

**Class transformation and work-life balance in urban Britain:
the case of Manchester**

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Abstract

Recent years have seen an expansion in the work on the attitudes, beliefs and preferences of those middle class groups that have accompanied the return of capital to many North American and Western European city centres and their surrounding urban suburbs. Yet despite this, we argue that there is little research linking gentrification to wider processes of social transformation, particularly debates over housing market decision-making, the balancing of work and life, and the gender division of labour within the household. It is to examining the interaction of these aspects of everyday life in a gentrifying area that this paper turns, using the example of Chorlton, a southern urban suburb of Manchester.

1. Introduction

The return of people and capital to UK and North American cities continues to challenge existing understandings of, and explanations for, gentrification. For although there might have been a period at the end of the twentieth century when the academic production of work on gentrification slowed (Lees 2000), this moment appears to have passed. A host of journal special editions (*Urban Studies* 2003; *Environment and Planning* 2004, 2007), together with a rash of books and a continuing flow of papers on its different empirical, methodological and theoretical aspects bare testament to the continuing vibrancy of this work (Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Bridge 2003; Butler 2003; Dutton 2003; Hackworth 2007; Lees et al. 2007; Slater 2004; Slater et al. 2004; Wyly and Hammel 2004). According to Slater et al (2004), much of this work has focused on two themes: the first has been that concerned with the practices of those portions of the middle class who have relocated: those who gentrify an area through their actions and exercising their preferences. As such, this work has deepened existing understandings of the processes through which gentrification is produced. The second theme running through this most recent work has been an attention to definitional issues through empirical detailing and theoretical reflection. As such, this work has grappled with whether gentrification means what it did in the 1960s, and if it does, what this might mean for future research (Hackworth 2007; Lees et al. 2007). Calls for a sensitivity to the 'geography of gentrification' (Lees 2000) during this recent period has led many more cities and neighbourhoods within them being labelled as gentrifying, to the point that it is now claimed that gentrification constitutes a 'global urban policy' (Smith 2002).

For the editors of the *Environment and Planning A* (2004) special edition, while this recent work is not without its insights it is also not without its limits. They argue that academics have paid far too much attention to the ‘experiences and desires of middle-class movers and shakers’ (Slater et al 2004: 1142) and not enough to others involved in the gentrification process, particularly what it has meant for displaced tenants or those under the threat of eviction. As a result, apparently, ‘the voices of those critical of gentrification appear somewhat lonely in recent years’ (ibid: 1142). Slater (2006: 744) goes as far as to claim ‘[i]t is as if the middle classes are the only characters occupying the stage of the gentrification, with the working class backstage, both perennial understudies and perennially understudied.’ By implication, then, the work that has been done on those who move into the gentrifying areas has been largely ‘uncritical’. What is required of those working on gentrification, so it is argued, is a refocusing on its ‘unsavoury consequences’ and with it will necessarily come a critical perspective. While we would certainly agree that there remains much that we don’t know about the consequences for those displaced through the processes of gentrification or for those on lower incomes who remain in these neighbourhoods, nevertheless, our paper argues that it is possible both to speak to the middle classes *and* retain a critical distance on gentrification. Acknowledging the class politics embodied in the process of gentrification – it is about ‘not simply changes in the housing stock, but changes in housing class’ (Slater et al. 2004: 1144; Bridge 1995; Smith and Williams 1986) – this paper strives to understand the ways in which different classes – middle and working -- are performed in the production of contemporary gentrifying Chorlton, an urban suburb of Manchester. This is about some people staying put while others move in and move on (Newman and Wyly 2006). It is about differences within and between classes, in terms of entry into the housing market, attitudes and views to balancing paid and unpaid work and variations in local

childcare strategies and ‘mothering rationalities’ (Duncan and Smith 2002; Duncan et al. 2003; Fagan et al. 2008; Holloway 1998a, 1998b, 1999; McDowell et al. 2006a).

The paper is organised into five sections. Section two draws together work on gentrification on the one hand and that on the geographies of motherhood, employment and childcare on the other. Building on earlier work that has sought to examine the process of gentrification with children and all that might mean (Karsten 2003, 2007), this paper argues that aesthetic, employment and housing trajectories need to be understood conceptually as co-constitutive. How they come together and combine structures the options working mothers with young children face when ‘deciding’ if and when to do paid work. Section three discusses the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) research project on which the paper draws, situating this particular case in the wider programme of research. Section four turns to the empirical case study. It provides an overview of both the city of Manchester and the neighbourhood of Chorlton, revealing the geographical context for this study. Sections four and five focus on the paper’s two main themes: why gentrifying families moved into Chorlton and what this meant for the neighbourhood, and the ways in which women dealt with balancing competing demands on their times after becoming mothers. The paper makes three arguments. First, we discuss how those with which we spoke felt attached to Chorlton, demonstrating what Savage et al. (2005) term an ‘elective sense of belonging’, although we place greater emphasis on the connections between place and class, occupation and the type of work performed in shaping how place-based attachments are forged. Second, we analyse the ways in which gentrifying households negotiated their entry into the Chorlton housing market. Third, we consider how mothers talked about their childcare strategies. Our material reveals a diversity of place-specific or ‘local’ ‘cultures of mothering’ (Holloway 1998a, 1998b, 1999) rather than the existence of a

unique, singular 'gendered moral rationality' (Duncan and Smith 2002). We argue that the particular ways in which paid employment and motherhood is combined is an individualised decision, although of course, not made entirely under conditions of the mother's own making, nor unrelated to their stage in the life-course and the geographical context in which they are located (McDowell et al. 2006a).

