‘A little bit patronising if I’m being honest’: working-class mothering and expert discourses.

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https://doi.org/10.34737/w814z

‘A little bit patronising if I’m being honest’: working-class mothering and expert discourses.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements of the University of Westminster

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2024

Contents

Abstract

Recent early years policy interventions have focussed on the Home Learning Environment. The 'Home Learning Environment' relates to the parenting children receive at home, rather than the physical environment in which they live, enabling a focus on individual behaviour. Family and parenting relations have been a target of state intervention for the last century, positioning working-class mothers as deficient and requiring correction. Little is known about how these discourses impact and shape working-class mothering. I explore how intensive parenting and attendant policy and dominant discourses impact on the day-to-day lives of working-class mothers. To do this, I draw on a critical discourse analysis of the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* website to discern current 'good' mothering discourses being promoted and narrative analysis of twenty biographical interviews with working-class mothers. The interviews revealed a huge gulf between *Tiny Happy People*'s 'good' mother and the women's lived realities. Absent and ignored were the significant material constraints faced by many of the women and the time burden created by the intensive mothering model being promoted. Working-class mothering values based on relationships and protecting their children from the effects of growing up working-class mean that *Tiny Happy People*'s good mothering ideals were mainly rejected as unnecessary or unrealistic by the women interviewed. Policy and other initiatives aimed at working-class people must acknowledge the reality of their lives and target improvements to inadequate housing provision and a labour market which creates low-paid, precarious employment; these initiatives would dramatically transform family life. This research provides the first academic analysis of the BBC's *Tiny Happy People*. It highlights the gulf between those in positions of power (whether within government or the media) and the working-class women interviewed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My story led me to this research topic, having occupied a stigmatised position of working-class, teenage, single mother when my first child was born. Mostly this took the form of comments, such as the teacher who 'had noticed I didn't wear a wedding ring' when I complained about a child calling my son a bastard or the colleague who expressed surprise that I knew who my son's father was. There was a further layer of stigma attached to me as a white mother of a mixed-race child. McKenzie (2013) describes this sexualisation of women whose children prove they'd had sex with a black man. When subject to this type and level of stigma, it impacts on the way in which you live your life, striving to demonstrate that you aren't what they say you are. It is perhaps no coincidence that there are sixteen years between my first and second child as I was conscious of being under scrutiny in ways in which other women were not. On several occasions I have been asked if my children have different dads for example.

This stigma was reinforced when I had my younger children, despite being older and married, since we were in receipt of welfare benefits, two-year-old nursery funding and, more recently, free school meals. Therefore, my children once again fall into the category of 'disadvantaged', thereby continuing, and reinforcing the feelings of disapproval and failure which have marked my mothering. From their early years my children were categorised as not good enough. In examining this framing, I realised that despite having become more 'respectable' through my marriage and gaining of educational qualifications, I am still perceived as deficient due to our relative poverty. The way in which that deficiency manifests itself is in stigmatisation, since my motherhood has created me as an object of stigma (Tyler, 2020) through categorisation: teenage parent, single mother, benefits dependent, unemployed, a recipient of two-year old nursery funding with children eligible for free school meals. These positions elicit disapproval from other mothers, colleagues, school staff, family and within the media, making me an object of disgust, reinforcing stereotypes of working-class women as promiscuous, overly sexualised, having low morals and reliant on others to fund their children.

When my eldest child was young, I was cast as someone I didn't recognise in line with stereotypes which abounded at the time (the early noughties) including tracksuit wearing Vicky Pollard of Little

Britain, a 'chav', using pregnancy to get a council house later shown with six children who she claims have seven different fathers (Tyler, 2008). Or Carol Jackson, an Eastenders[1] character who was a white, unmarried mother of four, each child with a different father, most noticeably, the youngest, who was mixed-race. These figures resonate with preoccupations and anxiety surrounding motherhood and fertility which are 'used instrumentally to classify bodies according to more or less desirable forms of reproduction' (Tyler, 2008, p29). My younger children's whiteness provided evidence that their mother has had more than one sexual relationship. It is this grounding in lived experience which influences my research and the fact that I, and mothers like me, are so poorly represented, echoing the sentiments of Bev Skeggs whose motivation for research was her 'experience of feeling as if I was a misrepresented object of sociological and feminist knowledge' (1997, p19). This experience of stigma has shaped my mothering practices in that I am defensive of my children knowing how they will be viewed by others given my mothering is perceived as deficient. I also feel I must work harder to appear 'respectable' than someone else might. My narrative explains my positionality and the emphasis I place upon experience in the production of knowledge since my knowledge is rooted in experience. Through this project, I explore the extent to which expert parenting discourses are informing and shaping working-class mothering practices.

This chapter sets out the background to my research project, how it came to be focussed on mothers, rather than parents, and why I am interested in the experiences of working-class women in particular. Next, I discuss why working-class is construed as white before describing the focus of the research. After that, I will describe the design of the project. Finally, the structure of the thesis and key concepts will be defined.

1.1 Background

This thesis was born out of an earlier MA project on parental decisions around preschool use and, although I was not fully cognisant of it at the time, my own experience of mothering. During the earlier project, one of the interviewees described being a mother as 'hard physical work'. This set a train of thought going about our differing interpretations of what being a mother involves and how that is impacted by who we are. Using autoethnography, I contextualise my mothering, with the aim of allowing those whose experiences are outside these to more vividly understand its realities.

[1] Eastenders is a long-running soap opera broadcast on the BBC set in a fictional borough in East London.

My narratives are not shared to elicit sympathy or gain kudos. This, perhaps more than anything was something with which I struggled with, and it was only through speaking with journalist, broadcaster and writer, Kieran Yates, that I understood the power of sharing experiences. She highlighted the tension between sharing and holding back. Without wishing to commodify trauma, it is important to speak about our experiences to redress the balance when these stories have been hidden and working-class experiences disregarded as we are fed the myths of equal opportunities and meritocracy. As Corrigan and Nascimento report: 'Making an original contribution to knowledge almost inevitably involves a painful internal journey.' (2022, p43)

Being a mother opens you up to a whole range of unsolicited advice (Jensen, 2018) whereby friends, relatives and strangers make comments and moral judgements of you based on their perceptions of your mothering. These comments are inherently gendered as men need only do the bare minimum to be considered a good dad eg taking their kids to the park, picking them up from school or doing their hair. However, this can also lead to assumptions about them being unemployed. Several times mothers at the children's centre or school gates have made a point of telling me that their partner works. So did mine, but irregular hours. Sometimes it's a shake of the head, or a muttered comment: one such comment when out with my son being 'kids having kids'. Other times, it's more direct, the shop assistant who told me off for letting my kids wander round the shop because a 'foreign man' had tried to take someone's kids recently round there. Unsolicited comments are more easily directed towards those perceived as lesser.

1.2 Why Mothers?

Beginning from my own mothering story, when my position was created in relation to the father of my children, the gendered nature of parent-blame is laid bare. My situation as a lone parent or benefits recipient had gendered and classed implications on my ability to be a 'good' mother but why was this? Lone mothers continue to experience stigmatisation (Carroll, 2017) even though lone parent families account for 15% of UK families (ONS, 2023). Frequently, it is implied that blame for an absent father lies with the mother (Chambers and Gracia, 2022). Despite increasing use of the gender-neutral term 'parent', it is still the mother who is expected to undertake most of the reproductive work (Gillies et al, 2017) and pilloried if this does not meet society's expectations. In this era of intensive mothering, reproductive work is not simply the feeding, clothing, and caring of the past but now includes being attentive to a child's development stage, ensuring the child is 'school-ready', considering the child's needs above one's own and following expert advice (Hays,

1996). It is framed as self-investment (Federici, 2018) and this individualisation presents people in the abstract. Decontextualising mothering in this way gives the illusion of a level playing field when the reality is entirely different and permits the emphasis, and sole solution, to be individual self-improvement.

Gender equality is framed such that women are increasingly being viewed in terms of their employment rather than their reproductive work, thus further reducing and concealing the importance and hidden cost of that work, basing equality on a male norm (Fraser, 2013). Mothers carry the burden of reproductive labour as well as responsibility for its perceived success or failure so must take on the unpaid and devalued work of reproduction and receive approbation for failure to adhere to current 'good' mothering ideals. Tied up with the idea of 'good' mothering is respectability, which is viewed as white, middle-class, and heterosexual (Skeggs, 1997). Mothers outside of this respectable 'good' mothering ideal are conversely viewed as lacking, deficient or bad. Where white, middle-class, women may be viewed as 'clean, sober and neat' (Bourdieu, 1984 p244), the opposite is true of black or working-class women with a 'tacit reference to uncleanness, in words or things, to intemperance or improvidence' (ibid). This moves classed concepts away from material resources and focusses instead on character traits and qualities (Reay, 2017) with working-class mothering situated as deficient in relation to middle-class mothering. Working-class mothering practices are marginalised and pathologised as being inadequate and the reason for their and their children's poverty (Gillies et al, 2017).

I was interested to discover whether the mothers I interviewed were attempting to live up to the 'good' mothering ideal or resisting or subverting it or doing something else entirely. Bourdieu (1977) highlights that dominated classes will want to push back against the constraints of doxa, and break down arbitrarily accepted norms but, equally, the dominant classes will defend the status quo. Skeggs notes Bourdieu's argument is that resistance is greater within dominated groups since 'they are less invested in the games of power' (2004, p25). As expanded on in section 1.5, the relationship between knowledge and power in our society has classed and gendered impacts, affecting working-class women more than their middle-class or male counterparts. (It has racialised impacts too, which will be discussed below.) This is compounded when those women become mothers since they then have responsibility to raise subsequent generations and lift them out of poverty by their mothering.

Working-class mothers are simultaneously the problem and the solution to social ills; they 'can be used and they can be blamed' (Skeggs, 1997, p48). When ascertaining worth, women are viewed, not simply in terms of their race, social class, and sexuality but there is a further layer of differentiation, which does not apply to men in the same way, when they become mothers (Lovell, 2004). A woman's personal capital is reduced when she becomes a mother, in ways that a man's does not upon becoming a father, so increasing gender inequality. Motherhood itself causes oppression in the context of capitalism (O'Reilly, 2016) since mothers are more likely to change their working patterns to accommodate children, take on a greater emotional load and overwhelmingly undertake more caring duties. Emotional labour is predominantly undertaken by women, their being responsible for 'maintaining the emotional aspects of family relationships, responding to others' emotional states and also acting to alleviate distress' (Reay, 2004, p59). It is estimated that, on average, women carry out 60% more unpaid work than men (ONS, 2017, p6). In a climate of intensive parenting, working-class mothers who are already disadvantaged by their lack of economic capital must then bear the burden of being responsible for their children's future earning capacity by imbuing them with as much human capital as possible. For neoliberal feminists, their feminism is dependent 'not only on gendered entrepreneurialism but also on individual enterprise' (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020, p10). Once they become mothers, their consumption and entrepreneurialism are projected onto their children and for enhancement of their children's human capital. Since social class is generally theorised in economic terms and at an individual or family level, it allows for scant critical analysis or opposition to those terms (Lawler, 2004). Interventions to address perceived deficiencies in working-class parenting are addressed by 'extending the school learning environment into the homes of the poor' (Simpson et al, 2019, p5). The impacts of 'poverty, negative personal experiences of schooling, insufficient educational knowledge and lack of confidence' (Reay, 2004, p65) reduce working-class mothers' ability to engage in the intensive mothering of middle-class women.

