind of person'. She uses the interpretive repertoire of 'like Gina Ford' as a symbol of the wrong type of motherhood in contrast her presentation of 'good' sensitive motherhood. Later in the interview Miranda draws upon the interpretive repertoire of 'settled science' to further this claim: 'that thing about cortisol, when you leave them to cry and you know they just shut down emotionally.' Miranda has a strong ethical reaction to her friends use of techniques associated with Gina Ford, expressing concern about the child's happiness. In asking 'how' the mother can do this, Miranda is asking an ethical question. She describes suppressing her own empathic reaction to the baby as 'awful' and 'horrible', and in doing so, questions the other mother's apparent lack of empathy. The evaluative mechanisms that she attributes to her friend, her friend's reported arguments for efficacy and tacit knowledge, are dismissed by Miranda. Although, earlier in the interview, Miranda talks about her own mother as a source of knowledge, she dismisses her friend relying on her mother as unreflective. The mechanisms of maternal empathy and ethical concern, which contribute to Miranda's own rejection of Ford, also create a negative judgement of

mothers who do not reject Ford. The trope of the selfish mother who does not make the required effort is evoked as a foil to the onerous quality of good 'sensitive motherhood'. Miranda and her friend's different approaches reportedly put a strain on a friendship where the mothers are using competing scripts of good motherhood to provide positive maternal identities.

As I discussed in chapter four the claim that Gina Ford type approaches prioritise parental happiness and convenience above the child exists simultaneously with the trope of the Gina Fordist mother suffering under an inflexible and onerous system. Charlotte, mother to seven-year-old Edward, is more sympathetic to mothers who employ the Gina Ford approach but, like Miranda, Charlotte also evokes Ford as a symbol against which she can position herself and claim a 'good mother' identity. Charlotte uses the mechanism of efficacy to criticise the approach and suggests unhappiness for the mother rather than the baby. She uses Gina Ford's manuals as an example of inflexible childrearing advice, which doesn't account for children's individuality:

Charlotte: The particular book that springs to mind, in that respect, is the Gina Ford approach, when they were very little, it's very regimented. You do this at this time and this at that time. I knew some friends that, again from the pre-natal group, there was one friend who was very much of the idea that this was how it should be done. But I think she ended up torturing herself somewhat because her child didn't quite fit in with what Gina had said her baby must. So, when her baby was waking up hungry or not going to sleep or doing something that wasn't allowed in the structure of the book, that was a bit inconvenient, and she thought she wasn't doing it well enough. And my heart went out to her. Life's not always as easy as being able to make the book work.

Anecdotes about other mothers suffering through following Gina Ford's routines are a staple of social media<sup>119</sup>, as such Charlotte is reproducing a trope of mothering culture. The mechanisms of efficacy and tacit knowledge are operative in Charlotte's rejection of Ford. By framing Ford's methods as rigid and unworkable Charlotte can position her own contrasting beliefs as a 'good mother' identity.

Charlotte positions the child as possessing an innate temperament and individuality who may or may not respond to parenting initiatives. She suggests maternal reflective, experiential knowledge of the individual child cannot be overridden by childrearing pedagogy. This corresponds to the cultural script of 'sensitive motherhood' epitomised by Penelope Leach's (2010:09) assertion that mothers should 'do things 'by the baby' not 'by the book', and to the cultural script of 'sensitive motherhood'.

Like Charlotte, Hannah compares Ford's methods to the 'reality' of motherhood, but for Hannah it is the child who suffers if a mother acquires false expectations from Gina Ford type approaches.

Hannah evokes both the trope of 'maternal suffering' and the trope of 'convenience'. She suggests it is mothers' quest for convenience that produces the feelings of inadequacy in a complete rejection

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<sup>119</sup> For an example see <https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/parenting/5463-is-the-gina-ford-regime-actually-possible>

of the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic':

Hannah: I think they make women feel inadequate. They give the expectation that little baby should be sleeping through the night, the baby should be quiet and calm and not heard. They shouldn't mess about or be messy. They should follow this routine. And if they don't, they're broken; there's something wrong. And it actually goes. I believe it goes against nature and what is. And I think they [Gina Ford Books] are the reason why people struggle so much with "Oh well, I'm not getting enough sleep. Breast-feeding's difficult." Because this says you should be doing this, and you should be doing it this way. When in fact babies don't work like that. And we've gone away from focusing on what babies need to what parent's need. To make it more convenient for the parent, if that makes sense.

Hannah utilizes the interpretive repertoires of what is 'natural/not natural' and of 'children's needs'. In her critique of Ford, Hannah evokes tenet that childrearing should be child-centred central to the script of intensive sensitive motherhood to dismiss the Ford approach and defend the onerousness of 'sensitive motherhood'. In doing so she positions Ford as outside the values of 'sensitive' motherhood which demands willing sacrifice to the 'needs' of the baby.

Hannah has not read Gina Ford therefore this is not a critique of her work, but of Hannah's idea of 'Gina Ford'. Ford's books (2006, 2019) do not state that children should not be heard or messy, she is pro-breast feeding and encourages mothers to listen and respond to their baby. Young babies are not expected to sleep through the night, but Ford advises parents to encourage regular sleep patterns (Ford, 2006). Rather than criticizing Ford's actual viewpoint, Hannah evokes Gina Ford as a foil, to position her own maternal identity as natural, flexible and responsive:

Hannah: Because it's this idea of they need to be trained and they need to be in a routine. And it's all about whether the parents are happy. It's not very childcentric. And also, she doesn't have children. She's got no actual understanding of what it's like.

J: Well, she's worked with children in professional capacity.

Hannah: Which is very easy if you are giving them back and you don't have that feeling of attachment to them. Yes. I think they are very different things.

Gina Ford's perceived lack of tacit experiential maternal knowledge acts as a mechanism for Hannah's rejection. Hannah uses the idea of attachment as an interpretive repertoire to place mother-care as superior. Experiential knowledge of 'what it's like' is placed above professional knowledge of childrearing.

Amy, mother of two-year-old twins Olivia and Charlie, also evokes the mechanisms of efficacy and maternal knowledge of her own individual children, claiming the Gina Ford approach 'doesn't work with my children. And that's not because I'm not capable of doing it. It's because they would just look at me like I was crazy.' She has not tried Ford's techniques; she is claiming an instinctual

knowledge based on her perceptions of her children.

Becky also discussed the efficacy of the method and Gina Ford's lack of maternal experience. She describes trying the Gina Ford approach with her twins.

Becky: ... there's a twins Gina Ford *Contented Twins*<sup>120</sup> or something like that. And we thought "right with twins we need to be on top of it, we need to be in a really good routine" – so we bought the book. Any way it was a disaster! And after a couple of days I just threw the book away and said to Mark "We're not doing this." And he thought it was ridiculous as well. You just couldn't... you couldn't stick to it... and luckily, I kind of had the strength of... of character and belief in my own parenting abilities to just wangle the book and say, "We're just not doing that it's just so stupid." I don't think... if I'd have had that book, I'd have just drove myself insane the first time around trying to do it with Harry. But because you'd kind of done it once already I thought "no, I can do this." I don't need...

J: So already having that experience helped there?

Becky: You just have a bit more confidence in yourself. You think... you sometimes think that everybody else knows better, you know? I don't think Gina Ford even has children, does she?

J: No

Becky: No...But somehow, she's become like, you know, goddess of childrearing. Honestly! Like the be all and end all. It just didn't fit with our lives; you know you've got a life with three children and you've got to stick to these strict routines. It wasn't fun! [giggles]

Becky cites her experiential knowledge and confidence in her maternal ability as the mechanisms which enabled her to reject the 'expert approach'. Although unlike Hannah, Amy and Miranda she does not reject the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic', she cites a need to be in control. In contrast with Hannah's assertions that Ford is convenient, Becky rejects Ford's approach as inconvenient, onerous and lacking in fun.

Jess and Louise were the only participants to evoke Gina Ford favourably. Both mothers are far removed from either the suffering mother described by Charlotte or the selfish convenience seeking mother described by Miranda and Hannah. I asked Louise what advice she would give a new mother, her reply demonstrates the how cultural script of 'control of the chaotic' can produce a good mother identity, and a 'nice feeling':

Louise: I don't think you can know what it's like until you've gone through it. Get them into a routine, eating sleeping. I think it helps, whether you do it by Gina Ford, whether you do it off your own back- get a routine. So things run smoothly.

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<sup>120</sup> Becky is probably referring to *A contented House with Twins* Ford and Beer (2006)



It's all about food. It's about feeding them, breakfast, lunch and dinner, it's routine. And being there. Loving them. I always just think when they've got clean clothes and they are all snuggled up in bed... that's a nice feeling. Knowing they've had a nice day. Get up and get them outside, fresh air it's just the good normal things kids want to do. Food on the table, clean clothes, hot bath good sleep. And that's it isn't it, with a lot of love, and letting them be who they are.

Louise's concerns are practical, and the mother's role framed as meeting practical needs and providing the structure from which a child can flourish. Rather than evoking the 'natural' as Hannah does, Louise evokes the idea of 'normal' to frame children's needs. Jess also suggested Gina Ford's approach provided a framework from which relationships flourish:

Once you've got a good routine, starting when they're babies with a Gina Ford type thing, then the kids know what's expected and life is smooth. You can get on with the important stuff, having fun together, loving each other.

For both Louise and Jess the routine is not the goal, it works in the background as way to facilitate the 'important stuff' of family relationships. This mirrors Supernanny Jo Frost's (2005:48) assertion that 'a routine actually allows more time for fun'. Jess, Mother of Eliza age eight and Verity age four, contrasted her 'control of the chaotic' approach with friends following 'sensitive motherhood', using the tropes of permissive parenting and out of control children to justify her own approach:

I've seen so many friends struggling, having battles over the tiny things, dealing with kids who won't listen and don't know how to behave, and often it's because the parents didn't have that authority from the beginning... I think authority starts with a good routine. Without it it's not fun, it's firefighting. The ones that are all permissive, attachment types who rage against Gina Ford and stuff, end up being the most shouty because they haven't got the authority to quietly insist on good behaviour. Kids aren't happy with permissive parents, kids want to know the boundaries, want to know that someone bigger is there, looking after them, in control.

Jess characterises the script of 'sensitive motherhood' as an early abdication of authority that creates family problems later in childhood and causes a parent to be out of control. In contrast to her calm control of the chaotic. She equates attachment-parenting with permissiveness. Like Miranda she evokes the interpretive repertoire of children's happiness, both claiming the other's approach causes unhappiness. These unsupported anecdotal claims about other parents and their children's happiness, are used primarily to justify the speaker's own position. They also show how observation, assumption and judgement of other families contribute to the reflective process of adoption, rejection and transformation of childrearing ideas.

The mothers describe their maternal identity through choices and approaches, for example Hannah sets her approach in contrast to other family members:

Hannah: They [family members] are very formula fed, very traditional, early weaning, cry-

it out. Very old school parenting. And I am very different to that, you know? My babies live in slings, I did baby-led weaning and all those kinds of things.

Slings and baby-led weaning act to signal a modern, responsive, nurturing and empathic mother, which Hannah contrasts with an old-school style of formula feeding, early weaning, and crying-it out, which she associates with her own 'disruptive' and 'conditional' childhood. Again, the childrearing ideas of attachment provide a language of child-development knowledge and techniques, around which a positive maternal identity could be organized in line with the cultural script of 'sensitive motherhood'.

Just as the script of 'sensitive motherhood' provided a positive identity of good motherhood, so does the script of 'control of the chaotic'. The positive identity comes when Louise gets 'nice feeling' knowing that she has cared well for her children, meeting their practical needs. A positive 'control of the chaotic' maternal identity also forms through observation of the child, raising well behaved children gives Jess, Louise and Becky a sense of pride:

Becky: I think probably...I'm probably most proud when they go other people's houses or spend time with other people and they say how lovely they are, how well behaved, how polite. You know, that kind of thing.