2. Gentrification, class transformation and work-life balance

Since the work of Chris Hamnett, David Ley and Neil Smith in the late 1980s and 1990s, in which an uneasy conceptual truce was reached, the last fifteen years or so have seen approaches to gentrification develop that are sensitive to 'difference'. This has been termed a 'geography of gentrification' (Lees 2000) approach, a means of moving away from totalising conceptualisations of gentrification, with an admission that, as Butler and Robson (2003: 2160), see it, 'gentrification ... needs to be examined in each case according to its own logic and outcomes'. Much of this work can be characterised by a number of themes. First, debates continue to rage over what is meant by gentrification (Clark 2005; Lees et al. 2007; Slater 2006). While the future for the term 'gentrification' is uncertain, for Lees (2007: 232), at least, it has to be one which is sensitive to its political purchase: '[i]t is crucial that we do not stick to outdated historical representations of gentrification and gentrifiers, but it is also crucial that we stick to the term 'gentrification' ... to contest and resist the most onerous aspects of this often unjust and morphing process.' Second, empirical studies of gentrification continue to be performed around the world to reveal its pervasiveness in a range of different types of places (see, for example, Fujitsuka 2005; Islam 2005; Krase 2005; Petsimeris 2005; Rubino 2005). This has demonstrated

both the place-specific characteristics of gentrification and its systemic features (Lees et al. 2007). Third, in recent years we have seen increasing attention paid to gentrification and middle class formation – on the ‘constitution and practices of middle class gentrifiers’ (Slater 2006: 742) (Bridge 2001, 2003, 2007; Butler 2003, 2007; Butler and Robson 2003; Robson and Butler 2003).

In this paper we return to some of the foregrounding research for our working definition of gentrification: Alan Warde’s (1991: 225) emphasis on the processes that underpin gentrification in all its many class and gender-inscribed manifestations (Bondi 1998; Karsten 2003). According to this, gentrification is: (1) a process of resettlement and social concentration, a process of displacement of one group of residents, with another of higher social status, entailing new patterns of social segregation; (2) a transformation in the built environment, via building work, that exhibits some common distinctive aesthetic features and the emergence of certain types of local service provision; (3) the gathering together of persons with a putatively shared culture and lifestyle, or at least shared, class-related consumer preferences and; (4) an economic reordering of property values, a commercial opportunity for the construction industry, and generally, an extension of the system of private ownership of domestic property.

Here we wish to emphasise two points: first, in building on Warde’s (1991) framework this gathering together of people does not have to constitute the majority. Rather it is about which groups’ preferences qualitatively shape the wider local context, in terms of facilities and services, as well as being behind the ways in which the built environment is changing (Butler and Robson 2001; Butler 2003; Karsten 2003, 2007; Savage et al. 2005). New groups moving into an area, making different sorts of demands on amenities can bring about a slow but important transformation in the local context, changing its physical organisation and its cultural ambience

(Schwanen and De Jong 2008). Second, that those moving into an area might exhibit a type of belonging that mirrors, but is not the same as, that exhibited by those who grow up and live locally. Savage et al (2005: 53-54) term this 'elective belonging', by which they mean that some urban localities increasingly are 'sites for new kinds of solidarities among people who chose to live in particular places', where for the new urban middle class 'belonging is defined not as an attribute of being born and bred in a place, but when a chosen place of residence is congruent with one's life story'. For Bridge (2007: 34), despite 'gentrifying landscapes [being] seen as increasingly translocal ... there are processes behind the construction of this imagined global persona that are intensely local.' So the 'sense of being at home is related to reflexive processes in which they [the gentrifying portion of the middle classes] can satisfactorily account to themselves how they came to live where they do' (Savage et al. 2005: 29).

Despite the breadth and depth of recent empirical studies, there have been very few that have examined the organisation of social reproduction in the households that move in to or remain in gentrifying areas, particularly those with young children (see for exceptions Karsten 2003, 2007). Gary Bridge (2001, 2003, 2007) has begun to situate gentrification in the life-course of gentrifiers. This, he argues, is adding a temporal dimension to the analysis, situating house buying decisions in a range of contexts, geographical, household, institutional and so on. Other have studied the role of education, as part of the wider production of particular types of family infrastructures in gentrifying neighbourhoods (Butler 2003; Butler and Robson 2001; Robson and Butler 2001). However, while this on-going work adds much conceptually and empirically to our understanding of gentrification, it still does not have much to say about associations between class, place and motherhood (Karsten 2003, 2007; McDowell et al. 2006a, 2006b; Ward et al. 2007).