1.3 Intersection of class and race

Having considered the compounding aspects of gender and social class, a further layer of stratification which serves to categorise people in relation to 'good' mothering ideals involves race and immigration status. Not only is a woman viewed in terms of her mothering but also her decision about whether to become a mother. Black and migrant woman have primarily been viewed in British society as workers first and mothers second due to the colonial legacy of

immigration following the post-war settlement (Carby, 1982). This is in much the same way that many working-class women are viewed, since their household circumstances dictate that employment is necessary to supplement their partner's income (or if they are the sole earner). Reproductive work always needs to be done and where both parents in a couple are in employment, parts of this are outsourced to other women (Vincent and Ball, 2006) – usually working-class, black or migrant women (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). In much the same way that social class and gender are assumed to be inconsequential since the myths of equality, choice and individual responsibility dominate, race is also ignored or treated as a postscript. Failure to adhere to citizenship standards dictated by neoliberalism is therefore a result of individual bad choices rather than entrenched racism (Hamilton, 2016). The precarious state of belonging ascribed to black mothers, as outsiders, then positions black mothers outside 'good' mothering discourses (Hamilton, 2016). A layer of privilege is granted through whiteness; however, this does not favour all women equally. Whiteness is not expressed in relation to the middle-classes; since the late 1990s this label is almost always attached to the working-classes (Lawler, 2012). In the New Labour era 'resident problem families became racialized as explicitly white, as a group whose behaviour sullied whiteness' (Shilliam, 2018, p110). Since the financial crash of 2008, 'class has returned to the diet of parliamentary and public discourse as a constitutively racialized phenomenon' (Shilliam, 2018, p4). Distinguishing the working-class as white and pushing anti-immigration narratives has political economy since it shifts resentment and blame for structural inequalities from government onto black and brown people (Ware, 2008). Alongside this deflection from structural inequalities, racializing social class allows the white working-classes to be 'portrayed as angry, backward losers, while immigrants are pathologised as insufficiently integrated freeloaders' (Gillies, 2007, p31). Poor whites are used by elites to deflect claims of racism and 'to question the existence of any such thing as White privilege' (Gillborn, 2019, p116). This is a 'whiteness contaminated with poverty' (Tyler, 2008, p25) and includes potential 'geographical, familial and sexual intimacy with working-class blacks and Asians and immigrant populations' (ibid). Whiteness then is sub-divided, so the privileges experienced by white middle and upper classes, are not felt by working-class whites. Instead, their race is tainted by their social class rather than giving the advantage this usually confers. Having considered the impacts of gender, class, and race on the design of this project, I will now turn to the topic of the research.

1.4 Contribution to knowledge

My research is located in the field of parenting/motherhood and class studies, adding to research done by Val Gillies, Tracey Jensen, and Diane Reay. It builds on the body of knowledge related to working-class mothering, engaging with the sociology of class, social policy, and the sociology of education. The particular contribution of my research is in illuminating the perspectives and lived experiences of working-class women and developing the autoethnographic method.

Within class studies, Bev Skeggs's (1997; 2004; 2005; 2011) work examines working-class women's gendered and classed experiences. This is built upon by the work of Reay (2004; 2005), Gillies (2005b; 2007), Tyler (2008; 2020) and Jensen (2010). These works consider the intersections of gender and social class and demonstrate how working-class mothers are increasingly targeted as abject subjects for intervention who need to learn how to participate in a 'landscape of competitive individualism' (Jensen, 2017, p174). This landscape has arisen in a context of blaming mothers who do not adhere to 'good parenting' scripts (Jensen, 2017).

As Reay (2005) argues, the 'last twenty years has seen the transformation of women's domestic labour to include extensive educational work in the home' (p113). Sharon Hays (1996) also identifies the increasing expectations on women, using the term' intensive mothering' to describe this role. Not all mothers are impacted evenly by this concept. As the concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003) of intensive mothering is more common in middle-class families, it is assumed that it is the mothering those children receive that gives them an educational advantage rather than economic resources or educational capital. Assumptions and portrayals of working-class mothers mean that their mothering is scrutinised and maligned, referencing their behaviour rather than their resources or material contexts (Allen and Osgood, 2009; Allen et al., 2015). Perceptions of parental dysfunction have created a policy climate where parenting is 'in crisis', and government intervention is necessary (Jensen, 2018), garnering public support for cuts (Jensen, 2020). This has led to an increasing policy focus on working-class mothers and an increasing emphasis on early intervention (Gillies, 2005a, 2014, 2020; Edwards and Gillies, 2016; Gillies et al 2016, 2017). Early intervention is deemed necessary to address the attainment gap, again focussing on individual parenting behaviour rather than addressing the classed inequalities within the education system (Reay, 2017; Gillies, 2006, 2016). These themes are revisited in chapters 2 and 3.

In terms of autoethnography and contribution to knowledge, this research blends autoethnography with biographical interviews with working-class women. My own classed position means I am part of the group I am researching. Diane Reay states the importance of who she is

within her work: 'My working-class background influences everything I research and write. That passionate partiality is helpful in ensuring a strong focus on social justice and an emphatic focus on working-class experience…' (Reay, 2017, p2). Similarly, this research project is wholly shaped by who I am and my lived experiences, which feed into the data through conducting and analysing the interviews and include my autobiographical vignettes throughout the thesis. Through this, I am developing the autoethnographic method by using it as a tool of analysis as well as my story forming part of the empirical data. My research, therefore, builds on a large body of knowledge, contributing to the field of mothering/parenting studies and social class and extending the use of autoethnography.

1.5 Research focus

Family and parenting relations have been a target of state intervention for the last century and a half, positioning working-class mothers as deficient and requiring correction. More recently, this has intensified as neoliberal ideas around self-improvement and investment in human capital have taken hold. In policy, this has meant increased focus on parent behaviour, through initiatives aimed at the Home Learning Environment, to correct an attainment gap between working class pupils and their more affluent peers. At a time of rising prices with public services cut to the bone, these policy remedies are viewed as the perfect solution to issues of child poverty and low attainment. What these 'solutions' disregard are the day-to-day realities for working-class mothers who are expected to parent their children out of poverty.

There is a long-held belief that poverty is transmitted generationally through behaviour rather than recognising the challenges of achieving financial security without the benefit of inherited wealth. Instead, it is assumed that poor children are at risk from their parents. Previously this was in terms of the risk posed by their parents through their amoral behaviour or paucity of ambition. However, the increasingly individualist nature of society, intensified by the adherence to neoliberalism of politicians of both the main parties over the last four decades, has widened the notion of risk posed to children by their parents. Beliefs in meritocracy and social mobility are so deeply entrenched within the political system, education, and society more broadly that they are seldom questioned. Indeed, social mobility is only discussed in terms of upward movement despite it being inevitable that some people moving upwards will cause others to go down. Measurement of education, through statutory assessment, allows social class to be ignored; instead, everyone is assumed to begin from the same departure point. This allowed the wealthy Victorian

philanthropists of yesteryear to assume a paternalistic position towards the working-classes which is mirrored today within government policy and closely connected media output.

Government-funded research is focussed on increasing uptake of early education through nurseries and preschools. Within these projects, data is collected from parents in the form of questionnaires (Speight et al, 2015, p61-63) to compile reports which demonstrate the deficiencies of working-class parents and emphasise the importance of early education for their children. From a policy perspective this also frees up those parents, or more accurately mothers, to engage in employment. Although not covering the actual cost of delivering high quality early education, large sums have been and continue to be committed to providing government-funded early education.

What is missing from these reports is the impact that government policy and associated dominant discourses have on working-class mothers. This is despite them being the target of policy and the figure held up as antithesis to dominant good mothering discourses. To address this, I sought within this project to establish current good mothering discourses and explore their impact on working-class mothers. In so doing, I hoped to offer an alternative to those dominant discourses which serve to demonise working-class mothers and share their lived realities. The aim of my research is to explore current discourses and highlight the disparity between these and the lived reality for working-class women. This is done through exploring the question: To what extent do family policy and 'expert' discourses of parenting impact on and shape working class mothering practices? Those good mothering discourses are based on intensive parenting ideals and ignore the context within which working-class women are raising their children and the mothering values they hold.

1.5 Research design

Drawing on narrative analysis of twenty biographical interviews, a critical discourse analysis of a parenting website and autoethnography, this thesis takes a constructivist approach to knowledge and uses the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. It is centred on mothers rather than parents since irrespective of the term 'parents' being commonplace, mothers continue to do most of the reproductive work (Gillies et al, 2017). If reproductive work is perceived as lacking, then it is mothers who are viewed critically by society. Since poverty is viewed as being transmitted generationally, then it is the mother's social reproductive work which is deemed deficient if a child fails to meet development targets or academic markers of success. Gender equality is framed such

that women are increasingly being viewed in terms of their employment rather than their reproductive work, thus further reducing and concealing the importance and hidden cost of that work, basing equality on a male norm (Fraser, 2013). Mothers carry the burden of reproductive labour as well as responsibility for its perceived success or failure so must take on the unpaid and devalued work of reproduction and receive approbation for failure to adhere to current 'good' mothering ideals. Material resources and classed concepts are less often mentioned and instead character traits and qualities are highlighted (Reay, 2017) with working-class mothering situated as deficient in relation to middle-class mothering.

To answer my research question and establish dominant discourses being promoted I needed to explain what dominant discourses are and the interrelationship between knowledge and power. Foucault's theory explains how political power is used to regulate lives, creating institutionalised norms which then become every day and commonplace (Foucault, 1980a). Critical discourse analysis, grounded in Foucauldian theory, was used to interrogate normative constructions of good parenting portrayed on the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* website. To explain discourse in more detail and consider the interrelationship of people from different groups and how those groups act to enforce and reproduce power I drew on the work of Bourdieu. Although Bourdieu and Foucault take different approaches to explaining power and are often viewed as incompatible (Bang, 2014), I am using their theories as tools to understand how power is perpetuated through norms (Foucault) and hierarchies of power (Bourdieu). Within this process I analysed existing social structures and how these create sociological issues, taking a central rather than bystander role (Wetherell et al, 2001). Epistemologically, the research is socially constructivist in nature since I am subjective in my approach to the data (Charmaz, 2014) and recognise that knowledge is created between social actors via their interactions (Bourdieu, 1992a). Social class is not a neat category and there are many ways of understanding and categorising it, both as an identity and subjectivity. Bourdieu's (1986, 1990a) interpretation of class is based upon the concept of capitals and the amount and combination a person holds. It is a fluid rather than deterministic concept since it is difficult to quantify and qualify someone's capitals precisely. Ideas of class are subjective and dependent on one's own social position. My own classed position is an example of this fluidity since despite having some middle-class attributes, my habitus and lack of economic capital leads to me being read as working-class. This position facilitates access to the field of my research as we live similar lives and I have many commonalities with the women interviewed. Because of this it was important to me to include my own narrative through autoethnography. Autoethnography

provides a platform for personal experience where it is valued as a source of knowledge by using one's own experiences to build sociological knowledge (Wall, 2008). It is not a method without critics, as it has been viewed as not constituting rigorous research (Sparkes, 2000), being reliant on individual testimony and introspection (Coffey, 1999). I argue that my position within the research and reflective narratives contribute to knowledge within this project and dispute these supposed methodological shortcomings.

The choice to focus on BBC's *Tiny Happy People*, a website of parenting advice, is based on the increasing use of and reliance on web-based information by this group. In an age of digital media, websites and social media output are an increasingly common and visible space for parenting advice, supplanting that dispensed via Health Visitors, leaflets, or books. This means that the website is a distinctive form of parenting pedagogy or media that is worthy of analysis. Through this platform contemporary parenting discourses are therefore both created and disseminated.

A wealth of analysis exists on media and cultural depictions of working-class mothers, particularly as subjects of reality television shows which serve as a pre-runner to the types of audio-visual content contained on THP. Research into this genre finds shows engaged working-class participants to entertain audiences, meaning that 'their deficiencies were spectacularly visualized whilst normative (middle class) solutions were identified' (Skeggs and Wood, 2012, p216). In these programmes, working-class mothers are overrepresented, and their lives are highlighted as 'pathological, psychologically unhealthy and morally suspect, even as their social class is dismissed. Working-class lives become read as problematic in terms of a cultural deficit or a moral pathology' (Jensen, 2010, p189). Instead of directly describing participants as 'working-class', their lifestyle and cultural life are referenced in 'terms of morality, laxity, choices and identities, without having to talk about class in terms of inequalities, complex material realities and limits' (Jensen, 2010, p188). This type of reality show encourages individuals to work on self-improvement thereby meeting the normative values displayed within and eschewing their working-class values and practices (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). Production of these programmes is predominantly by middle-class programme makers with working-class subjects thereby impacting how 'social class, poverty and welfare are represented and consumed' (De Benedictis et al, 2017 p353). In this way, unequal power relationships exist, and programmes are made with a 'middle-class gaze' (Lyle, 2008). Since the shows are made from a middle-class viewpoint, the focus is individual behaviour rather than recognising structural factors and questioning inequalities.

These shows serve to compound the problematisation of working-class parenting and focus on their behaviour. This can be seen in outputs which aim to target obesity; structural inequalities fail to be questioned, instead 'culturalizing the (re)production of obesity' (Litwack, 2015, p54) and associating it with poor decision-making of the individuals involved. Parallels are drawn between 'improper consumption and national discourses of class and morality' (Litwack, 2015, p55) and focussed on a 'pathology of parenting' (ibid) as the root cause. Reality shows of this type often draw on government advisers and there is a 'homegeneity of views of "help" and health related discourses in the TV shows and related Governmental press releases' (Ferguson, 2010, p89). Overwhelmingly, the problematized families requiring 'help' in these programmes are working-class (Ferguson, 2010). THP represents a turn towards dispensing explicit advice as opposed to modelling parenting redemption and is therefore a site where discourses of 'good' mothering can be explored.