Jess: I just have to look at my kids to know I'm doing OK. They are nice, thoughtful girls, doing well at school and nursery. Well behaved, fun, happy.

The 'good' behaviour of their children signals maternal success in controlling the chaotic. Whereas 'sensitive motherhood' is signalled by symbols of child-centeredness and attachment. When describing their rejected cultural script, the mothers I talked to drew on stereotypes of either 'permissive', 'selfish' or 'unhappy' mothers which may not reflect the reality of those practicing the contrasting approaches to childrearing. Rather these stereotypes act as symbols to define their own motherhood against and bolster their chosen 'good mother' identity.

The Gina Ford debate is not primarily about Gina Ford. Much of the criticism does not reflect the reality of Ford's advice. Mothers do not have to read her work to reject it or approve of it, rather, Ford is a symbol of the cultural script of 'control of the chaotic.' Mothers project their own assumptions on to Ford, evoking her as an interpretive repertoire to understand their own childrearing position within the culture

The childrearing manuals provide not only advice to reflect upon and potentially follow, but descriptions of motherhood to adopt or reject. The mechanisms of reflection, ethical concern, maternal empathy and maternal identity contribute to the rejection and adoption of either natural parenting/sensitive motherhood or Gina Ford/control of the chaotic. These same mechanisms

exacerbate the negative judgement of mothers who have not followed the same path. This may have a real effect on childrearing by exacerbating the impression of extreme judgement that the mothers describe. However, mothers on both sides of the Gina Ford debate mothers talk of loving their children, meeting their needs and striving for their well-being. The commonality of maternal goals may be obscured by the tribal adherence to the competing 'good' mother scripts.

## 11.2 Mothers Do Not Necessarily 'Follow' Advice

The two dominant cultural scripts have real influence over mother's childrearing choices, and their presentation of self. However, the data from the textual elicitation exercise shows that both scripts are working simultaneously. A mother must negotiate the contrasting and conflicting ideals of 'good motherhood' when responding to advice. This means that it is difficult to characterise mothers simply as following one script. Not only do mothers draw on alternate scripts to explicitly reject or adopt particular techniques, they also interpret the same technique differently.

Awareness of potential judgement against the cultural scripts of 'good motherhood' means mothers may obfuscate what they actually do, as they claim to adhere with the cultural script. This can be shown in the responses to three topic cards, consequences, routines and the naughty-step.

### 11.2.1 Consequences and Punishment

As I demonstrated in chapter four manuals exhorting the ideal of the Apollonian child, and sensitive self-sacrificial motherhood claim a desire to 'eliminate punishment', partly through the power and quality of her relationship, and partly by using supposedly 'non-punitive' discipline techniques such as 'natural consequences', 'time-out' and rewards'. The authors advocating control of the chaotic Dionysian child include punishment as an aspect of childrearing. By examining how mothers responded to the topic cards 'punishments' and 'consequences' this section seeks to understand how mothers negotiate the two incompatible scripts of 'good' childrearing.

Only Miranda rejected consequences evoking the developmental nature of small children to reject it, by suggesting 'Maybe when they are older, they understand the consequences of things, but not when they are little.' She advocates 'distraction and redirection' as working for her two-year-old son and completely rejects punishment in line with the script of sensitive motherhood.

Across the rest of the interviews the word punishment was rejected in favour of 'consequences' (sometimes called logical or natural consequences), as advocated in positive parenting manuals. As I discussed in chapter eight, consequences were originally conceived in the 1960's by the childrearing guru Richard Dreikurs as the absence of punitive parental action. For Dreikurs logical consequences,

take the form of parental inaction, “What would happen if I didn't interfere?” (1964:81). Becky responds to ‘natural consequences card’ by giving an anecdote to suggest natural consequences help children take responsibility for their actions:

Becky: With little ones we make them wear waterproofs, but as they get a bit older I say “Well the weather forecast says there’s going to a little bit of rain this afternoon, so I recommend that you wear waterproofs and why, because if you don’t you could get a bit wet.” So later on, when they’re saying, “I’m freezing cold, I’m soaking wet” I can say, “well you did choose not to wear waterproofs.”

This is the also way that Maris understands the phrase, when she suggests children need space to learn from their mistakes, and a mother’s role is to offer guidance not punishment.

Maris: I definitely believe in the power of natural **consequences**. We all learn from our own mistakes and we don’t need a double punishment for something. We punish ourselves already from natural consequences. You’ve got to allow them to learn from their own mistakes. Allow them to them understand what those consequences mean to them and try to guide them. Not punishment for it.

Jess also demonstrates this understanding of consequences and guidance, ‘When they’ve made a mistake, they need help with the consequences. Helping a child learn how to make it right by apologising or doing something good.’ She gave an example of one daughter getting over excited at lunch and knocking juice over her sister, Jess’s approach was to sympathetically reassure her daughter that by hugging her sister, expressing remorse and mopping up the juice she could rectify the situation. Jess explains, ‘The hope is that you give the kids the tools to deal with their mistakes, without making a big deal out of it’. For Jess the parent is not passive, but offers active guidance, sharing and teaching problem-solving skills. Jess is teaching her child to control the chaotic.

Jess has some reservations about ‘natural consequences’ leading to a child feeling unsupported, or being forced to suffer an avoidable bad experience:

Jess: If Eliza has forgotten her PE kit or something like that, I will run it up to the school for her. Some people say they should suffer the **consequences**, but I think that’s harsh. Why wouldn’t mummy help? Why not model kindness and help? Then later we might chat about how she can remember it in future. Kids don’t have to have a bad experience to learn. Isn’t it better if they learn that family is on your side?’

Jess’s stance demonstrates her maternal empathy for her child but is also part of fulfilling the mother’s role of ‘controlling the chaotic’ protecting her daughter from the chaos of a forgotten PE kit or spilt juice. Jess does not frame the mother child relationship as a conflict, but as a supportive dual endeavour, and she does not link discipline and teaching with children suffering. Whereas Jan described natural consequences as the effect one had on other people:

Jan: What happens if you do this and what effects it has on your immediate family

environment. A natural **consequence** is that you can put people into a bad mood. And it will come back at you. Which is something we have to live with as parents as well.

As I demonstrated in chapter eight in some childrearing manuals consequences are interpreted as a child's behaviour creating a parental action, for example confiscating a toy or giving a time-out. I suggested, expanding the definition of natural consequences to include punitive parental action dissolves the parent of responsibility through implying that the child creates the need for its own punishment, and the parent is following a natural or logical process rather than making a disciplinary decision. It is a disguised punishment. The same process is evident in the mother's responses. This is explicit in Amy's response to the topic cards 'consequences':

Amy:: We might use consequence, but we would call it **consequence** rather than punishment. It's not punishment. I'm not going to cut her hand off for it, you know what I mean. It just seems a bit pejorative to me.

Amy is reluctant to endorse disapproval of the child and evokes an extreme to position her action as moderate. Terming adult action 'natural consequences' may be a way of allowing recourse to punishment without disrupting the mothers' identity as responsive and child-centred in line with the ideal of the sensitive mother. But Amy's description of 'consequences' is of adult action. The toy is removed by the adult.

Amy: '**Consequences**'. We will sometimes say "if you do that again..." You know mummy doesn't want you to do that. And I will explain why I don't want her to do it... and if she still does it, I will explain if you continue doing that then we might put the doll's house away or whatever. That works with Olivia.

Amy uses the interpretive repertoire of efficacy to justify her approach. The slide towards a disguised punishment is evident when parents include a warning about a potential parental action which the child will not like within the description of consequences. In Responding to the cards 'natural consequences' and 'warnings' Karen reasoned that a consequence can include removal of privileges or the child being smacked, completely blurring the differentiation between punishment and consequences.

Karen: Oh, **Warnings** that's like **Natural Consequences** we do that a lot... If you don't do as you are told, I will take the x-box controller off you. I will do something. Not to you, but I will remove privileges or whatever. So, I see it as both, it's a warning of consequences... And back to this warning, if you carry on when you've been told umpteen times, then you will get your legs smacked.

Karen adopts the language of positive discipline, whilst disregarding its central prohibition on physical punishment. Terming adult action "logical consequences" may be a way of allowing recourse to punishment without disrupting her 'good' mother identity

### 11.2.2 Time-out on Naughty Steps

A similar process was observable when we discussed the card reading 'Naughty-step'. Some mothers simply rejected it on the grounds of efficacy. They had either tried it and found it lacking or had looked at the technique and decided it would 'not work'. Empathy with the child made some mothers uncomfortable with a discipline technique that made the child feel miserable.

Miranda: It doesn't make any sense to me. That kind of punishment. I just wouldn't be doing the naughty step type technique. They're supposed to be sitting there, thinking they are really bad, but from how young are you supposed to do it? Because they don't really understand... they will probably just feel miserable, then carry on being naughty.

The mechanisms of empathy and efficacy combine to produce Miranda's rejection of the technique. Claire noted the potentially punitive nature of time-out and attempts to transform the technique to correspond with the culture script of 'sensitive motherhood'.

Claire: **The Naughty Step**, I don't think it really works. I don't think they really understand the point of it, they just... Basically, it's a punishment isn't it? But I think you can use it as way for them to calm down. I guess, and I have said before, "just sit down, sit down in this chair until you can calm down", but I've not like said for a set number of minutes or whatever. I don't really... but I do like the idea of being able to sit down and calm down... but I don't like naughty step, or time-out really. I don't.

Claire was not alone in ostensibly rejecting the naughty-step as punitive, but then describing an almost identical method of time-out from positive reinforcement, which they label 'calming down,' going to the 'reflection area' or 'thinking space'.

Amy initially rejects the concept, but uses the interpretive repertoire of 'children's needs', to claim that on a subconscious level her two-year-old daughter wants her mother to remove her. By framing the action as responsive to the child's needs Amy is following the script of sensitive motherhood, whilst engaging in an action favoured by the script of 'control of the chaotic'.

Amy: ...The naughty step. Erm... I don't get it, I don't understand that kind of one size fits all ludicrousness. I don't understand.

Jonquil: So, you haven't used it?

Amy: We do have a reflection area, which we use more with Olivia, erm... not because Olivia's any naughtier than Charlie- but because Olivia sometimes needs that... because she gets herself more and more wound up. She doesn't thank me at the time, but she feels better when she comes out. But if she's having a tantrum sometimes, she wants to be removed to be able to do that in private and let those emotions out, which are too much, and she's ashamed and embarrassed and it goes on longer. So, we'll sometimes use the reflection area.

Thus, Amy begins by drawing on the script of 'sensitive motherhood' by highlighting her child's

emotional response and perceived need to be placed in the 'reflection area'. But as the conversation progresses it is clear that this process has a punitive element:

Amy: we used to call it the naughty area, but Sophia really enjoyed that... erm. She'd ask what she had to do to go in the naughty area, because she quite enjoyed being naughty. A bit self-defeating to be honest.

Jonquil: What did she enjoy about it?

Amy: She wanted to be naughty. She knew it was about mischief, she really got quite excited by it, so she'd come to me, big shiny eyes and ask what she had to do to invite herself into the naughty area. She doesn't feel the same about the reflection area. Which is interesting. It's not quite the same thing and she doesn't like it as much.