A strand of work that does deal specifically with these issues is that on the geographies of motherhood, employment and childcare. From work on the everyday lives of mothers with young children (Holloway 1998a, 1998ba, 1999), through to job search strategies and employment opportunities in different places (England 1993, 1995, 1996; Hanson and Pratt 1995), from the social geography of childcare and the place-based 'gendered moral rationalities' that underpin it (Duncan and Smith 2002; Duncan et al. 2003; McDowell et al 2006a; Vincent et al 2004) through to the negotiation of the boundary between 'work' and 'home' for working mothers (Hardhill et al. 1997; Jarvis 2005; McDowell et al. 2005a, 2005b; Ward et al. 2007), a growing literature now exists in human geography, social policy and sociology. What this work reveals are the myriad of ways in which working mothers organise their lives in relation to the lives of other household members and the demands made on them by employers. Women's work continues to be central at home and beyond, their unpaid and paid labour absolutely necessary in the production and the maintenance of the urban social fabric (McDowell et al. 2006b; Wheelock and Jones 2002; Wheelock et al 2003). As Castells (1977: 177-178) put it: '[i]f these women who 'do nothing' ever stopped to do 'only that', the whole urban structure as we know it would become completely incapable of maintaining its functions' (see also McDowell 1983). Recent studies have examined the differences between (and within) middle and working class households in terms of their division of labour, general patterns of consumption, their use of time, capacity to relocate physically to get their children into the 'right school', their leisure time preferences and voting habits. Evidence confirms, perhaps not surprisingly, that middle-class households are able to ease time pressures by buying in services such as ironing and cleaning, ordering shopping on line and purchasing private childcare (Cox and Watt 2002; Cox 2006; Gregson and Lowe 1994), while working-class households are more likely to use family and

friends in informally arranged childcare (Holloway 1999; Ward et al. 2007). Where these two significant bodies of work overlap – and provide a conceptual cue for this paper – is on the forces behind the production of the ‘local’ habitus and the consequences of this habitus for the choices faced by working mothers. The next section turns to the study details.

3. Research background

The research discussed in this article derives from a study of largely -- but not exclusively -- middle class households living in the Chorlton neighbourhood of Manchester. It was part of a larger Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) sponsored project that examined the interface between economic restructuring and the division of labour in the household. More specifically with relation to this paper, the project sought to examine how in-work families with young children sought to ‘balance’ work and life commitments in three different areas of two cities, London (Angel/Islington, Bowes Park, Finsbury Park) and Manchester (Burnage, Chorlton and Wythenshawe). One hundred and fifty interviews were carried out with parents, predominantly mothers, with at least one child under ten years of age in three localities in each of the two metropolitan regions. The cities were chosen to reflect different economic structures; Manchester in the north west characterised by adjustment to the decline of manufacturing industry and London in the south east, given the new regional boundaries, characterised by relatively strong economic growth based on the service sector, especially financial services and cultural industries. In turn the localities were chosen to reflect intra regional diversity in terms of social class and relative locations.

In Chorlton we asked mothers about their household working patterns, in particular, and how they divided their time between paid work and caring responsibilities, either alone or with partners, in order to manage their individual household reproduction day to day and over time and how their decisions were shaped by the characteristics of the region; in terms of job opportunities, and locality; in terms of its relative location to employment opportunities, the availability, accessibility and affordability of social and private facilities including schools and childcare, in addition to their perspectives on mothering. All twenty five interviews in Chorlton, each of which lasted between 45 minutes and two hours were transcribed, entered into Atlas Ti and analysed. Factual data were also recorded and analysed using SPSS. The interviewees were contacted in a variety of ways, mainly through libraries, health centres and formal childcare providers. The sample is therefore neither random nor representative. Nevertheless the in depth interviews generated rich and interesting insights into the complexity and variety of ways in which different people resolve the increasingly complex practical dilemmas of everyday life and the existence of recurring themes allows us to have confidence in the veracity of our findings.

Tables 1 and 2 reveal the hours our households worked and how childcare was organised. In terms of those with whom we spoke, most of the main carers, all of whom were women, worked either full time (just over 50%) or part time hours; 8 were male full-time, female part-time households and 11 of the 25 households were dual full-time households. This relative work-richness is reflected in the hours our households worked: 14 of 24 women worked 31 hours or above; 22 of 24 men worked 31 hours or above; this clearly has implications for how much time these households have to perform socially reproductive tasks – cleaning, renovating, and shopping - and to care for children. Finally, 16 of the 25 households ‘bought’ childcare, mostly in private nurseries inside and outside of the neighbourhood. Use of ‘free’ childcare was

predominantly through grandparents, a finding similar to that in other studies (Wheelock and Jones 2002).

Tables 1 and 2 about here

4. ‘Phoenix from the ashes’: Manchester’s transformation and situating Chorlton

The first industrial city, Manchester has undergone a significant economic and social transformation since the late 1980s, in keeping with many of England’s cities. While perhaps not as deep or profound as those elites that govern the city would have us believe (Peck and Ward 2002), nevertheless, the city centre and the surrounding suburbs have seen capital return in the form of investment in the built environment and lots of residential and retail new builds (Ward 2007). Decades of population decline have been arrested. By 2001 the city’s population had stabilised at just over four hundred thousand, with the city centre home to twenty thousand residents, up from a few hundred in the mid 1980s. Run down properties have been transformed into expensive apartments, with an accompanying growth in the ‘consumption infrastructure’, such as bars, cafes, gyms, restaurants and museums. New jobs have been created in the ‘service economy’, although as many have been created at the lower end as at the higher end of the job ladder. In-work poverty remains a real issue, in a city that has failed to arrest deep-seated economic and social inequalities.