1.6 Structure

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the thesis, explained the focus on white working-class mothers and introduced the research focus and design. In chapter 2 I outline the frameworks, assumptions and expectations underpinning and driving the misrepresentation and stigmatisation of working-class mothers which situates them as problematic. Chapter 3 contextualises this framing historically to consider the policy context and influence of 'expert' discourses on parents. In chapter 4, I set out my research question and how I explore it using a critical discourse analysis of the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* website, narrative analysis of biographical interviews with working-class mothers and autoethnography to situate myself within the project. I reflect on my understanding of parenting and power, drawing on Foucauldian and Bourdiesian theoretical frameworks. Chapter 5 considers current 'good' mothering discourses evident within the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* website since it represents dominant parenting norms. Those norms align closely with policy which situates working-class mothers as requiring advice to alter the way in which they parent their children. It draws upon a middle-class intensive mothering model and promotes this ideal as a means to address an alleged word gap between children which it is claimed means poor children begin school behind their peers. Within the website, key aspects such as housing and time are disregarded. These 'good' mothering discourses, discerned from the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* website are then used to discuss the women's narratives in chapters 6, 7, and 8. Chapter six focusses on home and how this is tied to an idealised notion of family and in

turn forms part of ‘good’ motherhood. It explores how this ideal home is unattainable for families on low incomes and what the reality of home is for them. Chapter seven discusses intensive mothering expectations which add to the invisible work of social reproduction and subsequent impact on women’s time. The chapter draws out the ways in which working-class women manage employment, lack of affordable childcare and the impact of combining roles on them. Chapter 8 concerns working-class women’s mothering values and how these are formed in response to their circumstances. It considers what is important to working-class women and how education is a key site which highlights the classed divergence of mothering values. In chapter 9, the conclusion, I summarise my findings and consider the limitations of the research. Finally, I consider what action may be taken to ensure support aimed at working-class women meets their needs rather than imposes the will of others who have no understanding of what it means to be a working-class mother.

Chapter 2: 'Problem families': the blaming and targeting of poor mothers

This chapter examines how poor families are problematised at the present time and what this means for working-class mothers. It maps the conceptual frameworks, assumptions and expectations underpinning and driving the current misrepresentation and stigmatisation of working-class mothers. It considers how mothers are framed, what it means to be a mother in the present era and how policy since 2010 has contributed to this. The chapter charts the rise in targeting of parents, and more specifically mothers, whereby a programme of austerity has been imposed and welfare benefits and sanctions have progressively decreased living standards for the poorest in society. I consider how these ideological programmes have impacted on working-class families across all areas of their lives including the proliferation of foodbanks which has been normalised under the current government alongside rising precarity in terms of housing and employment. Concurrently, cuts to local authority and departmental budgets have led to increasing difficulty in accessing basic healthcare and the dismantling of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, leaving families and communities attempting to pick up the pieces and hold everything together. Since undertaking my interviews, the situation has worsened through the cost-of-living and energy crises widening the number of people who are having to consider whether they can afford to turn on their heating and reducing their food intake/quality to counter rising costs. However, for people like my interviewees (and me) these are a part of our lives rather than being a novel experience. Within this backdrop of decreasing living standards and hardship, there has been a corresponding push towards dispensing advice to ‘help’ poor families. Increasingly, this type of intervention is viewed as replacing financial or material support.

As the target of various negative parenting discourses over the 27 years I’ve been a mother, I thought it would be useful to share some of the ways in which I have been targeted by well-meaning (and less benevolent) comments or advice. Influencing this, and of interest here, is the pervasive way tropes about benefits claimants have led to intrusive and derogatory assumptions and pronouncements which someone from a firmly middle-class background would not have received.

In hospital after having my third child, during the early hours of the morning, a member of staff attempted to demonstrate breastfeeding to me using a dolly and knitted breast. She was extremely persistent despite me repeatedly saying that I was bottle-feeding. I vividly recall the fervour with which she attempted to convince me that this was a good idea and feeling infantilised (and totally bemused), given I was in my late 30s and had already been a mother for almost twenty years. The lasting impression I got was that she was firmly of the belief she could sway my decision if only I'd listen. During the past year, I have once again found myself on the end of well-meaning advice as my children have attended the government Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) scheme. This programme is provided to children in receipt of Free School Meals and is designed to ensure they are sufficiently fed and entertained during school holiday periods. Instead of giving a benefits uplift during school holidays, organisations apply for funding to provide holiday clubs. My kids attended one of these schemes in a local church and parents were obliged to stay. The volunteers were friendly and well-intentioned but there was a definite saviour air to their activities. Each day they would inveigle you into conversations about your circumstances, whether you were working, when you last ate, etc, and questioning was highly intrusive. I was invited to join a regular adult social group, possibly due to my standoffish reaction to their lines of inquiry.

Probing of this type is deemed acceptable in relation to benefits claimants, particularly when it is packaged as part of an attempt to rescue people. It is almost as though people think they own a part of you. This is noticeable when claiming benefits. I remember presenting in person to sort out a housing benefit claim and being required to show bank statements. The officer ran his finger down the items, commenting on them and raising his eyebrows when he came to 'Nandos'. The inference being that perhaps if I forgo the Nandos I could afford to pay my own rent. Telephone enquiries are similarly difficult, particularly as opening hours meant ringing whilst at work. Often these conversations involve disclosing highly personal information, so certainly not ones to have in an open-plan office or where there is nowhere private to call from. Whilst on teaching placement, I was overheard on the 'phone to school about free school meals and one of the teachers pointedly remarked that she'd worked alongside her training rather than relying on benefits. Thankfully the claims process has moved online so removing the need to present in person or phone up and experience the distain of benefits office employees or colleagues eavesdropping on personal conversations. However, the online portal doesn't understand fixed term or variable contracts, instead assuming this month's earnings will be the same for the other twelve months. If I estimate my annual income at a lower figure to what I end up earning, they are very quick to write assuming

I've deliberately misled them to receive more than my entitlement. It is a cause of underlying anxiety that we might be overpaid and end up in arrears. My reflections explain some of the patronising and invasive aspects of being a working-class mother in receipt of benefits and serve to highlight the reality of the aspects discussed within this chapter.

2.1 Introduction

The chapter will consider two key themes currently impacting working-class mothers: the economic context within which families are living; and how their parenting is problematised. At a time when the welfare state and regulatory control have been stripped back leaving ordinary people struggling to make ends, worsened by successive crises, poor families are increasingly being targeted and expectations on mothers raised. This chapter begins with the economic backdrop within which poor families are living. Context is frequently ignored within parenting discourses or referred to as something which those individuals ought to be actively working to remedy. However, context cannot be ignored by those experiencing it. Comprehensive dismantlement of the safety net once provided by the welfare state and local authority support and services leaves working-class families on a knife-edge. Cuts to benefits and local and national funding since 2010 render families reliant on food banks and other charitable support, at the mercy of immoral and unbridled profiteering by private landlords while the employment promised to lift them out of poverty is fragmented and precarious. Divisions have deepened and become normalised over the last few years alongside increasing exhortations that individual employment, effort, and resilience are the necessary remedies to poverty.

Once the economic context has been laid bare, I will consider the targeting of working-class mothers which has run in tandem with the deliberate destruction of state support for poor families. Targeting of mothers relies upon them being represented as in need of correction, troubled or a risk to their children. Criminalisation of families and child protection procedures have been used to reinforce the perception that these families require external involvement. Early intervention has been invoked as a low-cost means of remedying the issue of 'problem' families. A discussion of this method and the neuroscience used to support it follows. Finally, I will consider the form early intervention takes in the current age of low-cost support.

2.2 Living austerely

This section will unpick and contextualise the onslaught on living standards imposed over the last thirteen years. Where New Labour's term in office is characterised by financial investment in services, the 2008 financial crash and subsequent change of government fundamentally altered that. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition completely reformed the benefits system, using a global financial crisis as a vehicle to introduce 'swingeing cuts to public spending as part of a self-styled age of austerity' (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014 p96). Cuts were made to welfare benefits (through the Welfare Reform Act, 2012 and Childcare Payments Act, 2014) including caps on the total amount of benefit payments a family could receive, a freeze to the rate of payments and higher thresholds for receipt. Caps to benefits include the two-child limit whereby only the first two children in a household would be considered for benefit calculations. Fiscal reforms were also felt by those higher earning families as child benefit ceased to be universal (under the High Income Child Benefit Charge (Finance Act 2012)). In so doing, much of the universal provision initiated under New Labour was heavily reduced or removed entirely and the social investment approach became targeted investment (Edwards and Gillies 2016). What this meant in practice was that policy approaches to family looked similar, particularly between 2010-2015 when the Coalition government was in place, except they applied to a smaller group 'to address the most problematic families' (Purcell, 2020 p105). These benefit cuts already left the poorest families with very little to live on, but exponential rises in living costs have seen households plunged even deeper into poverty and prevented from accessing basic necessities.

The joint effects of government-imposed benefit cuts and economic upheaval have dramatically increased the numbers of people affected by food and fuel poverty and intensified conditions for those who were already struggling. Food price have risen by 19.1% in the year up to March 2023, representing the highest increase since 1977 (Francis-Devine et al, 2023). Food Foundation figures reveal that 'in January 2023, 17.7% of households in the UK were food insecure (ate less or went a day without eating because they couldn't access or afford food), up from 8.8% in January 2022 and 7.4% in January 2021' (Francis-Devine et al, 2023, p5). The rate of children eligible for free school meals is at the highest level since records began in 2006 and has risen acutely since 2018 (Francis-Devine et al, 2023). According to the government's own statistics, 8% of children are living in 'food insecure households' (Francis-Devine, 2023, p8). The government have commissioned successive reviews into food insecurity which have led to recommendations, mainly focussed on educating poor people as opposed to improving financial stability by increasing welfare spending. One of the

actions the government is taking is to fund 'research into the link between ultra-processed food and obesity' (Francis-Devine, 2023, p11). This is an example of the approach to tackling problems associated with poverty which focus on the behaviour of poor people, rather than the poverty itself. The rising problem of food insecurity has led to an exponential rise in food banks over the last twenty years (Francis-Devine, 2023). Over the last year, one of the groups running food banks, the Trussell Trust, revealed that they had provided almost three million emergency food parcels which is 'the highest recorded number and an increase of 37% on the previous year' (Francis-Devine, 2023, p15). These figures do not include the huge number of independent food banks which are filling the gap between rising costs and insufficient incomes (ibid).

In terms of energy, sharp and successive increases in energy prices have affected UK households: 'In the year to May 2023, domestic gas prices increased by 36% and domestic electricity prices by 17%.' (Harari et al, 2023, p23). Such rises increase already high prices which had risen by 95 and 53% respectively in the previous year (ibid). The impact of rising fuel prices mean an estimated 6.7 million UK households are in fuel poverty (as of April 2022) representing 'an increase of more than 50% in just over six months' (National Energy Action, 2022). It is identified that those in low-income households are most impacted by rising prices since proportionally they spend a larger portion of their income on food and energy (Harari et al, 2023). As people in low-income households are already buying the cheapest food and rationing energy use, their only option to save money is to limit their food intake, not heat their home, cook hot food, or use hot water for washing.

Two areas which have created further instability for working-class families are the dual issues of employment and housing. General instability in the labour market, coupled with decreasing wages, and underemployment, has meant that work is no guard against poverty (Canton, 2018). Alongside this, rising inflation has affected food, energy, and housing costs. Many families who make up the 'problem families' this chapter is focussed on are living in privately rented accommodation. This is a sector which has vastly expanded in recent years and lacks the relative security of social renting or home ownership (Clarke et al, 2017). Increasingly, people living in rented housing are vulnerable to eviction, the numbers of which have soared in recent years (Clarke et al, 2017). Eviction is not solely reserved for those who have failed to pay their rent; rising rents and housing demand have led to an increase in 'no fault' evictions (Moore, 2017). What this means is that large numbers of families are living with uncertainty, lacking the security that home ownership or long-term rental brings. Private rental prices have grown by 5% over the past year (to May 2023), which is the

highest growth since 2016 when this recording began, building on a trend of steep increases since 2021 (Harari et al, 2023). It is within this context that working-class mothers are being categorised as problematic and targeted by intervention which seeks to blame their behaviour.

As this section has shown, the day-to-day reality for poor people in the UK today is one of insufficiency, whereby they lack the basic requirements of food, shelter, and warmth. It is an existence characterised by uncertainty, instability, and scarcity. However, rather than addressing those issues, attention is focussed on what individuals should do. To make this palatable, families living in poverty are characterised as problematic thus creating a general acceptance that those families deserve to be in this situation or can redeem themselves by getting a better job, learning to budget or cook, and parenting their children in the correct way. The following section will explore how people are categorised to situate them as blameworthy, beginning with a relabelling of families as 'workless' and/or 'troubled'.