The child's enjoyment of the technique was regarded as problematic, chaos has not been controlled if the child is revelling in the chaotic nature of mischief. The child not liking the reflection area was framed as a positive change. Then Amy talked about her own need to be separated from an out of control situation in order to calm down and avoid negative parental responses:

Amy: We always erm... sometimes there is... I'll be honest... sometimes it is about maybe not a withdrawal of love but a separation, because sometimes you are getting so frustrated that you're going to throw them out the window. It's actually the safest option, you know social services don't tend to get involved for the former [laugh]. So, you know, sometimes it's about you, not about them.

Jonquil: So you can all calm down by separating?

Amy: Yes. I don't know whether it works or not.

Whereas Claire's objective is to calm the child, Amy is also hoping to calm herself, and control the chaotic element within herself. Becky, who also underplays the punitive aspect of the technique, expects the child to reflect on the misdemeanour and express remorse:

Becky: ... We have two cushions in Jake and Lucy's room, but they were thinking cushions, so you need to go sit on the thinking cushion and think about what you have done. So, it's a bit like the naughty step, but more focussed on thinking about what you have done. Less a punishment. So, then I would go and expect them to talk about it and expect an apology.

Reframing time-out as child-centred in line with the cultural script of sensitive motherhood, these mothers are transforming a behaviouralist technique to correspond with their maternal identities and the dominant cultural script of sensitive motherhood. However, the need for control of the chaotic is evident in some applications of the supposedly transformed and 'sensitive' approach.

### 11.2.3 Routines

This process of paying lip-service to one cultural script, whilst following the demands of the other,

was visible in other areas, for example, looking at the card reading 'routines' several mothers rejected the idea of routines as part of childrearing, but then went on to describe loose patterns of activities which are followed daily. I asked both the mothers who ostensibly rejected "routines" and the mothers who advocated them whether similar things happened at a child's bedtime each day. The answer for both groups was a variation on wash, pyjamas, story –in the same order at roughly the same time each night, but only some would allow themselves to call this a routine.

This was most evident when mothers talked about babyhood, for example, Charlotte was critical of Gina Ford who she thought imposed 'regimented' routines, but heaped praise on Tracey Hogg's the Baby Whisperer:

Charlotte: Instead of telling you what you must do with your baby it's saying you this is the pattern your baby is likely to adopt because it wants to sleep, wake, eat in a three hour pattern, when you've got a little baby it isn't likely to go through the night. So, it informs you about the ideas that you didn't know about.

The substance of Ford and Hogg's advice on the advantages of structure for babies and toddlers is remarkably similar, they both suggest the mother provides a structure for her child by responding to the child's cues and rhythms and pre-empting their needs. But they differ in the way they engage with the two culture scripts. Ford gives sample schedules and emphasises control and order, whereas Hogg (2001:39; 2002: 68) frames structure as a 'solid but flexible foundation' to provide 'nurture' 'security' and 'sacred moments of connection' making infant and toddler routines palatable for mothers, such as Charlotte, aware of the cultural script of sensitive motherhood but still wanting to be in control.

Once the baby reached childhood the mothers who had rejected babyhood routines and sleep training, continued to be wary of advocating routines. For example, Miranda who is against sleep training and sympathetic to 'natural-parenting', responds to the topic card 'routines':

Miranda: Routines, I don't really know where to put it, because I'm not really very strict on structure. But I just think some people take it to a ridiculous level. Make life difficult for themselves. And I'm not doing that, I refuse to do that. We don't do nothing; we do do the same things. But it's not like bed-is six-thirty. What if you're going out, or you've got to do something different, or...I just think if you've done that all the time then you have a child where if something and you're not going to do that routine then... because they're so used to doing certain things at certain times they're not going to be able to adapt to anything.

Jonquil: So, what are the same things do you do?

Miranda: Oh... well... so, he knows that we always sit down and eat at the table, it doesn't matter if we're out or when it is. Bedtime it might not always be at a set time or it might not always be here, it could be at my mum's house. But things go in roughly the same



order. You know, you have stories and you calm down and you go to bed. But it's nothing massively structured. It's not like the bath every single night. But you know it's a similar kind of thing, you know, you get up, you have your breakfast, you get ready. But some days it might be slightly different and he's not going to freak out. Better than always being exactly the same.

In line with the script of 'sensitive motherhood' flexibility and responsiveness are more important to Miranda than structure. However, she does provide her son with recognisable patterns to denote mealtimes and bedtimes, which could be categorised as routines. Similarly, Claire equates any routine with the 'control of the chaotic' tropes of parental authority, which she rejects as antithetical to her chosen 'sensitive motherhood' approach.

Claire: I'm not one for routines, and obedience and sleep training and all that.

Jonquil: What don't you like about routines.

Claire: I think... I do... I like a rough routine; you know a rough bedtime. I like a structure, but I don't like do this, this, this and that. I like it be a bit more... like pay attention to what the child wants a bit more... I guess. I just don't like the sound of parental authority and obedience and all that.

Claire does provide structure for her children but rejects the language of routine as authoritarian. Reflecting the script of sensitive motherhood, Claire stresses that any structure she provides would 'pay attention to what the child wants.'

Mothers respond to the script of sensitive motherhood by claiming practices are driven by the desires and 'needs' of child and dismissing overt parental authority. Simultaneously the pressure to perform 'good' childrearing means that techniques are drawn upon by mothers to 'control the chaotic'.

To the real child, reflection areas, loose patterns and natural consequences may not feel much different to being put on a naughty-step, following a routine or receiving formal punishments. But to the mother the difference in terminology and perception acts both to reinforce a subjective maternal identity and provide an outward display of the 'good mother'. Routines, punishments and naughty-steps are antithetical to the identity of a responsive and child-centred 'altruistic' mother, so when used they are re-characterised to fit the identity. Mothers publicly speak the language of the dominant cultural childrearing scripts; but do not necessarily adhere to the tenets in practice. Performing a cultural script, but not living by it.

Two mothers claiming to use consequences, routines or time-out are not necessarily describing a shared parenting style. The interpretation and transformation of the techniques mean that despite using a common language of childrearing mothers' childrearing practice is varied.

### 11.3 Parenting styles- Ambiguous Authority

Childrearing pedagogy is promoted on the basis that it will create authoritative parents and help to solve children's problematic behaviour and cultivate their potential. As I showed in chapter two the belief that childrearing pedagogy has the power to create well-balanced parents, children and future citizens is both a marketing tool and driving force in twenty-first century British Government family-policy.

Conversely childrearing books have been criticised for undermining parental authority, framing the expert as the authority above the parent (Furedi, 2011; Lee et al, 2014). The textual elicitation exercise provided insight into how mothers respond to ideas of authority, and the relationship between maternal authority and childrearing pedagogy.

As I discussed in chapter six authoritative parenting, as defined by Baumrind, as a balance of 'responsiveness' and 'firmness', is subject to wide interpretation across the field. For example, positive parenting manual writers, such as Nelson (2006) reject punishment and smacking as un-authoritative, yet Baumrind (1996:412) suggests 'adverse consequences' including physical discipline can be regarded as authoritative:

Authoritative parents endorse the judicious use of aversive consequences, which may include spanking, but in the context of a warm, engaged rational parent-child relationship

This view is antithetical to 'sensitive motherhood' and smacking is rejected by the majority of British childrearing writers and by most mothers I talked to. But the textual elicitation exercise showed Baumrind's view to be present within British parenting culture as a minority position.

Authoritative parenting could be regarded as where the two scripts of 'sensitive motherhood' and 'control of the chaotic' supposedly meet to produce a new 'ideal'. However, as I shall demonstrate, the conflicting nature of the two scripts cannot be so easily resolved. The balancing act between responsiveness and firmness creates tension and ambiguity around maternal authority.

#### 11.3.1 Evoking Authority Figures

The mothers demonstrated a range of opinion about adult authority. Responding to the topic card 'Evoke authority figures' Jess made it clear that 'I am the authority for my child. They look to me first, then other grownups. But me first, so no I would never do that.' Becky agrees,

Becky: Now that [evoking authority figures] I hate, so that's a thing I would never do. I wouldn't ever say you do that or I'm going to tell your teacher. I hate all this Santa's watching and all. My sister-in-law, they have those sensors, you know like alarm sensors that flash? And she tells them that's Santa watching them. I think how awful. So, no. And I think as well, I reason I don't is because ... you're the authority figure not anyone else. So that's just giving them the message that you can't control them anyway and you're going

to have to talk to somebody else; I can't get them doing what I want them to do, so I'm going to tell dad or teacher whose then will sort it out.

Becky and Jess are clear that they have the authority in their relationship with their children and demonstrate discomfort with the idea of deferring to others. This approach tallies with the script of control of the chaotic, which emphasises parental authority as a means to produce pro-social children and promote family harmony, as presented in childrearing books such as Janis-Norton, (2012), Phelan (2010), Burman (2010), Frost (2005) and Ford (2006).

At the other end of the spectrum, mothers explicitly refute authority as undesirable. The script of sensitive motherhood which aims to gain children's compliance without overt recourse to maternal authority was evident in Claire's statement, 'I just don't like the sound of parental authority and obedience and all that.' Authority is linked to undesirable authoritarian parenting and antithetical to ideas of 'sensitive' social-democratic parenting, as presented in childrearing books such as Leach (2010, Nelson (2006), Faber and Mazlish (2001) Gordon (2000). Mother of two-year-old twins, Amy refutes the idea that she automatically carries authority, and instead talks about earning respect and mutuality within the mother/child relationship.

Amy: The **evoking authority figures** makes laugh. We do lots of reverse work on that here. So, if I do something wrong, I'm just as likely to say sorry to them, as I would expect them to apologise to me.

Authority is to be respected, if authority is respectable. If you know what I mean, that's very much how I see it. I do have the authority with my children, but that's fostered through good relationships, not just because they happen to spring from my loins. It's about how we treat each other and how we respect each other. So, if I behave badly, I will apologise, and it's amazing how big a reaction that sometimes gets from people, saying that's absolutely the wrong thing to do.

J: Yeah? Why do you think they say that?

AM: Because I'm meant to be in charge and in control. I don't think I need to be in charge and control by not acknowledging I've been mistaken. Because I think that's how they learn respect for authority and mutuality in relationships.

In line with social-democratic parenting ideals as epitomised by Ginnot or Dreikurs Amy is actively trying to raise children to question authority, including her own. In response to the card 'foster obedience' she responds 'I like them to occasionally do as they're told, but am I striving for obedient children - probably not - because I want them to know what they think and I want them to have their own minds.' However, Amy is conscious that her approach opens her up to criticism for not following the 'good mother' script of control of the chaotic'. This becomes explicit when she explains her viewpoint on concerted cultivation and reacts against perceived accusations of permissiveness:

Amy: I'm training my children to be the best people that they're going to be, not to be who I want them to be, who nursery wants them to be, the school want them to be. Whatever [...] it's not about being permissive. As soon as you start talking in the way that I'm talking people look at as if you're permissive. OK, no I'm not. So that's the other trap you can fall in to.

Hannah also wants her children to learn how to question authority and is actively cultivating this in her approach to childrearing. When asked what she wants for her children in the future she replied:

Hannah: I just want them to not be like 'yes' people. I would like them to have the confidence to question things. I think if you say yes all the time it makes you unhappy. And more than anything I just want them to be happy

In the middle of the range is Miranda, mother of two-year-old Max and follower of 'natural-parenting'. In response to the topic card she shows discomfort with authority in line with the script of sensitive motherhood, but also an acknowledgement of the necessity of adult authority present in the script of 'control of the chaotic':

Miranda: **Evoking authority figures.** Oh dear, I do it all the time and I probably don't really feel it's the best thing to do, but it works [giggles]. And I'm also, I'm trying for an easy life, I'm not trying to coast through it, but..I think if they're misbehaving and you're like "well, Father Christmas won't come" it'll work. Then it's easier than telling them off or having to shout.

Jonquil: What about other authority figures?