As part of the city of Manchester’s transformation – or at least accompanying it – has been a revival in its urban suburbs to the south of the centre. Nowhere is this renaissance more

observable than in the Chorlton neighbourhood, located four miles to the south west of the city centre. Traditionally an upper working class/lower middle class neighbourhood, over the last decade its population has become dominated by public sector professionals and a sizeable number of Manchester's new media professionals. Those who have moved into the area are those that Bridge (2003: 2545) described as having 'lower incomes but higher investments of social capital in their neighbourhoods' than the more traditional middle classes. As a result the neighbourhood has become awash with alternative medical practitioners, independent retailers, and organic outlets, evidence of a particular class-ridden consumption practices.

Tables 3 and 4 set out the socio-economic mix of Chorlton, and puts it in its wider geographical context, A number of points are worth making: First, Chorlton consists of a higher than average population in terms of educational attainment and in terms of the proportion of the workforce in 'higher managerial' occupations.

Table 3 and 4 about here

Second, the class make-up of Chorlton, as judged in terms of educational attainment and occupational category, has changed quite dramatically in the last fifteen years. That said, there remains a sizeable working class presence in the neighbourhood. Not all have been forced out through gentrification.

It is also worth noting that house prices in Chorlton have risen above the Manchester, North West averages and UK averages. At its peak in the summer of 2007 the average price for a house in the M21 Chorlton postcode was £241, 077 double what it was only five years previously and £10, 000 more than the UK average. Chorlton's housing stock largely dates from the turn of

the twentieth century. Although properties that have already been ‘transformed’ (Bridge 2007) – floors stripped and polished, walls painted single colours, and kitted out with furniture, fixtures and fittings from Habitat, IKEA and John Lewis, interspersed with older ‘authentic’ items – go for more, the number of properties that don’t fall within the ‘revalorized’ category continues to shrink. Housing renovation and investment with cultural capital (Bridge 2001, 2007) dominates many gentrifying neighbourhoods and Chorlton is no different, as households ‘play an active role in the creation of conditions that permit enhanced future rents’ (Harvey 1989: 96).

Instructive of the buoyancy of Chorlton’s housing market was both the growth in the number of estate agents with businesses in the area, as they moved in and talked up its upward trajectory (Harvey 1985; Bridge 1995, 2001), and the change in land uses, as care homes, garages, and small, independent hotels were converted or flattened and new apartments or houses were built in their place. As property values rose, so the area’s land use narrowed, other non-residential uses becoming increasingly less profitable in the face of rising house prices - a transformation in the built environment, as outlined by Warde (1991). More and more of the neighbourhood was turned over to residential housing, and with the prolonged rise in house prices and the relative stagnation of rental values, so sub-divided houses were reconverted into houses, either by their owners or, as was increasingly the case, by developers.

At the centre – commercial and symbolically – of Chorlton is Chorlton Green. One of the first two conservation areas to be designated in the City of Manchester in July 1970, this area is at the end of Beech Road, a single street consisting of a mix of ‘traditional’ public houses, vegetarian cafes, and ‘alternative’ clothes shops. This area of Chorlton is geographically small but economically central, host to a number of festivals over the summer. This was the centre of old Chorlton, when it first emerged as a settlement, and it is the centre of contemporary Chorlton,

used in every day language by those who have moved into the area and by estate agents who have made these moves possible. The paper now turns to the first of its two themes.

5. ‘Elective belonging’ Chorlton’s housing markets and lifestyles

This paper’s first theme is that of the Chorlton housing market and the way in which its placed within the housing biographies of those with whom we spoke. Figure 1 reveals the extent of the increase in house prices in Chorlton during the 2000s, symptomatic of the system-wide rise in house prices over the period. When house prices in Chorlton first began to rise in the mid-1990s the area was attractive to – and affordable for -- first time buyers. There was a relatively well-established set of communities. Movement into and out of the neighbourhood was not particularly noteworthy, although it did contain the highest proportion of middle class households in any Manchester ward bar one - Didsbury (Manchester City Council 1993). So, it was already distinctive in class terms from most of the city. The effect of the rise in house prices has been to make this more pronounced. Chorlton is now unaffordable to almost all but the most highly paid two income households.

Amongst those we spoke with we found evidence of two aesthetic trajectories - ‘community’ and ‘marginal’ gentrifiers. The first were those who moved into the area prior to the mid 1990s and who had invested time and money into renovating their house, and for whom, the sociability of Chorlton was deemed important. These households deployed both cultural and social capital. For ‘marginal’ gentrifiers, they moved into Chorlton later, when house prices had already begun to rise and when changes in the social and cultural make-up had begun to take hold. They did less of the renovation work themselves and for them the location near to the centre of the Manchester and on relatively good bus routes was particularly important, allowing the management of the everyday movement from home, to work, and to school. The households

were more likely to have children when they moved into Chorlton. These findings reinforce the points made by others (Karsten 2003, 2007). While these differences were important, there was also much that united these different waves of gentrifiers, most noticeably how they elected to belong in Chorlton and how they explained their decisions to enter the Chorlton housing market.