2.3 Labelling families

The Conservative majority 'came to power on a manifesto that evoked family as an individualised worker-citizen unit' (Edwards and Gillies, 2016 p255). Increasingly families were divided between 'strivers' and 'shirkers', terms which were 'further entrenched through a series of measures set out in the Conservative government's Welfare Reform and Work Bill' (Edwards and Gillies 2016 p255). Family policy during this era was very much aimed at those families at the lower end of the socio-economic scale and attempted to recast intractable issues such as socioeconomic disadvantage as something entirely different (Wastell and White, 2017). No longer was socioeconomic disadvantage something which governments ought to assist; responsibility lies with the individual and intervention is necessary to ensure that children do not follow their parents into poverty. It also shapes narratives around child poverty, detaching the child from the family so that he or she may be viewed as innocent.

Since 2015, the Conservative government has continued to enact legislation which reduces government assistance to those reliant on welfare benefits (Welfare Reform and Work Act, 2016) as a means of increasing employment. The terms of the Child Poverty Act, 2010 were repealed by the Welfare Reform Act, 2016 as was the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 (Millar and Ridge, 2020) and the measures used for child poverty removed, being replaced by measures relating to attainment at 16 for children of 'workless' families. It was under this legislation that

encouraging families into employment and raising educational outcomes for poor children were seen as the twin solutions for tackling the root causes of poverty. More recently, in setting out their vision for 'tackling poverty and engrained disadvantage', the DWP (2017) redefined unemployment as worklessness. This term serves to highlight a lack and to draw comparisons between poor families and poor child development, ignoring the high rate of in-work poverty. DWP (2019, p1) state:

> Worklessness damages lives. It reduces families' income and can damage families' resilience, health, stability, and have a long-term impact on children's development. Where problems such as these combine and fuel each other, families edge further and further away from the benefits of work, and children face a greater prospect of repeating the poor outcomes of their parents.

Worklessness is seen as the cause of those problems rather than considering the more complex and nuanced reasons for parents not engaging in employment – whether by choice or lack of availability of suitable employment. Reframing unemployment as worklessness highlights a lack of work when there are several reasons that parents may choose not to work, particularly when their children are young. One might assume that worklessness is high amongst families in poverty: however, over half of those families have at least one adult in work and in total 70% of children living in poverty come from working families (JRF, 2020). In connecting poverty and worklessness, policy fosters the notion that people choose not to work and therefore live in poverty when the reality is that for many, employment does not lift them out of poverty, (Daly and Kelly, 2015; Hartas, 2014). The language around benefits has become more stigmatising at the same time as the amounts being received are lower and worth less since freezes mean awards are outstripped by inflation. As well as being labelled 'workless', some families are defined as 'troubled'. These families are subject to intervention with the aim of correction.

The Troubled Families programme was set up, 'based on a standardised template of intensive family intervention' (Lambert, 2018 p86), utilising targets to create a payment-by-results system. This system was designated a Coalition flagship policy in 2015 and was thus expanded, requiring local authorities to identify and intervene more quickly in greater numbers of 'troubled families' at the same time as loosening the definitional criteria leading to more families being referred to the programme and creating an incentive to local authorities to inflate their success rates to increase their budgets (Lambert, 2018). Troubled Families purported to be for children while labelling,

separating, and subjecting them 'to different forms of state intervention because they are poor and consume the time and resources of the state and its officials' (Lambert, 2018 p88). Since 2021 the Troubled Families programme has been replaced by the Supporting Families Programme with ten outcomes including getting a good education, early years development and improving family relationships (Foster, 2023). Interestingly, outcomes 9 and 10 relate to secure housing and financial stability, but details of how those aims are intended to be addressed are not apparent.

Alongside moves to reform parental behaviour, removal of children is a feature of child protection, with the children of poor families much more likely to have social services involvement (Bilson and Martin, 2017). The numbers of children subject to care orders has risen every year in England since 2008 (DfE, 2020) and 'promotion of permanent alternative placements (whether through adoption or special guardianship) has been a key feature of English child protection policy in the past decade and more' (Bilson and Bywaters, 2020 p6). The figures may suggest a rise in incidence of abuse or improved detection systems; however, Bilson and Martin (2017 p796) highlight the widening of criteria for referral 'from maltreatment to children's well-being' so that although numbers of referrals for physical and sexual abuse remain static, neglect and emotional abuse referrals have more than doubled. In this way, working-class families (particularly mothers) are perceived as risky, troubled, and problematic.

2.4 Gender equality

Despite moves to encourage sexual equality through encouraging shared leave for parents and increasing maternal employment, parenting continues to be very gendered in its nature. Whether employed or not, it is mainly women who do the work of social reproduction and who are usually the main caregivers (Hartas, 2014). Discourses which serve to hold parents accountable for their children's outcomes hold mothers to higher standards of accountability than fathers (Lee et al, 2014; Jensen, 2018). Macvarish and Lee (2019) provide an example of this in their analysis of submissions for an 'Evidence Based Early Intervention' Inquiry, which considered the strength of evidence linking Adverse Childhood Experiences with long-term negative outcomes, finding 223 references to mothers as opposed to just 87 to fathers and 87 to maternal as opposed to just five to paternal. Where fathers were referenced, in only one quarter of all the documents, it was 'often their absence rather than their presence which was the source of concern' (Macvarish and Lee, 2019, p472). Since mothers are held to a higher level of account than fathers, it follows that they

will be the target of policy and the resultant recipients of blame when things are perceived to have gone wrong.

Use of “parenting” in social policy allows one to view messages as being aimed equally at parents, whether they be mothers or fathers; however, this belies the fact that ‘early intervention is almost exclusively targeted at mothers as the core mediators of their children’s development’ (Gillies 2014, p218). Use of gender-neutral language in policy disguises and obscures ‘the gender politics of parent-blame’ (Jensen, 2018, p17). Since policy refers to parents or the primary caregiver, it can be viewed as treating both mothers and fathers equally which conceals the reality that it is more often than not the mother who is the primary caregiver and therefore the one who is held responsible for her children’s development. This implicit accountability means that ‘the particular challenges and disadvantages facing them as women and mothers go unrecognised’ (Gillies, 2014, p218).

Mothers bear the brunt of the increasing expectation of investment in their children’s human capital (see 3.6), leading to what Sharon Hays (1998) terms intensive mothering. Intensive mothering enables ‘the patriarchal mandates of expertization and intensification (to) become fully enacted and enforced’ (O’Reilly, 2016, p49). In effect, the apparatus of state has fully operationalised parenting practices as ‘individual social engineering to produce model citizens’ (Featherstone et al, 2018, p27). In this way, mothers are bound by prevailing ideology to parent in distinct, state-endorsed ways which serve to dictate what good parenting should look like and the set of skills which it entails may be taught by way of parenting classes. Good parenting is ‘presented as a set of neutral and natural techniques, with love and intimacy reduced to mere mechanisms’ and entirely detached from any ‘structural context, culture or values’ (Gillies, 2016, p124). This ignores the many forms parenting takes and serves to narrow those acceptable practices to ones which conform to the prevailing ideology. By these means, good parenting primes children ‘to thrive in a flexible, globalised, knowledge-based economy, and perhaps more importantly, be sufficiently skilled to manage their own risks (low pay, precarious contracts and shifting demands for skills)’ (Gillies, 2020, p170). It naturally follows then that those who do not follow the ‘good’ parenting dictated by parenting programs underpinned by flawed neuroscientific claims (Gillies et al, 2017) are leaving their children open to failure to succeed in the modern world.

2.5 Scrutiny of poor families

In recent years, the government has looked upon education as a means of social justice since it will 'open doors to employment and social opportunities …. academic success, happiness and wellbeing' (DfE (2015a, p95). State intervention in family lives is deemed necessary as 'children only get one chance' (DfE, 2015a, p123); 'All parents have the power to change outcomes for their children, no matter what their background' (HMG and NLT, 2018, p9). Again, the idea that parents have equal 'power' ignores the reality of 'background' whether it relates to material resources, family support networks, culture, education, or availability of employment. In doing so, we are viewed as equal therefore 'failure' is personal and individualised. In using the language of social justice, it is very difficult to argue with policy (Gillies, 2014; Craske, 2018). Greater emphasis has been put on parents of poor children and the harm they can do to them by their unwillingness to change their circumstances rather than considering lack of available options. Not only is government concerned with what parents do to support their children to prepare for school, but those preparations now need to commence at an earlier age due to perceived economic benefits. Initiatives such as the First 1001 Days (Leadsom et al, 2014) concentrates on what parents do pre and post birth leading to even greater scrutiny of parents and what they do with their children. What these policies have served to do is pillory parents, encouraging a culture of blame.

2.6 Early Intervention

Early intervention is an umbrella-term which covers a range of 'interventions' whose stated goal is to provide input early in a child's life to prevent more serious (and costly) interventions in later life. Instead of highlighting 'unequal material and social conditions' and addressing them, it focusses 'on parents and how they rear their children' (Gillies et al, 2017, p3). Interventions include funded pre-school provision; pre- and post-natal advice and information delivered via midwives and the Family Nurse Partnership; parenting classes; and advice relating to parent-child interactions (often termed the Home Learning Environment). The type of problem early intervention seeks to prevent are 'future crime, low attainment, teenage parenthood, and drug and alcohol abuse' (Gillies et al, 2017, p115/6). It is easy to see the appeal of promoting certain parenting practices to prevent social problems of this magnitude.

Use of Early Intervention as a policy-direction really gained impetus once neuroscience was invoked to provide 'evidence' of its importance. Economist James Heckman promoted early

intervention as a way of providing greatest returns. Although first referenced in policy in DfES (2002) *Birth to Three Matters*, it was several years later when *Early Intervention: Good parents, great kids, better citizens* was published which emphasised the 'considerable body of medical evidence' to support the use of Early Intervention (Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008). The document goes on to say that 'medical evidence points overwhelmingly in favour of a shift to Early Intervention' (Allen and Duncan Smith, 2008, p45). Subsequently, Allen writes about the damage caused by 'poor parenting' to the brain, most seriously 'before birth and during the first 18 months of life when the formation of the part of the brain governing emotional development has been identified to be taking place' (2011a p15) which links with the scientisation of parenting. This invocation of poor parenting as being responsible for an undeveloped brain is hyperbolic and the 'science' Allen invokes cannot be traced back to any substantive source (Gillies et al, 2017). Both Allen's documents (2011a and 2011b) have, on their front page, an image of two brains, one 'normal', the other shrunken brain entitled 'extreme neglect', presumably to emphasise the hazards of not intervening early. Tickell (2011, p8) also makes reference to 'neuroscientific evidence' when reviewing the Early Years curriculum. Field makes even greater claims, including: 'By the age of three, a baby's brain is 80% formed and his or her experiences before then shape the way the brain has grown and developed' (2010, p5) although this claim is not referenced so it is unclear where this percentage is taken from. In her review of child protection systems, Munro writes of 'the growing body of evidence of the effectiveness of early intervention with children and families' (2011, p7) referencing the work of Allen, Tickell and Field who all depend upon the same evidence for their reports.

It is difficult to rely on the evidence of research used in these reports since most of it comes from child advocacy groups making unsubstantiated claims (Gillies et al, 2017) and many aspects of public service have been outsourced and services must bid for funding. This means research and evaluation is undertaken with the view to securing further funding so the whole process is skewed, highlight Gillies et al, (2017), who have traced back the 'evidence' for Early Intervention which relies on US studies, undertaken by the individual who designed the programme therefore cannot be described as independent, amongst other reasons for its lack of substance. Alongside this, those outsourced services have served to create a business-case for Early Intervention. As Allen reports the intention was to 'create a market in early intervention and social investment' (2011b xvi). Once funding becomes reliant on proving the success of an intervention, the need to produce evidence of success becomes ever stronger. Brain science was used within policies on early

education, maternal and infant health, public health and child protection 'often with no reference given to the source', thus cementing the theory firmly into public life (Macvarish, 2016, p67). Neuroscience continues to be invoked as a key reason for Early Intervention since the period from conception to age two is a 'peak period of growth' when the brain must achieve 'optimum development and nurturing' with connections being created at a rate of 'one million per second' (Leadsom et al, 2014, p5). These policies, which highlight the effects of poor parenting practices on infant brain development, serve to create a connection between parenting and poverty since they also highlight the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. In so doing, Early Intervention discourses equate social inequalities to 'stunted brain development, which in turn is a product of dysfunctional parenting' (Gillies et al, 2017, p132). Neuroscientific evidence and explanations are viewed as rigorous given their scientific base. Science has been used in this way for the last century since it supports the principal doctrine.