Miranda: Well yeah, "I'm going to tell Jed, or I'm going to tell Grandmama." Yeah, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I don't know whether it's a great idea or not.

Jonquil: What makes you think it might not be a great idea?

Miranda: Well, just that I'm not the authority figure, and I should be. But if I've already tried several and he's not listening to me, I'm going to tell Santa just to try and make him. So, it's probably not the best way to go about it, but I always do it.

Miranda first suggests evoking authority figures is the easy option as it avoids undesirable maternal behaviour such as 'telling them off or having to shout'. She evaluates the technique for efficacy, suggesting 'it'll work' and then 'sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't', but then problematises the technique as undermining her own authority. Miranda is clear that she reaches for another authority when her own has been lost and she cannot 'make' her two-year-old son listen. Miranda says she 'should be' the authority figure, but demonstrates a reluctance to play this role

The conflict between the scripts of 'good mothering' produces uncertainty about the validity of maternal authority. Mothers at risk of being judged as permissive or authoritarian attempt to balance the two scripts of 'good motherhood'. Just as the ideal of 'authoritative' parenting is

interpreted differently by the childrearing manuals so is it interpreted differently by the mothers.

### 11.3.2 Authority Through Techniques- Warnings: If-Then and 1-2-3

Evoking an authority figure is one way to gain compliance when a mother feels her own authority is not enough. The textual elicitation exercise found that behaviourist techniques were also more likely to be used when a mother was ambiguous about her own authority. Far from representing an authoritative approach, the use of pop-behaviourist childrearing techniques may be due to an ambiguity about adult authority. As I shall show, the textual elicitation exercise demonstrated a link between loss of maternal authority and increased use of warnings, punishment and pop behaviourist techniques.

Pop-behaviorist techniques, such as sanctions, warnings, 1-2-3, follow-through and boundaries are sold in the childrearing manuals, such as Phelan (2010), Janis Norton (2010) as demonstrations of 'authoritative parenting.' As I discussed in chapter eight, discipline techniques such as issuing a warning of parental action and following through, or starting to count to a designated number as a warning that the child needs to comply with the mother's request are recommended in pop-behaviourist and positive parenting childrearing manuals as an alternative to threatening, shouting, nagging and smacking. American clinical psychologist Thomas Phelan (2016) bases his manual *1-2-3 Magic: Effective discipline for children 2-12* on this technique. When a child does not comply a mother starts counting, with the expectation that the child will have complied when she reaches the designated number. Counting in this manner carries the implicit threat that if the child has not complied before the counting is complete there will be a parental action or punishment, Phelan recommends time-out.

Superficially it may be expected that mothers exercising authority would use these techniques, however, the textual elicitation revealed a more nuanced response; suggesting those mothers who are most comfortable with their maternal authority do not use warnings of punishment to gain a child's compliance. The techniques may be utilized when a mother is unsure about her own authority over her children, as an attempt to shift authority to the technique and gain the child's compliance.

The topic cards 'warnings' was interpreted by most mothers as a warning of parental action and punishment. From some mother's responses it became clear that warnings (or threats) were issued as a sign that the mother's authority was being ignored. The mother was no longer in control of the chaotic:

Charlotte: **Counting 1-2-3** interesting. There's a lot of that that goes on, you know to try and frame expectations. It's about trying to set clear expectations. I've said it's time to do this, I've said it again, I've said it again. It didn't have any acceptance, I mean the first time should be the time it should happen, but nevertheless... Start to count, that means, no it

doesn't mean mum's going to put up with asking another three times. It means she means it now. And then something will happen that you don't want to have to happen, like not gaining the opportunity to have trading cards that week. No, that means it's now. It's that mental cue that once the counting happens it's important and it's going to get you attention, because you know it's going to be followed through on.

Charlotte uses counting as an attempt to restore and exercise her authority. The threat of loss (in this example of trading cards) is implicit in starting to count. Rather than responding to the mother's authority the child then responds to the threat of punitive action. This is explicit in Charlotte's description of her approach to fostering good behaviour, 'The things that motivate a child to behave are the thought of losing TV, losing computer and that is my behavioural tool of choice: "If you do that again it will mean a TV ban"'.

Amy's discomfiture with authority extends to the technique 1-2-3, suggesting the technique highlights a parent's lack of power as children 'never' comply straight away.

Amy: No because you go 123, 123456, two and half, two and three quarters. They never do it on one, do they. They never. We do do I'll give you one last.. this is the final warning if you do that again... So, we will use that kind of... I suppose...

But the one two three thing, on its own, if it works great. But it never works for us. They'd just laugh at me.

Evaluated for efficacy she admits it might 'work' but evaluated through knowledge of her own children the technique is rejected. Amy does not expect her children to comply, she expects them to 'laugh at' her. It may be that attempting overt displays of power such as 1-2-3 threaten to highlight her lack of authority in the relationship. However, notwithstanding Amy's allegiance to the script of 'sensitive motherhood', she does describe issuing warnings with 'consequences' which could be reaction against her own ambiguity towards maternal authority and an attempt to 'control the chaotic'.

Becky suggests such warnings are contingent on 'following through', and maternal authority is undermined by empty-threats and refusal to follow through on warnings:

Becky: Because I've seen so many, not that you're critical of other people's parenting, but I've seen so many problems. Obviously, I know a lot of parents being a teacher as well, where that has created so many problems for them. They've counted to five and they've said if you're not... if you're not down from that tree we're going home. And they don't come down and they don't go home. A lot of these children, they are not nice children, and it's not their fault it's they're parent's fault for not doing that, for not following through.

In this anecdote the mother issues the warning at the point she has lost authority (the child is illicitly up a tree). Becky claims the mother's refusal to 'follow through' is detrimental to her children's

character, evoking the trope of 'permissive' parenting creating spoilt Dionysian children.

The link between potential loss of maternal authority and issuing warnings is also explicit in the example of a warning Pamela provides. If the child won't respond to her authority Pamela threatens him with a higher authority:

Pamela: He has quite a lot of warnings. I do do realistic warnings because I do realise that if you do say something like 'go to your bed' then we have to carry it out. If that's in the middle of the day... normally I'm going to ring Daddy or I'm going to ring Grandma... or...

Threats can be used when a mother feels that she is no longer controlling the chaotic, an indication that she is failing to live up to this script of 'good' motherhood. At other moments in the textual elicitation exercise Pamela is clear about her use of threats, when she looked at the card **smacking**, Pamela responded:

Louise: Just when he's been really... not listening... or being really quite naughty. He does get a smacked bum. I probably do it more than John [Louise's husband] does, to be fair. Because she's err... I probably do it a little bit too much really. I do give him a bit of a tap occasionally, but it's when he's been really naughty... being quite 'no I won't do this'. He... She normally knows that I've... that he's pushed it a bit too far. Like, 'do you want a smack, no? well carry on and you'll get...'

The fear of punishment is used to encourage compliance, rather than the mother's authority. Pamela suggests her son 'knows' the boundary and creates the situation. Karen also uses smacking as a threat and a disciplinary technique. Linking it to 'warnings' she explains her approach, 'And back to this warning, if you carry on when you've been told umpteen times, then you will get your legs smacked.' Karen uses smacking to reassert her authority to:

Karen: to break the momentum of the argument, the ranting the shouting whatever it is. To bring somebody up short, not as a physical punishment as such. As a way of stopping something in its tracks. Erm... and I know a lot of people don't like it, don't do it, think it's child abuse.

Karen is aware of the potential negative judgement her approach may incur, joking 'don't go ringing social services on me!' Her assertion that it is not 'a physical punishment' but a way to stop chaotic child behaviour suggests Karen sees her action as a realignment of power and restoration of authority, in line with a 'good mother' script of 'control of the chaotic'. This assertion also distances herself from the authoritarian parent who may calmly administer physical 'punishment'. Loss of adult authority as the mechanism behind reactive smacking became explicit when she talked about times when she had regretted the punishment:

Karen: You know, but afterwards you think I shouldn't have done that today, it wasn't gone that far, you know because whatever it was originally wasn't a big thing, but when I think as parent and child sometimes get into it with each other and it becomes an

argument and a big row and as an adult I think sometimes, you think you're not winning and so the ultimate thing is to smack the legs. And I've just thought of that now.

Smacking happens when the parent is 'not winning'. This power dynamic is at work, whether the 'adverse consequence' imposed by the parent is physical or not, smacking or loss of trading-cards. The implicit threat linked to some interpretations of 'consequences' becomes explicit when it is used to issuing warnings about potential adult action, as evident in Charlotte's response to the topic card 'Warnings: If-Then'

Charlotte: I think **Warnings: If- Then...** it's back to this thing of **removal of privileges** and time and stuff. You know, "If you ever do that again the consequences will be this..." So marking cards, if that's the first time and you didn't realise that wasn't OK, well then, "I am making it very clear that it's not OK, and if you do that again the answer will be this." And just to remind you if you get even close to doing the thing, that you've been told must not be done again, yes....

Warnings happen when parental authority is at risk. Louise voices a belief that a parent should be prepared to carry through any threat issued. But is at times unclear on what to threaten her child with. Counting to ten may give Louise and her daughter time to avoid the inevitable prenatal action, and allow Louise the opportunity not to issue a specific threat:

Louise: yeah. The one, **counting** to ten that works quite well. We just started that last week. She does treat it as a bit of a joke, she laughs, but she knows I mean it, she does. I don't know what I'll do if I ever get to ten (laughs). I haven't thought that far... But it's working. I don't need to get to ten yet. (laughs), I might change it to twenty! But know I say 'one' and she starts moving. So, it's sort of working. I don't know how but it is.

Louise suggests efficacy, and the child's acceptance, as the reasons she is sticking with this new this technique. At this moment in time counting to ten is a kind of game that the child seems to enjoy. Louise is in the process of trying and evaluating the technique. She is ready to adopt, reject or transform the technique.

Miranda's reflective response to the topic card 1-2-3, also shows how the technique of counting can be transformed into either a game or a threat. Like Louise, Miranda is unclear on what happens at countdown, asking 'but what action? I wouldn't know what to do.' She prefers counting to be a game, in line with her childhood memories and rejects the threat implicit in current applications of the technique:

Miranda: I remember when I was little to get me to do stuff, I remember Mum just say you need to do it by the time I get to ten. There wasn't a consequence, it was like a game. You wanted to get there before they finished counting, because then you won [giggles]. Yeah, it was a game. And I'd always want to get it done before she'd finish counting.

But the 1-2-3 with a consequence feels like a threat. I don't like the idea of threatening.



I've definitely done it when I'm, I'm cross and been "right I'm going to throw this toy in the bin" I don't want to do it, but it comes out when you're getting really stressed. It happens. I must try and stop that.

Despite admitting threatening when 'cross', mechanisms of ethical concern cause Miranda to reject threatening her child with punishment (which she frames as a consequence, again showing the ambiguity between the two terms). The interpretive repertoire of being 'cross' or 'stressed', maternal emotions causing reactive rather than reflective responses, is drawn upon to defend herself against the judgemental scripts of 'good' motherhood. 'Getting really stressed' indicates the loss of maternal 'control of the chaotic', and warnings and threats are the consequence of this loss.

Claire and Jess both interpreted the topic cards 'warnings' as a technique not involving punitive action. Claire and Jess have very different approaches to parental authority Whereas Claire claims 'I just don't like the sound of parental authority and obedience and all that.' Jess is clear that she has authority over her children. Yet both mothers reject warnings of punishment and use similar disengagement strategies with their children to avoid potential conflict and respond to the child with respect.