Turning to the first of these points, Amber, her husband and their three children moved to Chorlton from London. She was originally from nearby Altrincham, while he grew up just north of London. Her analysis of what attracted her and her family to the neighbourhood – a combination of what it was and what it wasn't – embodied the very essence of what the middle-class make-up of Chorlton was about. As she put it:

Some friend of ours had done a very similar thing, they were living in Stoke Newington and then moved to Chorlton and they were really happy with it ... [and] ... Chorlton is actually very like Stoke Newington, we always say, there's a lot of people that are not from Manchester that live in Chorlton. There are a lot of different accents and things. And there's a lots of places in Manchester, [my husband's] from the South and I think he would have [found it hard if] it would have been full of people who ... had lived here for generations.

Chorlton seemed to be becoming a place consisting of people whose personal networks stretched across the country, and sometimes, the globe (Bridge 2007; Savage et al. 2005). This sense of Chorlton being a place in which the relatively mobile middle classes came together was reinforced by Karen, a mother of two young children, who was completing a PGCE, while her husband was the Internet manager for an advertising agency. Her husband was originally from Manchester – but not Chorlton – while she was not, but that didn't necessarily mean she felt any less connected, due to the neighbourhood's changing class composition:

We came to Manchester because of [my husband's] family ... [My husband] has actually got a lot of school friends still here, and they all seem to be in Chorlton. And I've actually got some friends who I grew up with in Surrey and they live in Chorlton as well!

This sense of a portion of the middle classes coming together in Chorlton was also highlighted by

Dawn:

I've got all my friends [in Chorlton]. I've even got friends who I was close with in Birmingham, three girlfriends, who in three different ways have all moved to Manchester, and they all live round the corner from one another. Nearly everyone I know in the world lives in Chorlton.

Interviewees felt that were part of an elective community, one that articulated a sense of geographical attachment, social position and relationships with and to other places. They defined themselves territorially -- by where they lived -- and relationally -- by where they had come from (elsewhere). Collectively and individually they shared a sense of 'elective belonging' in the words of Savage and colleagues (2005: 29), 'people who come to live in an area with no prior ties to it, but who can link their residence to their biographical life history are able to see themselves as belonging to the area.'

Moving to the second point, the decision to enter the Chorlton housing market, and Carole and her husband moved to Chorlton in September 1994. At the time they were renting a flat in nearby Whalley Range, she was a clerk at a firm of accountants and he was a market trader, both relatively low income jobs. She reflected that it 'was one of the luckiest things we've ever done. We had no idea'. 'Community' gentrifiers, they were committed to staying put and did all the restoration work themselves. They moved within Chorlton in 2001 when they had their first

child, to a larger and more expensive property, and she appreciated the area as a place to bring up her children, stressing its conviviality and cosmopolitanism:

Chorlton people are liberal thinking, like-minded people. I mean, they can take it to extremes ... and that's quite nice as well, quirkiness and eccentricity. And its very family oriented ... Loads of kids.

This move, by two relatively low paid workers, into and up the Chorlton housing market, would now be almost impossible. By the end of 2007 house prices had so outstripped rises in income that average income earners such as Carole and her husband would not have been able to buy a house in Chorlton.

Dawn and her husband were both public sector workers, with two children aged 11 and 9. They bought their house at about the same time as Carole and her husband. They too were attracted by the local facilities:

When we moved we had a baby and I knew it was really good for having young kids, for babies and for children. And I liked the idea that I could just walk from my house to everything ... the facilities, and the community, and I knew a lot of people here.

She was not alone. As Savage et al. (2005: 92) found, '[t]he power of cultural capital to provide confidence in individual judgements is evident ... and knowledge derived from the social capital of ties and connections allows Chorlton residents to ... pick out where they want to live.' Evidence from elsewhere on how the middle classes seek out 'sanctuary' (Butler 1997) or 'incubation' (Atkinson 2006), as a means of making and re-making residential identities (Karsten

2007) supports our findings. Dawn and her husband also felt that, even on two salaries, they would not be able to afford their house at current prices:

It's expensive house price wise. But I mean, luckily for us, we moved over 10 years ago, and I had a house before that and I made some money on that. Otherwise, I mean, there is just no way you could move here from rented accommodation.

Amanda, a mother of a nine-month old boy, reflected on when her and her husband bought their Chorlton home:

We kind of bought at the right time, really. I would say it was just fortuitous that we decided to buy. It was very lucky.

And as Hannah, a part-time teacher with a partner and two children who bought their house in 1997 put it:

I mean we were very lucky, at the time, we thought it was beyond our budget, and it really was. But compared to now, if we'd have left it, even a year, we wouldn't have been able to afford to come here.

This sense of 'luck', of the timing of the house purchase, was a reoccurring theme in our interviews. Of course it wasn't just 'luck' – rather it was a combination of past and current factors and future expectations, which together constituted the conditions under which the decision to move into Chorlton was made. Studies of housing and the life-course reveal these to

include: individual and household incomes, family size and structure, house prices, neighbourhood characteristics and social networks (Clapham 2005; Karsten 2007). More than the narrow economic and housing factors highlighted by traditional studies, housing choices are the outcome of how individual and institutional factors combine at particular times in particular places. So, in addition to the relative affordability of Chorlton in the early 1990s, perceptions of liveability and links into the neighbourhood through social networks were behind the relocation decision by those with whom we spoke. Although local amenities and facilities were less extensive than they were at the end of 2007, those buying a house in Chorlton during the early and mid 1990s took a slight gamble: that the neighbourhood would witness an influx of reinvestment by those with high levels of cultural and social capital and with it new residents with higher disposal incomes and a desire to engage in conspicuous forms of consumption. If they were not already parents then it would become the kind of place in which they could imagine raising children. And although interviewees talked about diversity, as Savage et al. (2005: 43) argue, 'difference is celebrated and welcomed, for instance, with respect to diverse sexualities, family types and specific 'middle class' occupations ... [and yet] ... this diversity goes hand in hand with a liberal academic homogeneity.' Common cultural capital and urban professional values have actually produced a rather uniform local population in the neighbourhood – 'sameness' in the words of Karsten (2007: 85).