2.7 Focus on behaviour

The early intervention movement and attendant focus on school readiness and the attainment gap has been used to centre individuals and behavioural change techniques, removing emphasis on structural factors (Macvarish and Lee, 2019). Welfare reforms since 2010 (under the guise of austerity) have meant that financial support has been reduced and removed from those families on the lowest incomes, pushing greater numbers into poverty – whether or not someone in the household is in employment. Reduction of welfare benefits, together with policies which serve to divide families between 'hard-working' ie employed (in work which pays a sufficient amount to preclude welfare benefits) and those who rely on welfare benefits (who are may also be employed but in work which is low paid). Those 'hard-working' families may be receiving 30 hours of funded childcare but that is not deemed a welfare benefit as it is only for families where both parents (or a lone parent) is employed despite it being worth over £5,000 a year for those families who receive it (DfE, 2015b). It is possible to have one parent working full-time on minimum wage and still be in receipt of two-year old funding, however it is often thought as being solely for the unemployed/workless. The Early Intervention project allows government to focus on the intimate lives of parents on low incomes through a supposed lens of support meaning those parents are held to a higher level of account than more affluent parents. It also serves to set a benchmark of a 'good' parent against which parents may define themselves serving to 'Other' certain groups of parents; 'Mother-blaming can thus be conceived of as a stigmatising repository for social ills' since it is the poor, single or minority-ethnic mothers who bear the brunt of this blame (Jensen, 2018,

p19). One of the sites this occurs in is the Home Learning Environment (HLE). Note here that it is what happens within the home rather than the physical environment itself which, as discussed above, is often not guaranteed for families targeted by this initiative.

2.8 Home Learning Environment

When describing the HLE, substance is given to what is done rather than where it occurs, for example it is the interactions which are extrapolated, assuming or disregarding the circumstances in which some children may be living. DfE state children from more affluent backgrounds 'often with extensive support at home' (2017, p12) begin school ahead of their less affluent peers, citing the major determinant of early childhood development as 'what happens in the home' (ibid). This message permeates government policy, beyond that of education to other areas, with the Department for Health and Social Care parroting the message of education policy that parents must be supported to 'help their children's language development at home' as a means of improving 'future life chances' (2018, p20). The All Party Parliamentary Group for Conception to Age 2 – The First 1001 Days (APP) (2015) state that our historic approach in Britain is to treat child welfare as a private practice and that agencies only get involved when things go wrong: they castigate this approach as expensive. Making the case for Early Intervention clear, APP report: 'These are the children, and the families they go on to parent, who can cost society astronomical sums' (2015, p17). The spectre of generations of poor parents producing poor children looms. When APP state 'higher and more rapid payback' (2015, p19) in relation to the investment in Early Intervention, it illuminates that this is seen as a cheaper and more effective way of dealing with the "problem" of poor parents. Gillies writes of 'a concerted program to promote childhood investment as an alternative to the welfare state' (2014, p204) which encourages policies that invest in the early years to save money in the future. These messages pervade policy, for example DfE write: 'If disadvantaged pupils in all regions of this country performed as well as disadvantaged pupils in London, this would lead to an overall benefit to the UK economy of over £20 billion' (2017, p7). The stress here is on benefits to the economy rather than the affected individuals as no longer is the aim for everyone to enjoy a reasonable standard of living; now it is that the country is economically productive.

Drawing attention to what happens in the home means less interest is paid to other factors which may be beneficial for children. Placing the emphasis on individuals to be the architects of their futures removes the need for the State to provide assistance since it is within the home that the

most important things occur. HM Government and National Literacy Trust state: 'The Home Learning Environment (HLE) is interactions in and around the home which support a child's learning, such as reading, learning numbers and to count, playing with words and letters or singing nursery rhymes, songs or poems' (2018, p14). Despite the emphasis on the HLE within policy, research by Melhuish and Gardiner (2018) shows the biggest determinant in cognitive outcomes to be maternal education and for socio-emotional outcomes, the quality of the parent-child relationship. Hartas agrees, finding 'who the parents are is more important than what parents do' (2014, p85). Despite this, policy has focused and continues to focus on parent behaviour instead of investment in adult education and nurturing the parent-child relationship. Promotion of employment as the solution to reducing the attainment gap seems to run counter to the findings of Melhuish and Gardiner (2018), especially as the type of work available to lone parents and those with lower educational qualifications is more likely to be insecure and low-paid.

2.9 Parent behaviour and mother blame

The constant reiteration that low attainment is a result of inadequate parenting in families experiencing poverty has begun to create an environment whereby social background is discussed in isolation to poverty, so that it becomes the problem of the individual, rather than society. Ofsted refers to breaking 'an inter-generational cycle of low achievement' (2014, p12) through attending early education as though that which some parents, ie poor, pass on must be broken or removed. This reinforces the policy position of providing funded nursery to children of low-income families as they cannot or will not provide the early building blocks needed for a good start in life, once again disregarding mitigating factors such as homelessness and precarious or irregular employment. Ofsted claim 'strong associations between a child's social background and their readiness for school', measured by their progress against early learning goals, with children lacking 'a firm grounding in the key skills of communication, language, literacy and mathematics' (2014, p4). It is useful to consider what purpose policy initiatives serve when the purported 'problem' they seek to address is overstated (in relation to crime) or nothing new (in relation to the connection between low attainment and poverty). Why then is school readiness emphasised in modern policy? When did children have to become ready for school rather than school being ready for children? It is linked to ideas of neoliberal social investment in human capital (explored in the following chapter) wherein 'early childhood centres are factories for early learning goals and "school readiness"' (Moss, 2015, p231). In creating uniformity and measurement of those early learning goals, early childhood staff are obliged to centre those aspects within their settings,

creating further systems of governance supported by 'science' which is 'capable of regulating childhoods and exerting strong control over children and adults alike' (Moss, 2015, p236). Education in this mould has as its de facto goal 'ensuring neoliberal subjects' (Moss, 2015, p231). It opens a conduit into the lives of those families whose children do not meet the specified learning goals, making them the object of early intervention. When describing school readiness, Ofsted (2014) place emphasis on 'those that are poor', once again perpetuating the notion that there is an inherent deficit in the parenting behaviours in families who are income-poor rather than the more complex picture which exists.

Recent reforms serve to transform 'familial dynamics, arrangements, and practices into a scene in which the government can and should intervene, in order to stop the reproduction of poverty, disadvantage, and worklessness' (Lehtonen, 2018, p87). As discussed, work does not always offer a route out of poverty, since available jobs may not alleviate material deprivation. The Social Mobility Commission raise the fact that 'parents who work long unsocial hours, in jobs that offer little flexibility, may not be in a position to help their children access activities' (2019, p63) and that there is a greater likelihood of this in lower income households. Looking to employment to solve poverty has been shown to be ineffectual and the House of Commons Education Committee report that during their inquiry, income poverty was identified by witnesses 'as one of the biggest influences on life chances' (2019, p6). Structural factors must be considered rather than it being left to parents to imitate the behaviours of others in order to give their children better life chances (La Placa and Corlyon, 2016). In fact, government policies themselves appear to be responsible for rising inequalities, as they have 'an important role in responding to structural forces and mediating their damaging effects on inequality' (Joyce and Xu, 2019, p22). When investigating the effects of the two-child limit for child benefit, '95 per cent of survey respondents said that the two-child limit had affected their ability to pay for basic living costs, including 88 per cent who said it had affected their ability to pay for food and clothing' (Sefton et al, 2019, p2). This research found that families were experiencing 'severe and ongoing financial difficulty and being forced into debt just to cover basic living costs each month' (ibid). Considering this, it is difficult not to sense a group of families have been created with the express purpose of highlighting their deficiencies. Early Intervention Foundation state that 'for families where there is economic pressure, parents are at an increased risk of emotional distress, including anxiety and depression' (2019, p13). Surely the solution to reducing these effects therefore is to increase material circumstances for families experiencing

poverty. However, this runs counter to the hegemonic narrative that everyone can succeed, regardless of background, if only they work hard enough and are resilient.

2.10 Resilience required

It is not simply Ofsted which disregards structural barriers to a child's successful engagement with education; DfE situate schools as somewhere 'children from all backgrounds' may 'shape their own destiny' (2015a, p5). It is somewhat disingenuous to expect a child from an impoverished background to 'shape their own destiny' without the material resources that more affluent children possess. It is 'worklessness–instead of material or economic poverty' that policy deems necessary to focus on 'in order to help families take advantage of the opportunities on offer in a "fairer Britain"' which serves 'to individualise the causes of both poverty and worklessness' (Lehtonen, 2018, p90). The emphasis on employment as the only solution for families to succeed in escaping poverty runs through modern social policy despite evidence that most children in poverty are in working households (JRF 2020). DfE describe the type of character that children should be instilled with in order to be successful: 'being resilient and knowing how to persevere, how to bounce back if faced with failure, and how to collaborate with others at work and in their private lives' (2015a, p94). Increasingly, 'discourses of character focus on remaking or improving the subject's interiority as a way of weathering chronic hardship and worsening insecurity' (Bull and Allen, 2018, p396). The scale of resilience necessary for children in families who are experiencing material deprivation to 'bounce back' is far greater than those whose lives are untouched by eviction, hunger, overcrowding etc and have no awareness of such a position. Poor environments have been found to be a factor in determining child outcomes (La Placa and Corlyon, 2016), which is not something easily or necessarily remedied by resilience or perseverance.

Despite this, policy has concentrated on the concept that parent behaviour is the main influencing factor in determining a child's future success (Gillies et al, 2017). This neatly serves to divide parents into good and bad, depending on how well their children fare in terms of school-readiness, meeting early learning goals, verbal and non-verbal ability, emotional control and social behaviour. Instead of viewing the bigger picture, policy narrows the causes for the attainment gap to poor parenting which includes decisions parents make about what their children eat, play with, whether they attend preschool (and how many hours) and the HLE they provide. Gillies writes: 'Good parenting became associated with choosing, accessing and continuously evaluating products and services (food, toys, childcare, parenting advice etc.)' (2014, p211). Within this framework, it is

easy to see how the ethos of market has filtered into everyday family life: to be a good parent, children should be treated as a project to be successfully completed – follow the required steps and this will be achieved. This belies the truth that all children do not begin equal: the circumstances they are born into have an impact on their outcomes. Longitudinal data suggests the biggest influences on outcomes are demographic, the three most influential being: 'child's sex, child's age in school year and mother's educational level' (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2020, p134). Disregarding factors other than parent behaviour leads to 'cruel optimism' as it promotes the myth that 'opportunities to make good from inauspicious beginnings become attainable through the way mothers bring up their children' (Gillies et al, 2017, p132). And the reverse is also then true; when children do fall behind their peers, the fault for that lies with their mothers. Since the odds are stacked against children from disadvantaged families, when they fail to meet required educational standards, their mothers can be blamed for not trying hard enough (Gillies, 2014). Embedded within this discourse is the idea that failure occurs when we do not strive hard enough and if we simply follow the advice and do the right thing success will ensue.

2.11 Disseminating early intervention

Reduced expenditure at a national and local level on actual physical services has led to an increase emphasis on deploying technology to fill gaps. This has led to an increase in advice and intervention taking the form of websites or apps. For example, the Department for Education's *Hungry Little Minds* campaign which aims 'to give parents access to video tips, advice and suggested games to help with early learning' (DfE, 2019a). Naming the campaign *Hungry Little Minds* at a time when children from poor families are actually hungry given benefits cuts, caps and freezes have run alongside rising living costs, is particularly grotesque. Working alongside 'a coalition of businesses and organisations, including the LEGO Group, Penguin Random House, Arriva and the Greggs Foundation' (Department for Education, 2019a), this campaign involved the creation of a new app, EasyPeasy. Supplementing this campaign, the Department for Education issued guidance to parents on choosing educational apps (DfE, 2019b). Notably for this research project, the government's *Hungry Little Minds* campaign bears a striking resemblance to the BBC's *Tiny Happy People*, both in terms of its aims and use of technology to dispense advice. Within these initiatives is an emphasis on engaging and informing parents, but particularly working-class mothers, with the object of imposing a model of parenting viewed as being capable of correcting the attainment gap and reducing poverty while simultaneously ignoring the reality of their material circumstances.