Claire uses the counting method as a disengagement strategy as advocated by manual writer Sunderland (2007). She is very clear that this forms part of a sensitive child-centred approach with responds to the individuality of her Apollonian child:

Claire: I do, do the counting to five. Purely because Calum-just because he's- I used to do it, I used to go into trances- but he gets into his dream world, and then you kind of get into the thing of "Calum? Calum? Calum?". Yeah, so it's just kind of a way... It's not done as a "If you don't do this by five..." It's more "Calum I'm going to count, and you need to be here by five" it's just kind of a way of breaking the trance the dreaminess. He can get sucked into television, but also, like, games; he's got his dinosaurs and if he's in a game you can say his name hundreds of times, but he just won't. He's not ignoring especially, because I do sometimes get a little impatient because it's not nice being ignored. It's just that he's so focused he's tuning out everything. So, I count to get attention, but not as a threat.

Claire is explicit in her rejection of threats and no punitive action is taken if she has counted down. The mechanism of experiential knowledge is evident as Claire transformed the technique to meet her and her son's needs.

Jess also frames a warning as a disengagement strategy, giving two examples of warning, firstly of warning a child playing near the edge of a river that they were at risk, and secondly of giving her child a five-minute warning before a change in activity. Jess demonstrates how warnings are used to provide the child with information which will help to 'control the chaotic' by pre-empting possible dangers and unwelcome transitions. It is clear from Jess's response that she is being an authority for

her child by giving information. She also frames this disengagement strategy as respecting the child:

Jess: If they know they have to stop playing in five, it gives them a chance to get used to the idea. It's more respectful than expecting a child to suddenly stop. Kids find change tricky, so a warning of change smooths the way.

Asked whether she would give a warning to improve negative behaviour, Jess said, 'No at that stage I would tell them to change their behaviour now, simply explain why and expect them to do it now. Warnings and counting just make it all into a power game.' Jess rejects these techniques as an insufficient way to control the chaotic or maintain maternal authority.

As I demonstrated in chapter four within the script of 'sensitive motherhood' the mother responds to the child and is guided by experts and maternal authority is problematised as potentially unresponsive or authoritarian. Some mothers, such as Amy, express unease about overtly demonstrating an authority they are ambiguous about owning. The script of sensitive motherhood problematises maternal authority, whereas the script of control of the chaotic valorises it. A mother caught between the opposing scripts of 'good motherhood' may attempt to exert parental authority without explicitly showing it. One way of doing this is to abdicate authority to the techniques. A child must do x because the reward chart stipulates it. A child will suffer y consequence because the family rules state it. A child must obey because the counting technique demands it.

The advice books sell techniques such as 1-2-3 and warnings and consequences as an ideal authoritative parenting. However, it may be that in practice the techniques, reached for when parental authority is lacking, imbue the technique with authority rather than the parent. As such these advice books may help mothers who feel a lack of authority gain some control but cannot be regarded as reflecting an ideal authoritative approach. The threat becomes the motivation in the absence of real authority. The techniques may lend the parents a sense of control, but the authority remains with the technique not the mother.

### 11.3.3 The Mother's Authority to Know

Mothers demonstrated an ambiguity about their own authority to know how to raise their children. This ambiguity can be seen in the uses of the interpretive repertoire 'I don't know' before a mother gives a firm opinion. For example, when talking about concerted cultivation Maris suggests she does not want to shape their interests and activities, stating 'I don't know – I don't feel the need to control them. Absolutely not.' Amy challenges the staple tenet of childrearing pedagogy that childrearing should be consistent by saying, 'I don't know... depends what you mean by it doesn't it? No means no? So, if I say to nursery but then if they're ill they are allowed a nap. Things change.'

Charlotte defends her stay at home status thus 'I don't know.. It's going to be a different relationship if you are there and you have more time to... to be able to notice things. To be involved in their world.' Jess discusses outdoor play 'It's not the be-all and end-all, it's good but, I don't know, kids can be imaginative and creative, messy whatever indoors too.' These mothers do know what they think, but call on the phrase 'I don't know' to soften the perception of their strong opinions. In each of the examples the mother is challenging a dominant culture script, Maris is challenging concerted cultivation, Amy consistency, Jess that children should be playing in nature, and Charlotte that mothers' work status is immaterial to children's wellbeing. The phrase 'I don't know' both weakens the challenge and indicates that the mother is reflecting. Reflection is a tenet of 'good motherhood' so demonstrates this status, whilst a mother challenges another aspect of the dominant cultural scripts.

I asked the participants what they thought makes a good parent. The answers were remarkably similar, love. But what was particularly striking was the way the mothers presented an uncertainty and need for reassurance, a typical example from Miranda: 'I think a good a good parent just needs to love the child and provide everything. I don't know, encourage the child and teach them, and keep them safe. Is that an OK answer?' Miranda obviously did know what she thought but was tentative about expressing her knowledge and asked for reassurance. The contradictions inherent in the childrearing culture contribute to a feeling that mothers cannot be sure if they are good enough, as Becky 's answer suggests 'That's the hardest question of all probably. I don't think it's possible to say what is a good enough parent is really. I just hope I am one!'

#### 11.3.4 Authority Over the Future

Under the auspices of parental determinism, the evaluation of childrearing approach happens in the distant future.

Hannah: And more than anything I just want them to be happy. I hope that by thinking about things more, and researching it more I'll give them the building blocks to do it. I hope so anyway, I won't know until they're a bit older but hopefully.

By being a reflective parent who actively seeks childrearing knowledge, Hannah hopes that her approach will enhance her children's happiness. But this is a hope rather than assured. This reflects the parenting pedagogy's promise of long-term rewards discussed in chapter four, epitomised by the 'sensitive motherhood' approach advocated by Leach (2010). When outcomes are presented teleologically a mother's authority to 'know' is put in question.

But parental determinism was questioned. The reality of their children's temperaments and agency led mothers to question the verity of parental determinism, exemplified by Becky:

Becky: I only think that because of my own children. I think that I have treated them all the same yet they all have different characters anyway, erm so in part perhaps you can be an influence on that... but not wholly. I don't know where their personalities come from really. Any parent who's got more than one child will know that. So, no they aren't little robots are they you can't just program them, then they all turn out the same.

When I pressed Becky on what influence she felt she did have, she answered in terms of experience, skills, knowledge and values rather than character or specific outcomes. Becky envisioned an indirect influence based on shared family experiences and values, rather than parenting style:

I think you probably have quite a big influence. I don't mean in wanting to influence them or push them in a certain way, I don't mean that really. I mean in terms of the things that you do and your family interests are. I mean I can imagine that my children might grow up and want to either some kind of caring profession, or something outdoorsy – because as a family that's the kind of thing we enjoy doing. So, they know more about that, are more interested, they enjoy it because they have been forced to do it for so many years. Erm...So in that way that's how you're influencing them... but I don't think, or I wouldn't feel that I was influencing them to choose a particular path in life or do or be a certain...

Alison mother of five children ranging from thirty to seven, rejects parental determinism. Her children responded to their up-bringing differently and have had different trajectories, (one child keeping to a similar path to Alison and her husband and the other two adult children diverging from that path). In her experience parental influence is diluted as children become independent. 'I think it's fairly limited. The older your children get the more they are... the more other people influence them.' Her solution is to try and instil 'patterns, ideals or whatever', accept the limitations of influence and focus on the relationship:

Alison: I think you just have to do the best you can and hope that it's worked. And just keep telling them, look if there's a problem come and talk to me. And sometimes they do and sometimes they don't... you can't live their lives for them. You can just be there.

#### 11.4 Beyond the Pedagogy – a Good Day

As I discussed in chapter four different types of parenting pedagogy have specific aims, for example, to enhance parents understanding of children's development (Leach, Sunderland) to improve attachment (Sears, Ockwell-Smith) improve children's behaviour (Phelan, Janis-Norton), change parental behaviours (Webster-Stratton) to provide structure and 'take the chaos out of family life' (Ford, Frost, Mewes). But these aims do not necessarily reflect the objectives of parents themselves. There are aspects of childrearing that may be beyond the childrearing pedagogy, to catch a glimpse of mothers' ideals and aspirations for childrearing I asked the mothers to describe a good day with their children. The responses are remarkably similar, but it is worth showing all to understand that the mothers are describing a shared ideal:

<b>Mother</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Key words</b>
<b>Miranda</b>	I like it when it's a day when I'm not working and we can just go and spend time together, play together here or we go out and go to a park or play gym, something like that. He really enjoys it. Just have fun. Like he really likes to go to town and buy a new toy car, he thinks it's the biggest treat ever, and we have some chips, and it costs me like two pounds for the day, and he's just so happy. That's what I like.	Together Play Go out Fun Chips Time Happy
<b>Hannah</b>	When we're all together. We get up in the morning and we go somewhere like the zoo or the woods, and we take a pack lunch and the kids run around and we're just silly. Just faffing about and then come back home, one of us starts the tea and we all get warmed up. We snuggle up together and watch a movie, or play. And we all go to bed and actually go to sleep. It's all about just going out, and spending time together, playing together and being silly.	Together Play Going out Silly Snuggle Tea Time
<b>Louise</b>	Family time together, we try and have a lot of that. It's difficult with my husband working long hours. We like to be as a family definitely. We like to eat together, going out, anything like that. It's really important. If we're together we go out. I mean we been out on a picnic yesterday, I mean it's such lovely weather, we been out all together, it's lovely, [to baby] you get in the backpack don't you love? We do like outside family time.	Together Eat together Outside Picnic Family Time
<b>Alison</b>	Doing anything, anything together as a family. It doesn't matter how big or how little. Doing stupid things with them, doing really stupid things with them. Um... going to places. Like if we go to the park with bikes and scooters, if Evie doesn't want to go on her scooter, Sean [Evie's father] will go on it, and even now she's laughing her head off at him. Because he'll do things like handstands on the grass, you know stuff like that.	Together Stupid Going to places Laughing Family
<b>Claire:</b>	Oh gosh.. erm.. probably a Saturday have pancakes for breakfast, a nice snuggle and having breakfast together.. then just a nice relaxing pyjama morning. Just playing together, and talking and reading books, and children's television. Then a big walk and jumping on stuff and jumping in puddles. Yeah, just a nice walk. Yeah, nice. Then a nice family meal, and nice snuggly bedtime with stories. Yeah, I like reading time with my oldest, cosy underneath a blanket just the two of us.	Together Relaxing Playing Talking Reading A big walk Cosy Snuggly Family
<b>Jess</b>	A good day means the whole family together. Doing something together, making stuff or playing games, cooking together, eating together, tromping through woods with the dog. Chatting together, making each other laugh, being silly, lots of hugs and kisses. And snuggling up, watching movies or reading aloud together. Simple stuff. Family stuff.	Together Playing Eating Woods Laugh Hugs Kisses Silly snuggle family
<b>Maris</b>	Yeah, a good day for us would be... gosh. So many good days it could be... the best for me would probably be digging on the beach. I'd like to be on the beach, and I don't care if it's hot, I don't care if it's raining. We'll wear our wellies. We're digging on the beach. We're creating buildings together, we're playing, laughing throwing sand at each other, we're going to chase each other then we are going to eat some chips. Throw them out to the seagulls like we shouldn't, and throw them at each other, like we shouldn't. That would probably be my favourite day.	Together Creating Play laugh Eat chips 'Like we shouldn't'
<b>Jan</b>	Playing, smiling, laughing. If they can look back and remember days together, days that they spent their time laughing and smiling, running around and enjoying it, that's what it should be.	Together Play Laugh Smiling Running around
<b>Amy</b>	As long as we're doing we're happy. Erm... yeah those kinds of things we really like. Lot's of time. Being outside and having a really nice time. Just playing really. The time to spend to play properly, just being ridiculous and fun and stories.	Doing Outside Play Fun stories Time happy
<b>Charlotte</b>	A walk together and we can enjoy the outside together, and we can talk about stuff, and I can give my full attention to him, in that moment. We have all sorts of adventures and chats and I am involved in a different way because I can share that time with him.	Together Walk Time Chat Outside Share

In these vignettes togetherness is primary, it is pleasure, affection and connection that drive the 'good day'. A viewpoint that is easily lost amongst the judgement and dictates of contemporary childrearing pedagogy with its emphasis on the mother child/dyad rather than the family, and its representation of a naturally conflictual relationship between generations.