6. Mothers' employment and childcare strategies in Chorlton

The second theme this paper addresses is the decisions mothers in Chorlton made about 'balancing' paid and unpaid work. It builds on the previous section which examined the way in

which those moving into the neighbourhood exhibited a sense of ‘elective belonging’ to it, in terms of how they situated themselves in the context of housing biographies. This section focuses on whether this translates into a collective or ‘local’ culture of parenting or ‘spatialised gendered moral rationality’ (Duncan and Smith 2002), structuring choices between paid and unpaid work, as some have argued.

The relative lack of roots in Chorlton, and Manchester more widely in the cases of many with which we spoke, had important consequences for the ways in which care was arranged. Past ways in which inter-generational caring was performed were undermined. For, many there was no near family. Mothers returning to work faced competition for paid childcare. Patrice, a mother of two young children under five explained that ‘round here you’ve got absolutely zero choice, and at the end of the day, it’s who has got a vacancy’. For some, the alternative to the family network was the use of friends. Although a minority (Table 2), this was still important in some cases:

[T]here is a bit of a community which I don’t think you necessarily get in other parts of Manchester. And there is quite a lot of basically, ex-students, who’ve bought houses, had kids and sort of hung around really. And so from that point of view, there are a lot of people in the same sort of situation really, you know, who don’t have grandparents around the corner and stuff like that. So there’s probably a bit more of a support network here as well.

As Table 2`reveals, the majority of those with which we spoke used private childcare. Grandparents were used by a minority, while there was no use of any other family members. This is in contrast to neighbourhoods where generations of families co-exist and where the role of other

family members, particularly grandparents, is far more pronounced (Holloway 1999; Ward et al. 2007; Wheelock and Jones 2002).

An important factor behind the organization of childcare was the amount of paid work performed by the parents. Table 2 reveals that the majority of those mothers with which we spoke worked either long part-time or short full-time hours. Mothers in Chorlton revealed a complex set of attitudes towards motherhood and paid employment (Holloway 1999). Sarah has a three-year old son. Until becoming a mother she had worked full-time, as our statistics reveal the bulk of women do in Chorlton. Returning to work after seven months maternity leave, she took two part-time jobs, one as an art teacher at a local college and the other as an art teacher at a local school. Her husband works for the local authority as a web designer. She was happy with this reduction in her hours, even though she now worked in two places:

I thought I don't like the balance of five days to two – you know you want a balance, especially when you have a child as well. Four is just ideal really because you feel like you've had long enough to relax for the weekend with that three days together and then I feel like I enjoy my job as well. Because I don't feel as stressed out about it as I did when I was doing it full time.

As a mother of a nine-month old boy, and wife to a full-time teacher, Amanda returned to work full-time as a social worker before reducing her hours. She decided to increase the amount of time she spent with her child while, she hoped, maintaining her career trajectory:

I think from 5 days at work and 2 days off to 4 days at work and 3 days, this 29 hours feels like I am keeping my foot in the door and being a main person there, I guess. But the main question is the balance ... actually wanting more time at home.

For Amber, with three children under six and a working husband, her decision to return to work involved a deliberate downsizing of her career. After relocating from London, and not performing paid work for fifteen months after giving birth to her third child, she returned to teaching:

I think in, it's quite easy in teaching ... And I'm very well qualified as well for what I am doing, because having been Head of Year, I wasn't looking for that, I really had made that decision as well, that was another reason to move ... here. I didn't want to have such responsibility, I wanted to just go back into sort of teaching and not have the extra responsibility of management and stuff like that.

She decided to give up her management responsibilities and concentrate on the teaching, as a way of reducing her workload even though she continued to work full-time. Her change was not in her contracted hours but in the stress that went with them. Later in the interview she reflected on where this change in her attachment to her work had come from:

Before I had the children, my job was, it was never the be-all-and-end-all of my life, but it was a significant part of my life and I quite enjoyed the challenge, and I used to get in very early and leave quite late and enjoy what I was doing, whereas I very much see it now as I've got to go and do it, get it over and done with and go back home.

Laura is a mother of an eight-year old daughter and a five-year son, and has a partner who works full-time as a graphic designer. She scaled down her hours to thirty over three and a half days a week, working as a health development officer for the local Primary Care Trust (PCT):

I think it's also, it has, and it's not like I was terribly ambitious or anything, and then I had my children and I thought oh I'm not ambitious. Because I wasn't and I'm still not ... I think I value, I think I've always had flexible jobs but I do value the flexibility. But I think I just work now is, I mean if I had a job which I didn't like or was badly paid, I'm not sure I would work. I'm quite happy at home, I quite enjoy being at home, So for me work is a kind of social thing, it's adult company, obviously it's money as well, which is nice, it means we can afford holidays and things like that. But it's fulfilling other sorts of needs really. And I think it helps me cope with being a mum.