2.12 Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, working-class mothering has been portrayed as problematic and requiring correction, serving to situate mothers as the problem and solution in relation to poverty, crime, and the attainment gap. Amidst a background of increasingly harsh conditions, working-class women face misrecognition for their failure to adopt middle-class parenting values which are based on an idealised intensive mother (Hays, 1996), who is actively involved in creating a positive home learning environment, which will serve to improve children's educational attainment and socio-emotional outcomes. All attention is focussed on the behaviour of those mothers while we are encouraged to look the other way and ignore the terrible conditions wreaked by austerity and the cost-of-living crisis. A reliance on food banks and supermarket vouchers for pupils on free school meals has been normalised as has in-work poverty and the acceptance of using bailiffs to evict families, even if they have kept up to date with rent payments. Expecting people to manage a household in these circumstances is near impossible, but stigmatising working-class women for failing to adhere to middle-class 'good' mothering alongside this is unfathomable. However, that is their reality. Not only are working-class mothers blamed, but they are also denied the resources needed to parent and live well. Increasingly working-class mothers have been labelled as 'hard to reach' and elaborate policies developed to target, inform, and educate them to ensure their children's future success and removal from poverty. It is not the method of dissemination which needs to change but rather an acknowledgement that these types of intervention do not work since they do not meet the needs of the women heading up the 'problem' families they seek to address. The next chapter will consider how mothers became the target of state intervention over the last century, with their children increasingly becoming viewed as resources which set the scene for the casting of working-class women and their children as 'Problem Families' who are the target of early intervention.

Chapter 3: Historical Context: human capital, neuroscience, and family intervention

The previous chapter looked at how working-class mothers are categorised as 'problem families' in recent policymaking and how that label is used to justify punishing regimes of benefit sanctions, presumed criminality, early intervention and assumed deficits. Mothering is problematised and intervened in as a way of tackling social problems. As this chapter will demonstrate, this framing is nothing new. Drawing on material covering the period from the interwar period, this chapter will show that various iterations of the same idea stretch back through history. What the chapter will also highlight is that those initiatives did not work then, and they are not working now. I will draw on the continuities and differences in how mothers have been positioned and targeted, and how dissemination methods have evolved but the underlying ideas remain remarkably constant.

My own experiences of being a mother straddle two distinct phases covered within this chapter. I had my first child in 1996, shortly before New Labour were elected. Although I was aware of them being in power, many of the changes implemented and discourses abounding were outside my direct knowledge as I didn't read the papers or watch the news. I now know that there was an emphasis on lone mothers during this time which probably accounts for my colleagues' comments about 'hand-outs' and questioning me as to why I hadn't been given a nursery place for my son because I'd be top of the list being a single mother. Whilst pregnant I joined the Council and Housing Association waiting lists as my parents wanted me to be independent. Fortunately, social housing was reasonably easy to come by in the place I was living, and I moved into a back-to-back close to the neighbourhood I grew up in. At the time I was working as an office junior in a big law firm in the city centre. When describing the house to one of the solicitors, I was listing the plus points and said there was a bin yard next to my house; they thought I'd said 'vineyard', demonstrating the gulf between us. Moving into a house on a low income and with little savings meant I acquired furniture on a piecemeal basis until month-by-month I had somewhere to sit, sleep and cook by the time my baby came. In the context of the previous chapter, when I was a teenage single parent, living independently for the first time whilst navigating benefits, employment and a tricky relationship with my son's father, my health visitor identified that I was

'stressed' so gave me a relaxation tape. Although it was given in good faith, I never listened to it because my problems couldn't be fixed by a tape. A tape couldn't put money in my electricity meter or prevent domestic violence.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will pick up from the previous one by unpicking the origins of that 'othering' created by 'problem families' terminology. Although responsibilisation of poor parents has a much older history, the chronology of this chapter will begin a century ago in the period after the first world war when children began to be viewed in terms of their future. It will pick up on eugenics which, despite falling out of favour due to the horrors of the second world war, underpins ways of thinking about and categorising people which persist. Although it is no longer acceptable to openly use the term, subsequent discourses draw on eugenic thinking. I will then discuss the period immediately after the second world war as this is a defining moment in social and political history which had a huge impact on families. I will explain how the establishment of the welfare state as part of the post-war settlement positioned mothers and was rooted in the attachment theory of John Bowlby, drawing out how this framed mothers and their perceived role in society. Alongside this, increasing focus on children's futures tied to nation building meant that education for all was deemed important. As a result of this, connections between education and what happens in the home began to be drawn, as highlighted in the *Report of the committee on maladjusted children* (Underwood et al, 1955). Social and political changes of the 1960s and 70s began to shift notions of women's roles in relation to employment, eventually leading to the normalisation, in the latter part of the century, of dual income households. These changes were influenced by neoliberalism embraced by Margaret Thatcher. In the late twentieth century, under New Labour, this would morph into a more distinct focus on social investment, with children being viewed in terms of their human capital. Practical steps were undertaken to connect poverty and behaviour in the public conscience in the form of SureStart and associated early invention; and Parenting Orders which identified 'risky' parents. Under subsequent administrations, tightening of fiscal policy ratcheted up the target approach of early intervention whilst removing financial support from families. The chapter will end with an examination of the evolution in methods of dissemination of parenting advice and self-help strategies to regulate and normalise one form of mothering, thereby providing the context for my subsequent analysis of *Tiny Happy People*.

3.2 Interwar period

Social Darwinist ideas underpinned the eugenics movement and were used to provide evidence of difference between groups of people, categorising those from racialised minorities and the working class as inferior. Interest in eugenics coincided with concerns related to extreme poverty evident through urbanisation and exposed during the first world war, with a particular anxiety around declining birth rates (especially amongst the middle classes); eugenicists believed this would reduce the nation's strength since the poor were breeding at a higher rate (quoted as 50% although this was later debunked) (Soloway, 1995). Differences in the birth rate of middle and working classes were often assumed to be bigger than they were. The eugenic movement, headed from 1931 by psychiatrist C.P. Blacker (Redvaldsen, 2017), was at its peak in 1930s Britain at a time of deep recession. Influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin and natural selection, the movement concluded that poverty was the result of inferior genes. It was comprised of 'distinguished natural and social scientists, literary intellectuals, and social activists' (Renwick, 2016 p849). Notable members would be instrumental in fashioning the post-war settlement, namely the economist John Maynard Keynes and economist, politician and social reformer William Beveridge. Their ideas fed into discussions of how to improve the British stock and divided people into skilled and unskilled when discussing birth rates, with the idea that undesirables should be discouraged from reproducing. The faction 'favoured selective inducements to marriage and parenthood among the genetically fit while opposing interventionist measures likely to encourage the reproduction of their hereditary opposites' (Soloway, 1995, p292). There was a connection 'between eugenics and quantitative social mobility research' via individuals and institutions (Renwick, 2016 p848). Those studies undertaken in the interwar period informed modern understandings of social mobility and meritocracy. Although falling out of favour following the horrors of the Second World War, the eugenic foundations of research on social mobility after the war particularly 'the relationship between population research and eugenics, is therefore highly significant' (Renwick, 2016 p866). Prior to this, eugenic ideas were openly embraced around the world and in many countries; this meant sterilisation or institutionalisation of those deemed unfit to reproduce. Problem families were 'held to be genetically deficient and to display criminal tendencies; poorly developed both mentally and physically, they were unattractive to normal members of the population; and their weaknesses were inherited by their children' (Starkey, 2000 p48).

Since Jean Piaget first developed his theories around stages of child development and Sigmund Freud highlighted concerns around emotional maladjustment, interest in psychoanalysis and the

influences of early experiences on development have continued to be refined to explain social and behavioural phenomena. In the UK, it was mainly in the aftermath of the first world war, when many soldiers returning from combat were found to be suffering from mental ill health. Psychoanalysis emerged as a dominant lens for understanding children's lives and was embraced by policy makers with its impact being present within medicine, law, education, and social welfare (Hendrick, 2016). This thinking led to a raft of changes impacting upon the family: developing a very particular understanding of how children learn, moving away from former economic models, which viewed children as labour, and legislating for a changing world. In the interwar period, John Bowlby was developing his attachment theory through his work in child guidance clinics. He described the negative effects of an insecure mother-child bond which he termed a 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988) which was to be very much embraced in the following decades and adopted in everyday life and across the social spectrum. The popularity of this branch of science was in part due to effects of large-scale changes, both at home and abroad with mass urbanisation and the effects of successive wars felt heavily by leaders and within the wider population. Advocates of child guidance believed it to be the answer to the impact of the changing world on the mental ill-health of children which would be 'prevented or ameliorated through the insights offered by modern medicine and science' and benefit society as well as the individual patients (Stewart, 2011, p796). After the second world war the Pacifist Service Unit dispensed advice on parenting and household management through their volunteer network. During this period, the 'spectre of the problem family tempered any complacency that families in general could be left to develop desired standards of behaviour without expert welfare guidance' (Hendrick, 2016, p85).

3.3 Post-war settlement

Pivotal to any discussion of the history of the family is the end of the second world war since this marked 'the beginning of a new social and political emphasis on its envisaged role as a core institution in the post-war welfare state' (Hendrick, 2016 p63). Resulting wartime upheaval brought into focus the importance to which family relationships could be put in governing the country. Hendrick (2016 p64) writes of a contemporary consensus that 'rebuilding of the family would be integral to the development of the post-war world'. At this time, a whole raft of legislation was introduced which affected children and families, introducing the National Health Service, payment of family allowance to mothers and extending compulsory education. Together these changes

sought to improve health and education for all to rebuild the country following the end of the second world war. When the post war reconstruction began, discussions of problem families and psychoanalysis contributed to ideas about family norms. These discussions helped to form the basis of what would be the post war settlement eg the establishment of the National Health Service and Welfare State. Hendrick (2016 p79) writes: 'In claiming to identify degenerative lifestyles, the discussions implicitly promoted an idea of what "the family" *should* be, while simultaneously identifying the economic, social and psychological stresses in conflict with the ideal'. Discussions of the family were central to the post-war settlement and the previous notion that family-life was private (with the exception of those from poor families) and should remain untouched by the state was beginning to diminish in favour of the collective good.

The way in which children were perceived in this period of upheaval would see them come to be viewed as 'future citizens' (King, 2016, p392). In placing importance on children's futures, economic investment was deemed vital and there was political consensus on that aim. However, this 'did not necessarily benefit children, or at least all children' (King, 2016, p393). Notably, 'the child who would be most useful in the future was envisaged as usually white, male, and embodying middle-class values' (King, 2016, p410). Together with the emphasis on attachment, focus on mothering at this time was based around physical presence emphasising the importance of them being at home.

John Bowlby was commissioned by the World Health Organisation in 1951 to report on the effects of children becoming orphans, since the war had left many children in this position. This was not an impartial appointment as Franzblau identifies: 'When theory is in the interest of those in power, policy is not far behind, and there was certainly nothing in Bowlby's history or thinking to suggest that he would contradict the prevailing maternalist ideology' (1999, p28). Bowlby's appointment was certain to consolidate the maternalist thinking and as such cemented attachment theory firmly in policy and popular discussions in the UK. For parents this clearly delineated their roles, with fathers positioned as breadwinners and mothers as homemakers. In their role as housewives, women were targeted through health visitors and advice books. As part of the new welfare state marriage guidance was now available to address the perceived concern related to 'the psychological health of the growing population reared outside of the nuclear family' (Chettiar, 2016, p567). The importance of the nuclear family relied upon mothers being married and raising children who were well-adjusted. Their presence in the home was key to attachment theory and ideas around children's development. However, not all women were able to remain at home with

their children. Working-class women often had to combine their mothering and employment, so could not constantly be present. When women failed to meet these standards, their children became the target of child protection social workers. Local authority children's departments were established under the 1948 Children's Act to 'rehabilitate and educate neglectful parents' (Cretney, 2005 p686). This Act was designed to address the 'moral panic over unruly children and urban poverty accompanying wartime evacuations' (Lambert, 2018 p82) led by the Women's Group on Public Welfare. Since there were no funds in place to undertake preventative work, in practice it was not done by local authorities but was instead picked up by voluntary associations, albeit in a modest and haphazard way (Holman, 1988). Officials interpreting instructions for dealing with those families had a definite interpretation of what that meant so that narrowly defined interventions were deployed focussing on mothering behaviour rather than families' material context (Lambert, 2018). This focus and framing of poor mothers as deficient in maternal skills whilst ignoring that this is symptomatic of their poverty is evident in today's parenting discourses.