In these vignettes childrearing is a relationship. Not a relationship to be instrumentalised in the pursuit of child development goals, but relationship as a definition of childrearing. Sharing experience, sharing the outdoors, sharing 'snuggles' and sharing food are central to 'the good day'. Being outdoors, play, talk, reading and watching television are presented as shared experiences, enjoyed for their own sake, rather than instrumentalized in pursuit of extrinsic goals.

These vignettes are simultaneously memories, and presentation of a fantasy ideal. In the ideal the Dionysian child is banished, and the Apollonian child runs around, tromping through woods, jumping in puddles, laughing and playing joyously. Conflict is absent, parental authority is unimportant, children and adults are unified the mutual pleasure of being together. The mothers talk about fun, adventures, silliness, doing 'stupid things', being ridiculous. In Maris's scenario she joins her children in anarchic naughtiness, and revels in the idea of playing 'like we shouldn't'.

Despite the romantic conceptualization of childhood, the 'good day' represents a childrearing ideal unrepresented by either script of 'good motherhood' as presented in the manuals. A shared ideal about what childhood 'should' be and the mother's role in promoting that: providing time together, food, hugs, comfort, shared experience and a touch of anarchy. This ideal is unencumbered by teleological concerns and is situated in the moment, the 'good day'.

## Chapter Twelve: Conclusions and Reflections

This chapter draws out the main contributions of the research, both substantive and methodological and situates the research within the academic discourse. This chapter then discusses the implications of this research on how childrearing pedagogy can be understood and highlight its limitations as a tool of social engineering. The chapter ends with a reflexive account of how the study has affected my own childrearing practice.

### 12.1 Key Contributions

The study aimed to explore the concept of childrearing pedagogy, and the cultural scripts of ‘good’ childrearing as identified by Walkerdine and Lucey (1989), Hays (1998), Lareau (2003), Nelson(2012). Where this study departs from previous work is in its application of critical realism to explore the mechanisms of adoption, rejection, and transformation of advice and to illuminate the relationship between childrearing pedagogy and mothers’ reported beliefs and practice. This critical realist study finds that ideas about childrearing can produce real causal tendencies and effects on childrearing beliefs and reported practices .This study showed that subjective maternal enactment and rejection of advice is not predictable and there is no notably uniform relationship between childrearing advice and parental action. Mothers employ mechanisms such as efficacy, ethical concern, empathy, and tacit knowledge to reject, adopt or transform salient advice within the rich, messy complexity of family relationships.

#### 12.1.1 *No settled Curriculum for Childrearing*

Recognising that inherent in the texts, is the desire to teach parents how to raise children, this study has reconceptualised childrearing manuals as ‘childrearing pedagogy’, suggesting that each manual presents a curriculum for childrearing. In chapter six I showed how childrearing pedagogy is changeable and contradictory. Childrearing ideas often emerge from hypotheses co-opted from past psychological discourse (Hulbert, 2004; Burman 2008). Claims to privileged ‘expert’ knowledge are used to create, sustain and defend childrearing ideology (Lee et al, 2014). Yet, as I demonstrated in chapter three, within the childrearing pedagogy discourse the validity and efficacy of advice is a matter of faith, with little warrant to support many of the claims made by advice manuals (Lee et al, 2014; MacVarish 2016). In chapter three, I demonstrated how science and research are misrepresented within childrearing discourse to justify ideological positions and close debate (Wastell and White, 2013). Taken with the findings in chapter eight, this shows that there is no settled curriculum for childrearing, rather than disseminating robust and reliable information, childrearing advice is situated and contingent. Every manual offers its own subjective curriculum,

which I suggest is informed by the writers' conceptions of what children are and how they should be. This study supports Hardyment's (2007:360) argument that "there is no such thing as a generally applicable blueprint for perfect parenthood".

Building on James, Jenks and Prout's (1998) and Jenks's (2005) identification of pre-sociological models of childhood, I suggest childrearing manuals represent a current manifestation of an ongoing dialogue between the romantic view of the innocent Apollonian child and the chaotic Dionysian child. Drawing on my analysis of thirty-six childrearing manuals, I identified the childrearing approach to the Apollonian child as 'sensitive motherhood' and the 'control of the chaotic' approach to the Dionysian child, naming these 'cultural scripts' of childrearing. The tension across the childrearing manuals epitomises the tensions between the Dionysian and the Apollonian: order versus chaos, culture versus nature, innocence versus experience. I suggest that these irreconcilable tensions may mean that fulfilling one script invites judgement against the tenets of the other. For example, fulfilling the script of 'control of the chaotic' by using routines to create order, is criticised as stifling the creative spontaneity and responsiveness necessary to fulfil the script of 'sensitive motherhood'. In chapter eight I demonstrated how these two conceptions of childhood, and the two cultural scripts of childrearing are in competition with each other. Within the childrearing pedagogy these two cultural scripts interact; borrowing and transforming ideas and language from each other, in a messy battle of persuasion. However, as the analysis explored, both cultural scripts can be evoked simultaneously, in the same manual, and neither cultural script achieves dominance across the field; suggesting a script is selected to fit the immediate persuasive purpose of the speaker.

#### *12.1.2 Mothers use both dominant cultural scripts*

I owe a debt to Sharon Hays (1998) who analysed late 20<sup>th</sup> century childrearing books and interviewed American mothers. This study builds on Hays by providing a 21<sup>st</sup> Century British viewpoint, I find that although new childrearing methods are advocated and there is a greater polarisation between manuals that emphasise techniques which 'control the chaotic' and advocates of 'sensitive motherhood', Hay's concept of 'intensive motherhood' is recognisable both in the manuals and mother's discourses. These findings support Faircloth's (2013) distinction between 'structured' and 'unstructured' models of childrearing, and Hulbert's (2004:9) distinction between Lockean and Rousseauian advice, and Rankin's (2005:254) battle of ideas between fundamentalists and progressives.

However, by employing a textual elicitation method emphasizing language and the detail of childrearing, this study also found that each mother evoked *both* cultural scripts of motherhood as



they positioned themselves within the discourse and claimed a 'good mother' identity. This finding supports Thompson's et al (2011:126) observation that engaging with advice is not about 'fact finding' but positioning oneself within the maternal culture. This study shows that when mothers adopt the dominant language denoting 'good childrearing', they also transform meaning to include themselves within this normative script. For example, Alison speaks the language of positive parenting whilst ignoring its primary prohibition of physical punishment. Jess talks about being 'the authority' and in control, whilst admitting to using 'sensitive motherhood' tenets of 'negotiation' and rejection of punishment. Some mothers transformed time-out into 'reflection areas' or 'thinking space', re-imagining the technique to correspond with a 'sensitive motherhood' identity. Some childrearing pedagogy offers a ready-made positive maternal identity, within the sample of mothers I talked to this was most often the identity of attachment/natural parenting. But mothers would still reject and transform aspects of the doctrine to suit their own circumstances. For example, Miranda identifies with attachment parenting and embraces its doctrines of extended breast-feeding and co-sleeping yet rejects baby-wearing and baby-led weaning. Advice was also rejected because it seemingly conflicted with a maternal identity, this was most apparent in the stated rejection of routines and the symbol of Gina Ford.

### *12.1.3 Mothers Perform the Cultural Scripts, But Do Not 'Follow' Advice*

This study began by considering Rose's (1999:208) assertion that 'Parents are bound into the language and evaluations of expertise.' The textual elicitation exercise showed that mothers were familiar with the language of 'expert' childrearing, supporting Rameaker and Suissa's (2012: vii) theory that parents are 'likely to assimilate some of the material presented to them'. However, I suggest the assimilation of the language of expertise is not strong enough to eradicate resistance ; although mothers are influenced by salient childrearing language and are vulnerable to negative judgement, there is a capacity for rejection and transformation of the dominant childrearing dictates of expertise.

Mothers talked about reading selectively, seeking childrearing advice which reflects their own views and confirms the validity of their approaches; potentially receiving comfort and reassurance through interacting with childrearing books and websites. They want to "connect" with the advice. Mothers also reject childrearing pedagogy that is not compatible with existing values and beliefs. However, the contrasting scripts of 'good' childrearing may serve a useful purpose, allowing mothers to build a 'good mother' identity by cherry picking aspects from both scripts. It is possible that rather than the script dictating childrearing practice, the chosen script of 'good motherhood' may be utilised to

justify a mother's independent childrearing beliefs and practices, after the fact. The demi-real 'scientific' advice on parenting was adopted by some parents to justify existing practice, for others the discourse served to intensify practice and belief. Ideas such as Sue Palmer's 'toxic childhood' and Gina Ford's routines were part of the cultural discussion and mothers positioned themselves as 'good mothers' in response to these ideas.

The conflicting and incompatible cultural scripts of 'sensitive motherhood' and 'control of the chaotic' presented across the childrearing manuals may potentially exacerbate the differences between mothers and undermine maternal solidarity by encouraging mothers to take a position. Rose's concept of a socialisation project is therefore evident in the negative judgement between mothers, where mothers report feeling pressured to perform motherhood in line with the scripts of 'good motherhood'. This suggests that although mothers do reject and resist childrearing ideas, there is an inherent risk in resistance. Mothers risk being judged as permissive or authoritarian and attempt to balance the two scripts of 'good motherhood' within their presentation of maternal identity.

By employing a critical realist interpretive framework to discourse analysis, centred on a method of textual elicitation, I was able to illuminate the relationship between childrearing pedagogy and mother's beliefs and reported practice. This critical realist approach found mothers publicly speaking the language of both 'sensitive mothering' and 'control of the chaotic'; but not necessarily adhering to the script's tenets in practice. Performing a cultural script, but not living by it. The mothers I talked to are critical readers, showing resistance to some expert dictates and the capacity to challenge and subvert the cultural scripts of 'good motherhood' when scripts threaten to exclude them or their children. The textual elicitation exercise with mothers demonstrated that childrearing culture is participatory but not shared; mothers adopt, reject and transform different aspects, creating a myriad of different approaches.

#### *12.1.4 Varied Interpretations of Techniques*

Although mothers recognised the language presented on the topic cards, the interpretations and meanings varied. For example, the card 'consequences' was interpreted as parental inaction, guidance or punishment. Mothers that claim to use 'consequences' as a technique may not be doing the same thing in practice.

I suggest that mothers will use the language of 'good' childrearing but interpret and transform meaning to encompass existing practices and beliefs. This study finds that mothers will quote the culturally acceptable childrearing script, even when it may be at odds with quotidian reality. For example, some mothers rejected the idea of routines and time-out as incompatible with their

‘sensitive motherhood’ identities, but then described using almost identical techniques. The textual elicitation exercise illuminated the differences between what mothers say and what they say they do. This may be as a defence against negative judgement and protection of a ‘good mother identity’. But what they say they do, seems to be primarily informed by their experience and their knowledge of their individual children. The discrepancy between reported ideas and reported practice demonstrates a tension between experiential knowledge which knows children as individuals with distinct temperaments, agency and capabilities, and cultural scripts which emphasise parental determinism and universal expectations.