Later in the interview she reiterated how having something else – paid work in this case – is important to her:

I mean my life doesn't, I mean I love my kids dearly but they're not the be all and end all of my life, I'd like something for me.

For most of the mothers we spoke with then there was a concern to return to paid work after maternity leave. They were committed to a version of motherhood that had as a constituent part a degree of their identity and their friendships being forged through the performance of paid work. Work- and place-based networks structured their social interactions. Mothers reduced their hours of paid work to fit around childcare and the doing of other socially reproductive tasks, clear in the knowledge that this would almost certainly harm their careers (Dex 1987; Martin and Roberts 1984).

However, not all those we spoke with shared this view. For Carole, with three girls under six, and a husband who works as a primary teacher, the decision to stay at home was both a moral

and a financial one. When her first daughter was born she returned to work and she shared a nanny with her neighbours, who also had a young child. One week the nanny would look after the children at Carole's house, and then the next week she would look after the two children at the neighbour's house. However once she had her second daughter, Carole and her husband calculated it was not worth financially hiring a nanny. She was also keen to stay at home this time, as part of thinking over about work-life balance over the life-course:

It wasn't worth it money-wise, to pay for a nanny for two. And I didn't want to ... I didn't like going back with [my first daughter] but it was only short term, and I could cope. But the plan was to pack them all in and get the young bits out the way, suffer for a bit! ... I wanted children and I wanted to stay at home with them. So I didn't see it as a sacrifice ... You know things like career breaks and people, lots of people have children later and stuff like that.

Another exception to the 'middle class' norm in Chorlton was Tabatha. Her account was different to many we heard, as was her employment and family history. She and her husband were born and grew up in Chorlton. She left school at sixteen, worked in the local supermarket, and then stopped performing paid work when she got pregnant at twenty. Her and her husband had been together for almost twenty years. They both have family near by and in the case of her first child her mother did a lot of the caring, looking after him overnight, in order that she could perform two part-time jobs:

I got a part-time job in Threshers off-licence at night. So when his dad came in from work, I'd start work at – I think it was six. Six to ten I used to work ... And I done that for – gosh about six years, but also, while I was there – you'll die now! Because, while I was there – I also got a part-time job at the airport, in the duty free ... And I used to work five o'clock in the morning till eleven o'clock in the morning. So then, I'd like go home – well, pick up Mark [from my mother's] at eleven, go home and then get ready for work at the night time, six to ten.

In the case of her second child, she stopped working days but went back after two months to work nights at Manchester airport. However a change in the hours she was offered and a sense of wanting to organise her work around her daughter – something that she felt she'd not done with her son- led her to change what she did:

I just thought, I don't want to go through what I've been through with [my son]. Because I didn't feel I was there for him. You know, all through his primary school. I'm not doing it with [my daughter]. I'm going to take some time out. So that's why I went for the job in the school, to do school hours and to have school holidays.

Tabatha's work history was more fragmented, made up of more low paying jobs, and with less career progression possibilities compared to most mothers with which we spoke. Nevertheless, she tried to organise her working hours around caring for her children. And she had the support of her family members who lived closed by. All the other in-paid work mothers with whom we spoke were in professional occupations, organising their hours around what they understood to be the needs of their children and buying in a range of childcare – mostly but not exclusively in the form of private nurseries.

In terms of how Tabatha felt about juggling her responsibilities, in her own words her decision to remain in paid employment was also partly due to what she described as the pressure to ‘keep up with the Joneses’:

I never thought that I would be working with a second child. I thought we would be quite comfortable after buying a house at twenty. Made money on that and moved on. I thought we’d be financially comfortable enough for me not to have to work when we had [our second child]. But it hasn’t worked out that way. I’m having to earn more ... Living up to people’s expectations: [my daughter] should have swimming lessons, [my daughter] should go dancing, she should go disco – and I do it! I don’t do it for me or for [my daughter]. [My daughter] enjoys it, don’t get me wrong, but I do it because the circle of friends we’re in, they all go, so we should go.

The changing nature of Chorlton was then shaping in profound ways the conditions under which Tabatha chose to parent and to work. Her own ‘gendered moral rationalities’ (Duncan et al. 2003) – ‘understandings of the right thing(s) to do as a mother and a worker’ -- in the words of Schwanen (2007: 449) were being challenged by the daily social practices of the middle class gentrifiers. Tabatha’s views, and those of Carole’s, trouble the understanding that there necessarily exists a single, spatalised ‘culture of mothering’ in a locality. Instead we found that the particular arrangements that were put in place were a set of responses to a range of contexts and pressures.