Alongside charitable campaigning and reports, the government has commissioned research into perceived problems to seek solutions; these focussed on education and social conditions amongst other things. One such report, commissioned by the Minister of Education, in summarising actions stated: 'The fundamental importance of the family as a whole should be borne in mind by those responsible for strengthening and developing the social services, and action designed to keep the family together should be regarded as one of the most important aspects of prevention' (Underwood et al, 1955, p141). This ties in with the terms of the 1948 Children's Act which recommended preventative work with the aim of keeping children with their families, in a change to previous legislation which sought to remove children from their problem families. Citing contemporary research, the Underwood report concludes 'the most formative influences are those which the child experiences before he comes to school at all' and by then 'certain attitudes' (1955, p14) have developed definitively affecting the entirety of the child's ensuing development. As the previous chapter highlighted, this thinking has resurfaced more recently in relation to the Home Learning Environment.

Whilst the second world war was to be the catalyst for the modern welfare state, by the 1960s and into the 1970s, there was increasing pushback by the women's liberation movement against the idea of a woman's role being solely mother and housewife. Due to post-war labour shortages and feminist campaigns for equality of opportunity, the notion of family was changing from the post-

war male-breadwinner/female-housewife model as increasing numbers of women entered the workforce and were beginning to dispute the status quo whereby they were required to remain at home and their needs made secondary to the needs of their husband. Greater numbers of women in the workforce led to campaigns for equal pay and opportunities and more women were beginning to see the benefits of raising children alone instead of remaining in violent or exploitative relationships. Changes in divorce law in 1969 led to an increase in women raising children alone. Wives were becoming more likely to petition for divorce (despite being more likely to suffer financially as a result) (Thane, 2013). Consistently, repeated references to lone parents (or more precisely mothers) problematise these families, despite them becoming more commonplace. The problem is not framed in terms of the lack of financial means of these families but rather the potentially harmful effects on children of being raised by one parent.

3.4 Thatcher's family values

Huge social and economic changes during the 1970s had triggered a move away from the Keynesian economics adopted when the welfare state was established. Capitalism had created a crisis in the economy (Rogers, 2013) wrongly attributed to 'disproportionate welfare spending' (Garside, 1998 p50), despite Britain spending less on welfare (as a percentage of GDP) than many of its European counterparts. Due to this, when Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979 and embraced neoliberalism, there was little resistance. She 'promoted free market economics and sought to shrink the size of the state and make reliance on benefits increasingly unsustainable' (Knight et al, 2020 p24). Despite being the UK's first female prime minister, Thatcher was strongly committed to a traditional family model and sought to promote family values. This was especially 'in terms of family responsibility (to counter social provision) and family structure (against the lone parent)' (Pascall, 1997 p293). Thatcher's family values embraced the notion that families should be responsible for their own success and failure, rather than government (Thatcher, 1987). This was used as justification for reductions in public services (Pascall, 1997), having gendered and classed implications and leaving (particularly poor) women with less choice. Simultaneously opening up markets, emphasising personal freedom and economic liberation served to destabilise jobs meaning that families could no longer rely on the old breadwinner model.

The wider economic situation impacted upon families in that, increasingly, Britain was seeking to compete on a global stage while at the same time, attempting to retain traditional family structures. Family life was evolving as divorce rates increased and families were beginning to take

more diverse forms, so Thatcherism sought to put family on the agenda to counter that. Increasingly during this period, government policy did not keep up with the reality of family life; instead, it tried to retain 'the Beveridge family in structure, roles and responsibilities (Pascall, 1997 p295) whilst simultaneously reducing state support. Although family values were important during this period, family policy was superseded by the needs of economic policy (Pascall 1997) serving to disrupt the family since 'deregulating markets undermined men's job security, their breadwinning and mortgage-paying; it encouraged women out of the home' (Pascall, 1997 p300). Coupled with this, the rise of the 'New Right' 'sought to shift policy away from state assistance and towards moral regulation' (Gillies, 2005a p72) promoting the moral underclass discourse. That discourse was built around ideas of generational transmission.

The notion of generational transmission is not a new one and has its modern origins in the late Victorian era when urbanisation led to greater numbers of people living in cities than the countryside for the first time (Ball, 2017). Terrible living conditions meant that social problems were magnified, and people became concerned about 'crime, juvenile delinquency, changing kinship structures and gender relations, "race" immigration and general immorality' (Ball, 2017 p65). Discussions centred around the urban poor and their drunken, criminal or immoral behaviour (Ball, 2017). These ideas were to be revisited and drawn upon in the 1960s when cultural and environmental factors were beginning to be considered, most notably through American anthropologist Oscar Lewis's 'culture of poverty'. His study on poverty in Mexico claimed people living in those communities had 'a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependency, of not belonging' (Lewis, 1963 p7). Using similar ideas, the Plowden report into education suggested that parents would 'initiate a vicious downward circle' (Plowden,1967 p37) if they provided insufficient educational encouragement, 'from generation to generation' (ibid). Later in the report, when discussing specific groups, for example 'gypsies', Plowden (1967 p59) writes, 'unless action is taken to arrest the cycle, their children will in turn suffer educational deprivations which will become increasingly severe in their effects as general standards of education rise'. Here it can be seen that it is not the poverty which is the problem but the presumed attitude and behaviour of the parents. Along similar lines and echoing eugenic ideas, Keith Joseph (who would go on to closely advise Margaret Thatcher) spent many years putting forth his proposition that entrenched poverty was due to a cycle of deprivation. In his speech of 1974, Keith Joseph referred to children being born to mothers least equipped to raise them, highlighting that they were teenaged, single, working-class, and lacking intelligence (Denham and Garnett, 2002). His recommendation was to

extend family planning to these women otherwise 'Britain's economic decline would be compounded by moral degeneration' (Denham and Garnett, 2002, p197). Although less severe than the forced sterilisation of earlier in the century, this thinking harks back to eugenicist arguments of the 1930s. In an interview with the BBC on 31 August 2006 Tony Blair said that for some people 'their problems are not simply about low income' echoing Keith Joseph in the 1970s and Oscar Lewis in the 1960s (Welshman, 2006 p476) and connected poverty to 'lifestyle issues' for some people (ibid). Similarities between the speeches of Tony Blair and Keith Joseph are 'the belief that some groups have been left untouched by rising living standards and the growth of the welfare state, the focus on intergenerational continuities, the enumeration of problem groups, the focus on early intervention, and the reference to evidence' (Welshman, 2006 p482). The next sections will explore New Labour and the early intervention project introduced during this era which would come to define 'support' in relation to poor families.

3.5 New Labour and Social investment

Continuing to embrace the neoliberal concepts of individualism and parental choice promoted under Thatcher, New Labour's incarnation led to recognition and acceptance of the family in many different forms and huge investment in public services. However, economically, New Labour trod a similar path to their predecessors – relying on market forces to regulate activity and increasing accountability and performativity in the name of improving standards. New Labour promised to put family at the centre of the policy agenda, viewing families primarily as 'institutions of social control and social welfare' (Prideaux, 2005 p129). Following Thatcher's neoliberalism which rolled back the state, New Labour presented themselves as challenging this by re-investing in certain public services, namely education and raising in-work benefits. New Labour's use of social investment marked a move away from policies of redistribution, characteristic of previous Labour administrations. Instead, they pursued a model combining social integration (acquired through employment) together with an idea of a moral underclass who are dependent on welfare benefits. Levitas (1998) identifies three models to address social exclusion: redistribution; social investment; and a moral underclass discourse. The moral underclass aspect was a continuation of the Thatcher policies of the 1980s (Levitas 1998) but the emphasis on social investment meant that it was not immediately apparent. New Labour distinguished themselves 'from uncaring and unsocial Thatcherism whilst remaining committed to the neo-liberal, anti-collectivist and globalizing agendas which Thatcherism made central to UK governance' (Byrne, 2005 p56). Social inclusion

was seen as a route out of poverty; people would be helped into employment to enable them to be more actively engaged citizens. In effect, social investment meant education was seen as an investment in people, a means of increasing their human capital thereby extending the role of parents.

To address the problem of generational transmission within a social investment society, Tony Blair focused on parenting, since it was his government's belief that 'inadequate parenting is the source of serious social ills, driving a cycle of deprivation and generating crime and anti-social behaviour' (Gillies, 2005b p838). Running concurrent to early investment narratives at this time was the idea of protection, whereby children must be protected from 'exposure to violence, physical and sexual abuse, drugs and alcohol and adult internet content' (Redmond, 2010 p474). To promote the underclass discourse (Levitas, 1998), rising concerns were voiced within government about these issues and New Labour introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), despite falling crime rates, to manufacture concern around problems of street crime, drunkenness, violence, and disorder. This has parallels with earlier concerns arising from urbanisation in the Victorian era, which were 'behaviours associated with a particular social class, and most especially with its young males' (Squires, 2008). MP Frank Field's *Neighbours from Hell* (2003, p84) described parents 'who cannot or will not control their children'. In encouraging people to focus on anti-social behaviour, it widened the definition and thus overstated and magnified problems leading to less tolerance of the behaviour of neighbours but especially young people. Like the Conservatives before them, New Labour had claimed a problem with drunkenness while at the same time relaxing licensing laws which allowed pubs to open all day and night to promote the economy.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced Parenting Orders and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). Parenting Orders were given to parents if their children committed a criminal offence, received an ASBO or were persistent truants. These offences were expanded in the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act to include children excluded (or at risk of exclusion) from school. Receipt of a Parenting Order would mean parents would be compelled to attend parenting classes; failure to do so could result in fines being imposed or even imprisonment. Up to 90% of Parenting Orders were received by mothers (Peters, 2012). Schools and Local Education Authorities were also given powers to 'offer' parents 'voluntary' parenting contracts to improve their children's behaviour or school attendance. Should a parent opt not to enter into a contract, and problems continued, guidance accompanying the introduction of parenting orders states a court order could be sought

'to make you attend parenting classes to deal with your child's behaviour or prosecuting you for your child's irregular attendance' (DfES, 2004 p4). Post-1997, to an outsider, it would appear that 'almost any social ill – poverty, social exclusion, crime and anti-social behaviour, poor educational attainment, poor mental and emotional health – could be remedied by improving parenting skills' (Moran et al, 2004 p14).

Further legislation was introduced which served to widen categories of risk posed by parents (and linked to development – or perceived lack – of human capital) under the Every Child Matters initiative of 2003. Cementing an explicit link between poor parenting and negative outcomes (Parton, 2014), this widened concerns immensely from children 'who might suffer child abuse or "significant harm" to include all children, particularly those who were at risk of poor outcomes and therefore who might not fulfil their potential' (Parton, 2014 p52). The interest and investment in parents as key to producing responsible citizens led to an expansion 'of the state's role in parenting support as parents were envisaged as crucial actors in shaping children's current and future social in/exclusion' (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014 p96). Poverty and social exclusion were equated to mean the same thing so the children of those in poverty were the ones who came under the spotlight. Since it was agreed that social inclusion was integral to children's future well-being and prosperity, what their parents did to promote that was everyone's business.

3.6 Human capital

The Education Reform Act 1988 had altered the way in which parents interacted with schools, since parental choice was emphasised and schools measured by league tables and inspection grades, impacting upon children and how they were viewed (Ball 2017); children were now seen as a vehicle for investment in the future, not only on a societal level but also on an individual level by parents. The idea of children as 'human capital' is not entirely new but the form it now took was. At the start of the twentieth century 'children were seen as the most valuable asset a nation had' and they needed to be considered in policy in order to maximise a country's worth (Cunningham, 2014 p179). This earlier understanding of human capital meant that the young were seen as valuable, in the collective sense as future citizens of the country, as opposed to the modern understanding proposed in 1964 by Chicago economist, Gary Becker, requiring one to be an 'entrepreneur of himself' (Foucault, 2008 p226). The modern concept of human capital relies on the notion that 'spending on human services such as education should be considered an investment rather than an act of consumption – and therefore that education itself should be

considered a form of capital or interest-bearing asset' (Cooper, 2017 p219). This theory was developed by Gary Becker into an understanding of human capital as the economic value individuals collect and embody (Becker, 1993).

During the New Labour era, policy came to view children much more in terms of who they would become and how much personal value they (and their parents) could attach to them. Government investment in children as human capital was towards a future in which they would become economically productive adults (Redmond, 2010). At this time, Prime Minister Tony Blair was advised closely by Anthony Giddens who proposed a third way, moving away from the traditional left and right of politics. The Third Way grew out of a claimed necessity due to globalisation and individualism and Giddens (1998) proposed that with rights should come responsibilities, giving the example of responsible risk-takers building their own human capital. This differed from the interpretation in other European countries, such as those in the Nordic region, which invest in human capital alongside social protection (Deeming and Smyth, 2015). Both models rely on the concept that by investing in the young, the need for state welfare would be reduced in the future. The UK position concentrated on combining investment in human capital with low social protection. Since there is a disparity between the two models, henceforth reference to social investment shall mean the UK model. Social investment is a means by which welfare states invest in health and education to build skills and capability, from the early years (Baines et al, 2019). This leads to a welfare state which invests in human capital rather than a simple provision of welfare payments to ease economic pressures while giving parents the responsibility for parenting their children out of poverty.