#### *12.1.5 Childrearing is Contingent and Situated*

The textual elicitation data suggests childrearing may be less consistent than some parenting-style advocates suggest. Approaches were tried and adopted, abandoned or transformed as situations warranted. Mothers also adopted different approaches with different children, suggesting children’s agency, temperaments and preferences inform their upbringing. This suggests that childrearing is not static, it is responsive to family situations, relationships and the agency of the participants. Evidence that a mother’s approach is tailored to the individual child, and responsive to the child’s action, means children are active participants in their own upbringing. This casts doubt on theories that rely on a hegemonic application of child rearing mores, such as Hendrick (2016) or Sigman (2009) who I discussed in chapter three. This study supports Sherman and Harris’s (2012:64) suggestion, ‘Parents form their skills and habits based on what they have observed in their environment, and they modify parenting strategies according to the environment in which they find themselves.’

When analysing the interview data, I explored how explicit imposition of a cultural hegemony around childrearing is resisted by mothers. This was strongly evidenced by reactions to Gina Ford, and mothers’ evaluation of health visitors. This study suggests mothers will only adopt a childrearing approach if they see it as advantageous and compatible with existing beliefs, values and experience.

Although similar reflective mechanisms are evident across the interviews— there are differences in which techniques are adopted or rejected by a mother. All the parents interviewed are participating in the same broad parenting culture – but this culture doesn’t seem to be uniform, or hegemonic. Rather than a culture being based on similarity and shared beliefs, values and practices, current parenting culture may be a system of diverse beliefs and values connected through interaction (Mawell, 2012:29). Each parent participates in this culture differently, each child is raised slightly differently.

Although this was not a comparative study into social class it is worth noting, that in this limited sample, social class did not seem to predict maternal identities or approaches. Within this small

sample, the two mothers who raised their babies with Gina Ford type methods did not share a class background, nor did the mothers who identified as attachment-parents. This finding surprised me as I had expected to see class distinctions such those as identified by Faircloth's (2013) analysis of middle-class attachment mothers, or Lareau's (2003) distinction between 'the accomplishment of natural growth' and 'concerted cultivation'. I suggest this study's strength lies in part in challenging assumptions of cultural hegemony which may obfuscate both the differences and similarities between individual mothers' actual childrearing practice. The findings suggest that mothers across class boundaries may be employing similar reflective mechanisms, but the different cultural and structural contexts produce different childrearing practices. This explanation would acknowledge and support the childrearing class differences found in work such as Thomson & Keiley (2011), Gillies (2007) or Jensen (2018), at the same time as respecting the similarities across classes and differences within class.

#### *12.1.5 The sociological child is missing from the manuals*

Building on James, Jenks and Prout's (1998) identification of pre-sociological models of childhood from whence I suggest the culture scripts of 'good' childrearing emerged, I propose that the two cultural scripts of 'good' childrearing can be regarded as pre-sociological models; uninformed by structure and agency. As such, both cultural scripts are incomplete and incompatible with the realities of childrearing. No real child conforms to either the Dionysian or Apollonian model. As Jess's comment illustrates 'the kids in the books aren't real, real kids are don't behave like that. They're all different'.

A sociological model of the child (James Jenks and Prout 1998:6) acknowledges the child as a human-being rather than framing the child teleologically as a human- becoming as intrinsic to the logic of parental determinism. The mothers I talked to resist the parental determinist narrative as incompatible with their experience of childrearing. Mothers with more than one child observe the differences in their children and conclude that personality and temperament are innate. Rather than shaping their character, the mothers talked about 'knowing' their individual children and responding to difference. The mothers I talked to tended to see their children's personalities as set. They could bring out innate potential, or instil manners and values, but could not fundamentally change their children. This is epitomised by Louise's comment, 'I think they develop their own character and we bring out what's already there. It's nurture, bringing out their own character, it's nice. Helping them be the best they can.'

The mothers reported that their children's agentic response had changed the mother's childrearing approach, epitomised by Jess's reflection, 'Kids teach you to be a parent, to be the parent they need.'

Talking to mothers I was struck by the way that mothers' experience reflects what James, Jenks and Prout (1998:6) refer to as a new paradigm of childhood where children are 'understood as social actors shaping as well as being shaped by their circumstances' With the exception of Skenazy (2010), childrearing pedagogy suggests that 'parenting' is something done to children, whereas the textual elicitation data revealed childrearing as a co-construction between parents and children within a family and its circumstances.

## 12.2 Methodological contributions

Studying childrearing discourse through critical realism enabled me to critically explore how scientific claims are utilized throughout discourse to construct different conceptualizations of childhood; and illuminate the value judgements involved in the process. Within the same philosophical framework, I was able to explore the dynamic relationship between parenting and parenting-pedagogies, with the understanding that "human agents act in accordance with ideas" (Collier, 1994:171).

### 12.2.1 Understanding Childrearing Through Critical Realism

Understanding that critical realism rejects totalizing metanarratives and accepts that cultural and social phenomena are irreducibly diverse (Maxwell, 2012), I consciously explored similarity and diversity within the data, adhering to Maxwell's assertion that 'data must be analysed in ways to retain these differences and attempt to understand their significance.' (Maxwell, 2012) This critical realist approach led me away from all-encompassing hegemonic explanations such as 'neoliberalism' (Tyler, 2013; Jensen 2018) or 'governmentality' (Rose, 1999) and led me to explore and identify the smaller reflective mechanisms at play when mothers negotiate childrearing advice.

I do not claim that my list of mechanisms is complete. As I contend that childrearing is situated and contextual it also stands that the data generated this project is open to meaning making, as Moore (2006:28) notes in her discussion of qualitative data:

*Because context knows no bounds and context determines meaning, it can therefore be assumed that meaning is also boundless. This does not produce a relativist argument, but rather a contextualist one; not an argument that data can be interpreted in any way, but that data can be interpreted in endless contexts, thus opening up the possibilities of meaning making. (Moore, 2006:28)*

However, the mechanisms identified were present across the interviews. Although each mother adopted, rejected and transformed different aspects of the advice, the reflective mechanisms employed were similar. A major strength of this study is the ability to explore similarity and diversity

through a critical realist approach to meaning making. As Maxwell (2012:38) argues, critical realism emphasises the contextual nature of causal explanation in qualitative work, allowing the researcher to find causation in individual cases, and legitimizing the identification of an ‘individual’s beliefs, values, motives and meanings as causes.’

### *12.2.2 Textual Elicitation*

I created a new textual elicitation interview method designed to elicit participants’ critical response to the language and ideas contained within the childrearing manuals. As Mannay et al (2018:774) have noted, ‘interviews do not have to adopt a simple question-and-answer format; rather, they can engage with creative practices to enrich their depth and breadth and engender serendipity.’ This work builds upon other creative methodologies, such as visual elicitation (Harper, 2003; Rose, 2016, Lomax, 2020) and card-sort methods (Fincher and Tenenbourg, 2005; Lobinger & Bratner, 2015;) to encourage participants to encounter and explore the language of childrearing advice. In particular it enabled me to place the childrearing books under scrutiny, placing judgement on the texts not the participants.

The textual elicitation method could be applied to other settings where a body of literature is assumed to provide shared meaning. For example, the method could be used to tease out (un)shared understanding of textual communications between parents and their children’s schools, or between health professionals and patients.

### *12.2.3 Limitations*

This is a small study, situated in a limited location, a larger study encompassing different areas of Britain may give a more nuanced comparison between mothers from different cultural backgrounds. Due to my recruitment through a ‘friendship pyramiding’ (Hermes, 1995) this study may reflect my particular social circle rather than the general population, for example it is over representative of breast-feeding mothers. However, I do not claim a warrant to describe the dominant practices used by mothers in Britain. This critical realist study is concerned with the mechanisms of negotiation which can be observed in single cases (Maxwell, 2012).

## *12.4 Implications for Practice*

As I discussed in Chapter two, improving parenting through the application of pedagogic initiatives has been promoted in policy discourse as a measure to combat the cycle of disadvantage and improve social mobility (Allen, 2011; DfE 2013) As epitomized by Graham Allen MP’s (2013) assertion that

*I think social dysfunction is the biggest public health issue of our times...Right now we have a tsunami of social dysfunction that we need to tackle, a lot of that we can strip out by just basic standard good parenting, interactivity and an effective programme of early intervention. (Allen, 2013)*

Parents<sup>121</sup> are thus presented as both the solution to society's ills and the problematic cause (Wall, 2004; Holt, 2009). Social problems are attributed to the individual failures of individual parents (Wall, 2004, Bristow, 2007), underplaying the structural causes of social inequality (Churchill & Clark, 2010). Within this discourse children are valued for their social and economic potential, their futurity, and are 'operationalised through "child outcomes"' (Jensen, 2010:11). The acceptance of parental determinism has spurred a political desire develop a universal culture of parenting experts and advice, for example the policy paper *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives* (DWP & DfE, 2011:38) states.:

We want to see a culture where the key aspects of good parenting are widely understood, and where all parents recognise that they can benefit from advice and support on parenting skills... we want access to parenting advice and support once a child is born to be considered the norm.

The use of childrearing pedagogy as a force for social change is called into question by this study's findings in two ways. Firstly, by showing that there is no settled curriculum for 'good parenting', questioning, what advice are all parents are supposed to 'benefit from'. Secondly this study demonstrates that the childrearing pedagogy does not have a uniform or predictable influence on what mothers say they do. The data demonstrates mothers' understanding and interpretation of the language of childrearing is not uniform, showing that no two mothers are using the same group of techniques, and mothers using the same technique may interpret it differently. Two mothers who claim to use the same childrearing approach (for example, consequences, rewards or routines) will not necessarily be raising their child in the same manner. This finding calls into question the idea that parenting culture is either primarily homogenous or hegemonic in practice and suggests attempts to create a universal childrearing curriculum to teach 'good' childrearing would not result in predictable action. This supports doubts raised by academics such as Lee et al (2014), MacVarish (2016), Gillies (2005), Dermott (2012) Furedi (2009) and Jensen (2018) about the efficacy of government policies promoting childrearing-pedagogy as a tool to predictably improve child outcomes. I propose that due to the many possible mechanisms of adoption, rejection and transformation of childrearing ideas,

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<sup>121</sup>The use of the term "parenting" obscures the highly gendered nature of this trend: standards of femininity, motherliness virtue and mental health often have been unrealistic projections that attempt to to redress social and professional problems by redefining women instead of taking the problems head on. (Eyer, 1992:198) The spotlight on mothering skills has occurred at a time of increased maternal economic activity outside the home (Hays, 1996, Nelson, 2010).

mothers are not going to predictably reproduce childrearing behaviours as taught by parenting pedagogy.

It may be that peer-peer groups have more value for mothers seeking support than didactic pedagogic initiatives. As I discussed in chapter nine, experiential knowledge was valued above any taught skills set or techniques. In chapter ten I discussed the ideas that a mother's childrearing knowledge emerges from the relationships with her children, and such experiential knowledge gathered from raising a child is valued as authentic. Professional childrearing advice was valued more highly if the advisor had experienced motherhood. This suggests an implicit understanding that whilst childrearing must be learnt, it does not follow that it can be didactically taught. The mechanisms of evaluation I identified from the textual elicitation exercise reveal both an emotional and ethical element to childrearing which cannot be understood through a universal 'scientific' code of child rearing. Universal policy support for parents raising children may be better concentrated on building peer networks through parent and child groups, than by more formal pedagogic interventions; this findings from this study suggests further research into parental peer support could be beneficial.