6. Conclusion

This paper has outlined a highly contextual and differentiated process of gentrification that has changed slowly the class composition of Chorlton, Manchester. While the neighbourhood of Chorlton has historically been socially mixed there is no doubt that since the mid 1990s the area has become home to a growing middle class population. Through their practices middle *class* households – understood here as about more than economic, also about the social and cultural aspects of everyday life – have actively defined what is meant by *their* ‘class’ and by *their* ‘culture’. They have constituted their own ‘urban worlds’ (Bondi and Christie 2000: 337), such as those which now exist in Chorlton, in which a set of infrastructures for everyday life have been produced and sustained (Jarvis, 2005). And the evidence of other work in other English cities reveals a similarly variegated gentrification landscape (on Bristol see Boddy 2007; Bridge 2001, 2007; on Leeds see Dutton 2003; on Newcastle see Cameron 2003).

This paper has sought to integrate issues of social reproduction with those of gentrification. Drawing on two strong but often unconnected literatures, it has explored the different types of capital that gentrifiers have deployed in Chorlton and the ways in which decisions to move into and within Chorlton reflect a strong commitment to the neighbourhood and to a manufactured sense of ‘elective belonging’ (Savage et al. 2005). However, we found little evidence of the roots mothers put down through their mothering practices replacing those they already had through work, and through friendships, some but not all of which were Chorlton-based. Rather part-time and full-time working mothers self and identity was forged and performed through the interaction of home-, place- and work-based activities, practices and networks.

Conceptually, we have highlighted how an element of the middle class has been attracted to Chorlton. With its alternative medicines, independent retailers, organic food-stores, and green public spaces, Chorlton has been the site of a concentrated expression of cosmopolitan liveability. Individually and collectively those electing to belong in Chorlton have set about remaking the neighbourhood through their conspicuous class-inscribed consumption practices. Housing is one such act of consumption, as are the renovations that characterise many of the neighbourhood's early twentieth century two and three bedroom terraces and through which the acts of identity formation are forged. Moreover we have revealed how the decision to return to work by the mothers in our study was bound up with views on motherhood, housing market choices, childcare availability, and social networks. There was no one local culture of parenting in Chorlton. Rather each decision over the balance to be struck between the amount of paid and unpaid employment reflected a more complicated intersection of past, present and future situational contexts (Robison and Moel 2000). More generally, the paper has demonstrated the important ways in which aesthetic, employment and housing trajectories are intertwined, with evidence from elsewhere suggesting the precise way in which they combine changes over the life-course (Fischer and Malmberg 2000; Karsten 2007). And with a commitment to remain in Chorlton, so those with which we spoke revealed quite traditional middle class concerns about education, and the need to enhance their children's social capital through ensuring entry into the 'right' school. As Bridge (2007: 44) reports in his work in Bristol: 'the gentrification aesthetic blurs with a wider middle class ethic and resulting strategies over schooling.' Work on these themes should continue to be a valued part of the wider gentrification research 'project'.

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Table 1: Paid work per work, in hours

	0	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41+
Women (n=24)	4	1	1	4	11	3
Men (n=24)	2	0	0	0	11	11

Source: authors' survey, 2002-2004

NB: The total for both is 24 due to missing data. In all cases women were the primary carers.

Table 2: The 'local' childcare landscape

Type of childcare	Used	Not-used
Bought childcare	16	9
'Free' childcare		
- Grandparents	9	16
- Other relatives	0	25
- Friend/neighbour	4	21

Source: authors' survey, 2002-2004

Table 3 Socio economic indicators of Chorlton in comparison with Manchester, the North West and the UK

	Chorlton	Manchester	North West	UK
Economically active (%)	81.4	62.3	76.2	78.5
Economically inactive (%)	18.6	37.7	23.2	21.6
Reasons for economic activity				
Looking after home or family (%)	19.8	20.7	20.0	21.4
Permanently sick or disabled (%)	26.5	25.2	24.9	18.9
Highest qualification (none) (%)	16.8	33.9	12.6	15.8
Level 4/5* (%)	52.4	21.4	18.4	15.7
Higher managerial (%)	20.6	7.8	8.2	10.2
Semi routine and routine (%)	11.3	21.8	28.9	23.2
Home ownership (%)	43.5	41	70	69

Source: Statistics for Chorlton and Manchester, Census 2001; comparable Figures for NW and UK, Regional Trends 2001

*** First degree or above and equivalents**

Table 4: Basis socio-economic data on our Chorlton households

Characteristic	Numbers and Percentage
Employment status of main carer	13 (52%) full-time; 7 (28%) part-time; 1 (4%) two part-time jobs; 4 (16%) not employed
Couple employment pattern	3 (12%) male full-time/female not employed; 8 (32%) male full-time/female part-time; 11 (44%) male and female full-time; 1 (4%) female full-time/male part-time or less; 1 (4%) male and female part-time or less; 1 (4%) single parents
Socio economic classification of main carer*	1 (4%) semi routine; 3 (12*%) intermediate occupations/lower supervisory and technical; 5 (21%) self-employed; 15(63%) managerial and professional
Household structure	23 (92%) heterosexual nuclear; 1 (4%) main carer, child(ren) and others; 1 (4%) main carer, partner, child(ren) and others
Housing tenure	23 (92%) owner occupied; 1 (4%) private rented; 1 (4%) other
Ethnic origin (self-declared)*	18 (72%) white British; 3 (12%) other white; 1 (4%) Pakistani; 1 (4%) Other Asian or British Asian background; 1 (4%) Caribbean; 1 (4%) Other Black or Black British

Sources: authors' survey, 2002-2004

* - The total is only 24 due to missing data.