Time and money impacted on which household member took prime responsibility for childcare, as all the mothers I talked to had at some point scaled back paid employment to care for their child. This is in line with Dermott's (2018:37) observation that 'money and the social policies that provide financial support to the least well off continue to be a hugely important element in efforts to develop more gender equal patterns of care and unpaid labour.' The mothers' discussion of the constraints time and money in the textual elicitation exercise illustrate how childrearing is affected by real structural pressures, supporting Jensen (2018) analysis of childrearing being subject to socio-economic inequalities. When mothers talked about needing support, it was structural support such as affordable childcare and flexible work, rather than pedagogic advice. These structural pressures are unaddressed by the strictures of 'intensive motherhood', identified by Hays (1998:54):

*First, they assume that child care is primarily the responsibility of the mother.*

*Second, the methods they recommend are child-centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive. Finally, they clearly treat the child as outside market valuation: children are sacred, innocent and pure, their price immeasurable, and decisions regarding completely distinct from questions of efficiency or financial profitability.*

Both 'control of the chaotic' and 'sensitive motherhood' are forms of 'intensive motherhood' that



isolate the mother child dyad from the outside world. This thesis would support a shift away from public funds spent on childrearing pedagogy towards policy initiatives which do not rely on the ideologies of 'intensive motherhood' and strong parental determinism as advocated by work such as , Furedi (2009) , Lee et al 2014, MacVarish (2016), Jensen (2010), Edwards (2013), Rose & Abi-Rachad (2013), Brsitow (2007), Wall (2004), Gillies (2007), and Dermott (2012).

## 12.5 Implications for Future Research

This study focuses on how mothers negotiate childrearing advice. I originally wanted to study parents rather than mothers, however my reading led me to conclude that fathers and mothers were influenced by different cultural scripts (Miller & Dermott, 2015) and a study of both mothers and fathers would be too broad a focus. I chose to concentrate on mothers since they are the intended readership for the majority of childrearing manuals (Ehrenreich & English, 2005)) and mothers in contemporary Britain are commonly supposed to take primary responsibility for raising children (Hays, 1998, Gillies, 2007, Jensen, 2018). However, to fully understand how childrearing pedagogy is negotiated within families, I suggest using this methodology with other members of the family, especially fathers, but also grandparents and other family members who are involved in raising the children including children themselves.

There was a shift between the script mostly evoked by a mother describing babyhood and the script evoked when describing childhood. Jess, a follower of Gina Ford, evoked the script of 'control of the chaotic' when describing how she mothered her babies. But now her daughters are eight and three, the script has changed. Jess still valued organisation and routine, but rejected punishment and pop-behaviourist techniques, such as time-out and reward systems in favour of communication and guidance. She framed her use of routine as actively cultivating her child's individuality and creativity. In contrast, Alison rejects the 'control of the chaotic' sleep-training techniques as 'barbaric' by drawing on the script of sensitive motherhood. However, as her children become school age, Alison uses the interpretive repertoires of 'common sense' and 'animal behaviour' to demonstrate the need to control the chaotic. It would be interesting to revisit the participants in the future and conduct the textual elicitation exercise again to further understand the temporal nature of childrearing ideas. Ideally further research, following families from babyhood in a longitudinal study to monitor the changing responses to childrearing over the course of childhood would further understanding of the potentially temporal, contingent and situated nature of childrearing.

## 12.6 Reflexivity

This study has been a personal exploration, I am a mother to Alice who was six at the beginning of this work, and I have been living the experience of raising a child whilst researching the subject. This work has shown me there are many ways to raise a child well. How my husband and I raise our daughter, suits the three of us; but others raise children equally well with different approaches. I offer gratitude and respect for all the mothers I talked to and recognize the validity of their individual childrearing decisions and approaches.

I started this study with two personal desires, firstly to understand the warrant for the advice given in childrearing manuals and secondly to understand how these books are read and used by real people. Finding that the validity of claims of 'expert knowledge' found in these books was largely unsubstantiated freed me to ignore the dictates and find our own way as a family. I have found that rejecting the concept of parenting skills and techniques opens space for the nurturance of family relationships. My child is not a product to be perfected by my expert parenting but a real and complex person to be understood and loved. Reading many childrearing manuals did not teach me how to raise my child. It is Alice who has taught me to be a mother.

Child rearing pedagogy does not necessarily reflect the mothers' views of what children are and how they should be. The teleological aims of childrearing pedagogy, with its emphasis on conflict resolution, parenting-skills, boundaries of childhood and child development, may be at odds with the experience and desires of mothers. My daughter is a responsive and pleasant child and there has been little conflict in our relationship. I do not think this is rare, but it is contrary to the dominant discourse that frames raising children as inherently problematic or conflictual. I did not recognize my daughter in the childrearing manual's representations of children.

I was heartened to find the mothers I talked to were skeptical readers, ready to critique the ideas presented in the childrearing manuals. But I was also disheartened by the recurring themes of guilt and judgement. Childrearing pedagogy could be a useful resource, this study found that mothers are seeking information and affirmation. There is space for a new type of childrearing pedagogy, one that understands the reflective mechanisms at play when mothers make childrearing decisions. A pedagogy that does not make unwarranted claims, that communicates the best of our knowledge of child development faithfully and humbly, that recognizes children as real agentic human beings and above all trusts and supports mothers.

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## Appendix 1: Topic Cards

Bed sharing	Time out (naughty step)
Natural Consequences	Removal of privileges
1...2...3....	"Go to your room"
Sleep training	Removal of child
Humour and jokes	Distraction and redirection



Praise and encouragement	Descriptive praise
Setting goals with the child	Show parental disapproval and approval of child's actions
Shout at the child	Talk and listen calmly with the child.
Be consistent	Set clear expectations
Lots of unconditional hugs	Set clear boundaries
Talk about together about right and wrong (Morals, philosophy or religion)	Surprise treats for good behaviour
Limit TV and screen time	Evoke authority figures e.g. Santa, Nanna, teacher
Read books together	Play together

Warnings If...then...	Ignore bad behaviour
Family meetings	Active listening
Reward systems	Time in (hold child quietly until calm)
Modelling good behaviour	Smacking
Eating  (Weaning. Fussy eating. Healthy eating).	Family rules
Follow through  Keep your word	No means No  (And yes means yes)
Limited choices	One-to-one parent child time

Family time together	Non-Physical Punishments
Please and Thankyou Teach good manners	Lots of positive attention
Eating together regularly as a family	Love bombing and quality time
Love unconditionally	Establish parental authority
Develop the child's character	Teaching skills
Foster obedience	Foster child development (social, emotional and intellectual)
Foster good routines	Stop negative parental behaviour (shouting, nagging etc)

## Topic Cards Sorted by Cultural Script.

<b>Control of the chaotic</b>	<b>Sensitive mothering</b>
Foster good routines	Stop negative parental behaviour (shouting, nagging etc)
Foster obedience	Foster child development (social, emotional and intellectual)
Establish parental authority	Love unconditionally
Teaching skills	Love bombing and quality time
Please and Thank you / Teach good manners	Time in (hold child quietly until calm)
No means No (And yes means yes)	Active listening
Follow through/ Keep your word	Ignore bad behaviour
Family rules	Descriptive praise/ Praise and encouragement
Reward systems	Natural Consequences
Warnings If...then...  1...2...3....	Lots of unconditional hugs
Time out (naughty step)	One-to-one parent child time
Show parental disapproval and approval of child's actions	Lots of positive attention
Sleep training	Modelling good behaviour
Set clear expectations	Non-Physical Punishments
Set clear boundaries	Distraction and redirection
Removal of privileges	Setting goals with the child / Family meetings
Limit TV and screen time	Play together
Removal of child	Bed sharing

## Appendix 2: Interview Topics and Possible Interview Prompts

All topics were covered but the questions varied from interview to interview. Usually one or two questions from each section were asked to trigger the conversation.

### 1. Support Networks

- Can you describe your support network? Who helps you raise your kids? Use of day care?
- Where do you get advice from?
- Which sources have been most/least useful? Can you give me an example/ in what way?
- Do you go to different sources for types of knowledge/advice?
- Do you ever feel you can't access the advice you need?
- What type of childrearing advice do you like/want?

### 2. Childrearing Books

- If childrearing book, brought by participant. Can you tell me about this book?
- Have you made use of childrearing books?
- Together look at a selection of childrearing books evaluating the tone, advice type and usefulness – from the covers. Which one would you be most likely to pick up in a bookshop?  
Tell me what interests you about this one? What puts you off?

### 3. Raising Children

- If you were writing a childrearing book what knowledge or ideas would you like pass on to another parent?
- As someone with more than one child, have you found that parenting approaches change with different children's personalities and needs? Or does the same approach work well with both?
- Barriers/ obstacles challenges. What change would most help parents to raise their children?
- How important is it that parents have knowledge of child development?
- What do you understand by the phrased home-learning environment? How does this relate to the way you raise your kids? Can you tell me how you engage with your child in activities that?
- What do you think makes a good parent?

#### 4. Past, Future and Changing childhood

- Do you feel that your own childhood experiences inform your parenting?
- Can you think of any ways that raising children has changed in recent years?
- What do you want for your child (ren) in the future?
- What kind of influence do parents have over a child's future?

#### 5. Concerted Cultivation

- What kinds of clubs and activities to your children enjoy?
- Some parents actively try to enhance their kids' social and intellectual development, other parents feel that kids develop naturally at their own pace. What approach to child development do you take?

#### 6. Judgement

- What makes a good parent?
- If a child misbehaves or is rude, does this mean he is badly brought up? Is a well-behaved child the product of good parenting?
- Do you think other people judge parents? What kind of thing are we judged about? Do you think this effects way people raise their kids?

#### 7. End

- What memories of childhood would you like your children to have?
- Can you describe a good day with your kids?
- Is there anything you'd like to add?

# How We Raise Our Children

Listening to Mothers

A PhD research project



Picture by Alice, age 4

Jonquil Balcombe

University of Huddersfield

## About the project

How do we raise our children?

There are many theories about how we should raise our children, but how do we actually do it day-to-day?

Do the parenting experts and advice books reflect the real experiences of parents?

It is parents who are experiencing the daily challenges of raising children; the worries and the joys. I want to find out how they do it.

## What are the benefits of taking part?

People often find it both interesting and helpful to talk about their experiences.

What you say will help complete my PhD research into contemporary parenting. It is my hope that the research will help others to understand how parents raise their children in Britain today.



## Taking part

I am looking for mothers living in the north of England, with at least one child under eight years old. It will just take a couple of hours of your time.

You will be asked to:

- talk to me about your experiences of raising a child
- bring along a parenting book (or website) to discuss
- look at some parenting advice books and tell me what you think

Everything you tell me will be treated as confidential. I will use false names to protect your identity in any publications.

If you would like to take part, please contact me by e-mail at [Jonquil.Balcombe@hud.ac.uk](mailto:Jonquil.Balcombe@hud.ac.uk).

Should you have any queries or concerns, please contact me or my supervisor, Professor Janet Fink, at Huddersfield University. Tel: 01484 4\*\*\*\*2 or e-mail: [J.Fink@Hud.ac.uk](mailto:J.Fink@Hud.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4. Participant Consent Form

University of Huddersfield

*School of Education and Professional Development*

### **Participant Consent Form**

**Title of Research Study:** Educating Mother

**Name of Researcher:** Jonquil Balcombe

**Participant Identifier Number:**

- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information leaflet related to this research and have had the opportunity to ask any questions.
- ☐ I agree that the interviews can be recorded and kept for transcribing purposes. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- ☐ I understand that all my responses will be anonymized.
- ☐ I give permission for members of the supervision team to have access to my anonymized responses.
- ☐ I understand that extracts from my interview may be used by the researcher in her thesis, academic papers and other subsequent publications.
- ☐ I give permission for the researcher to contact me and request further interviews.

**Name of Participant:**.....

**Signature of Participant:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Name of Researcher:**

**Signature of Researcher:** .....

**Date:** .....

# Appendix 5: Becky's Spider Diagram of Childrearing