One of the enduring features of neoliberalism is that of choice and freedom (alongside competition, shrinking of the welfare state and promotion of markets), albeit with attendant responsibilities, at least for individuals. Describing the changing nature of the modern family, Giddens (1998 p94) writes that the 'emphasis must surely be upon securing a balance of autonomy and responsibility in which positive forms of encouragement go along with other sanctions'. This language of encouragement and sanctions covers a range of situations: children's behaviour in school, parental behaviour within families and welfare benefit claimants' behaviour within society. Vincent (2003) notes the emphasis was characterised by a need for people to do something in return, so with rights come attendant responsibilities. This could be due to the greater risks associated with investing in human rather than physical capital, since according to economic

argument there is no guarantee that once invested in via education, a person will make the required effort to be productive in the labour market, granting the investor less control (Checchi 2006). In creating an attendant responsibility in parents, it thus creates a safer investment since citizens will self-govern to ensure they do not appear to be irresponsible or a bad parent.

Although investment in human capital has been a feature of modern states wishing to compete on the global stage, the nature of it has moved markedly over the last twenty years from a goal to build a stronger nation to a more individualised project of parental investment in their children's human capital. Thereby, New Labour dramatically altered notions of 'parenting' by situating it in a central position in economic and social policy. In so doing, parenting ceases to be a relationship and is instead framed as a job or a set of skills (Gillies 2005a). New Labour's 'policy initiatives have gone further than any previous government in seeking to shape and control the practices of parents' (Gillies 2005a p86). Economist James Heckman (whose ideas gained popularity with both US and UK policymakers) developed his theory of investment in human capital claiming: 'Gaps in cognitive and non-cognitive abilities that play such an important role in life chances open up very early across socioeconomic groups' (Heckman, 2013 p13/14). He laid the blame for this on maternal behaviour citing research that well-educated mothers 'devote more time to child-rearing' than their less educated counterparts (Heckman, 2013 p18). To address this, he suggested that policies 'to promote early accumulation of human capital should be targeted to the children of poor families' (Heckman, 2008 p316) since it was 'love and parenting – not money' which was scarce in these families (Heckman, 2013 p41). Echoing others before him, Heckman claims 'the percentage of less-educated women is rising, and they bear and raise a disproportionate number of children' (Heckman, 2008 p317). In this way, 'social disadvantage is recast as a biological effect, curable by professional interventions at the level of individuals' (Wastell and White, 2017 p109) and is addressed by social policy in those terms.

To consider early childhood from a human capital point of view allows for inequity to be acceptable or ignored entirely since it relies on the premise that it is parenting rather than resources which are necessary to imbue human capital. Instead of addressing poverty at a structural level, policy approaches are favoured which entail 'high quality targeted interventions for poor children to avert the worst consequences of poverty' (Penn, 2010 p53) meaning the responsibility lies with the individual. Instead of removing the immediate 'worst consequences of poverty' such as hunger and homelessness, those interventions take the form of nursery provision

for two-year-olds or parenting classes, both with the goal of improving future educational outcomes and therefore life chances. Use of such narratives is equally potent when they shift from campaigns to secure resources for disadvantaged groups to the aspiration to guide professional judgement in individual family cases. No longer is financial assistance necessary to ameliorate poverty as 'advice' will empower parents to rid themselves of hardship, according to this recasting of poverty – it can be 'cured' by education. Ideas around human capital informed the adoption of early intervention as a strategy.

3.7 SureStart and associated early intervention

Coupled with responsibilising parents, the theme of child protection and care was highlighted as being 'the single most important thread that should guide family policy' (Giddens, 1998 p94). Framing policy in this language renders it non-negotiable since no-one can argue that it is not of critical importance (Featherstone et al, 2014); however, the way in which it is enacted means that family-life is open to scrutiny to ensure child safety. Alongside personal financial increases through benefits and tax, New Labour introduced SureStart, a targeted early intervention programme for children from birth to three 'bringing together a range of education, health and other services' (HMT, 1998 p11) to ensure children arrive at school ready to learn. James Heckman's formula, which was based on a theory of accumulation whereby skills beget skills, argued that the earlier the intervention, the greater the rate of return which fed directly into Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's (his Chancellor) investment in SureStart (and increased nursery provision). It sought to target 'individual behaviour and development' (Clarke, 2006 p701). The individual behaviour targeted was that of the parents, while the improved development of the child was the desired outcome. The focus of SureStart was proximal variables, such as the provision of books and toys which are easier to measure than distal factors, such as the 'effects of poverty on self-esteem and depression and the impact of those on parenting capacity' (Clarke, 2006 p707). If a system uses measures and targets to assess effectiveness then it will naturally focus on those measures which are more visible and easier to rectify, such as the provision of classes to encourage early reading rather than addressing the attendant despair felt at the lack of control through living in poor conditions. This leads to the idea that good parenting 'is a question of technique instead of being fundamentally about quality of relationships' (Clarke, 2006 p708). SureStart's approach is individual rather than structural allowing a continuation of existing inequalities while shifting some into slightly better positions within the unequal status quo (Clarke, 2006). When considering how

many books a child has at home in the context of the material deprivation described in the previous chapter, it is clear this is a problem of poverty rather than, as it is framed, parenting.

During this period, early education was extended, complementing SureStart provision, offering free places for all three and four-year-olds via the Childcare Act 2006. This act also introduced a comprehensive curriculum in 2008, covering the age range 0-5 years, described as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It replaced Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000) for children aged 3-5 and Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2002) for babies and toddlers. EYFS was 'mandatory for all schools and early years providers in Ofsted registered settings attended by young children' (DCSF, 2008 p7). At its inception, EYFS contained 69 learning goals (split into six main areas) which children were required to meet by the end of the Foundation Stage. In creating a requirement for children to meet a prescribed set of standards, the EYFS also served to split children into those who met the standards and those who did not.

In tandem with this, The Child Health Promotion Plan, produced jointly by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health (2004), set in place a series of requirements for healthcare providers from antenatal through to secondary school: These included the two-year old review. In 2009 additional guidance was issued, stating the aim of the two-year old review 'to optimise child development and emotional wellbeing and reduce inequalities in outcome' (DH, 2009 p8). The specific outcomes outlined covered social and emotional wellbeing, speech and language development, detection of developmental delays, increased immunisation and prevention of obesity (DH, 2009) with many were linked to the EYFS early learning goals. They also included early detection of 'psychosocial issues such as poor parenting, disruptive family relationships, domestic violence, mental health issues and substance misuse' (DH, 2009 p9). It is clear here that the remit of the two-year review has been broadened to include parental behaviour. How those 'psychosocial issues' could be measured at the two-year review is unclear. What is clear however, is the increasing surveillance and measurement of children and, by extension, their parents promoted under New Labour.

In the run-up to the 2010 general election, both the main political parties were in consensus on the need to promote social policies aimed at families in poverty (Purcell, 2020). It was evident that whoever was elected, the family (especially those in poverty) would feature heavily in future policy. In many ways, New Labour paved the way for what was to follow, as they invested heavily in developing active (socially included) citizens, shifting responsibility onto the individual, and

'created the conditions for the perfect storm of today: catch them early, focus on children, and identify and treat the feckless and risky' (Featherstone et al, 2014 p1739). That 'perfect storm' being today's interventionist ethos. Once both main political parties are in alignment regarding the means of addressing poverty, hegemonic beliefs systems are fully-fledged and almost impossible to disrupt. With the support of 'science' concepts are adopted and embraced by the public and policymakers, further entrenching their stranglehold on the prevailing belief system.

3.8 Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition imposed Austerity

The connection between crime and parenting was to be embraced with renewed enthusiasm following the riots which broke out in August 2011 in several London boroughs in response to the shooting of Mark Duggan, a young black man, and subsequently spread to other English cities (Newburn, 2014). Government response to the riots was focussed on families, despite most of the participants being young adults, and resulted in the creation of the Troubled Families programme. Despite being given a new name, to all intents and purposes, Troubled Families was a revamp of Labour's Family Intervention Projects which came under the SureStart umbrella. The intensive family intervention of Troubled Families is little different to that of the Pacifist Service Unit (a voluntary body set up during the second world war) which saw the solution to problem families 'primarily in terms of improvement of standards of housewifery and parental control' (Starkey, 2000 p25). As referred to in the previous chapter, the programme of austerity pursued by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition was to reduce the finances of poor families and draw on earlier ideas which would create an acceptance for the targeting of this group.

When the benefits cap, discussed in the previous chapter, was proposed in 2012 under the Welfare Reform Act, discussions abounded concerning the numbers of children born to families on benefits, termed 'benefits broods' (Jensen and Tyler, 2015) and collective disgust encouraged by politicians and media alike. Narratives were pushed about larger families and their reliance on benefits, reminiscent of eugenic preoccupations almost a century before, which was used to gain support for a two-child cap for child benefit alongside wider welfare caps and reductions. Whether described as cycles of deprivation (Keith Joseph), the Plowden Report's 'vicious circle' or New Labour's 'social exclusion', the idea of transmitted poverty between generations has persisted, leading to interventions to address it. This has 'repeatedly found practical expression in interventions that aim to change parenting practices in poor families and to provide poor children with high quality early education, in order to counteract the effects of their poor social and

physical environment and produce a better future generation of adults' (Clarke, 2006 p701). Despite a move from a focus on biological transmission to environmental transmission, the idea that poverty is passed between the generations persists. When New Labour highlighted the problem of social exclusion, it was drawing on traditions 'within Anglo-American developmental psychology and quantitative sociology that demonstrate statistical associations between a large number of variables, labelled as "risk factors", and particular negative outcomes' (Clarke, 2006 p706) conceptualising the issue as one of generational transmission. The language may change but the underlying message remains the same, so while the Underwood report (1955 p4) was concerned that 'the maladjusted child of yesterday can be the maladjusted parent of today, and his offspring the maladjusted children of tomorrow', today it is the 'greater and greater prospective of repeating the poor outcomes of their parents' which concerns DWP (2017 p7). Generational transmission remains a keystone of policy documents and public opinion; it therefore follows that if parents transmit poverty to their children – through their genes or parenting behaviours, then their children are at risk from their parents and steps ought to be taken to help the innocent child.

As with the choice by the World Health Organisation to appoint John Bowlby in 1951, the use of neuroscientific claims in current policy is not a neutral decision; instead 'expert knowledge' which aligns with political ideology has been co-opted and inflated to inform 'policy and professional forms of thought' (Wastell and White, 2017, p90). It is precisely because they align so readily with the prevailing economic circumstances (and political ideology) that neuroscience and prevention science have been drawn on so heavily. Prevention science melds developmentalism, tying it to economics and 'evidence-based' research which establishes the projected fiscal savings (Wastell and White, 2017). In so doing, it shapes particular ideas about children's needs and discussions around what counts as 'good' parenting. Wastell and White (2017 p126) highlight risks to children's development within prevention science discourses include 'parental lifestyles and choice' which is open to social and cultural interpretations and seeks to 'other' those who deviate from the accepted middle-class norms. It is attractive to policymakers as it also depends upon being cost effective.

To understand why prevention science has been embraced so readily by practitioners, one can look to the terminology which is the same as that of child development. This means it is readily accepted by those who work with children, as it is framed in language and terms that they understand and already embrace. Ideologically, it resonates with previous thinking that situates

poverty as an individual problem which is outside of the state's remit. Neuroscience has been used in policy 'to relocate an older moral project on the high hard ground of scientific rationality' (Wastell and White, 2017, p89). For these reasons, it is hard to see how any alternative to the dominant discourse of early intervention and preventative science can be envisaged by those working in policy or by people working with children and families.

3.9 Dissemination of parenting advice

This chapter began with the interwar period: the changes invoked following the first world war and the embracing of psychiatry and child guidance clinics. Central to this guidance was a view that family relationships needed intervening in to allow children to grow up into well-adjusted adults with an emphasis on parents being together (Stewart, 2011). Although only a small proportion of children attended child guidance, 'the broader impact of its aims and aspirations came to have a profound impact on what constituted normalcy in childhood' (Stewart, 2011, p802). Sharing and spreading of parenting advice rose to popularity and child guidance proponents, such as Bowlby and Donald Winnicott published books and pamphlets for a general readership. Both 'exerted considerable influence on popular understandings of family, home, mothering and child development, as well as, more generally, on the culture of child rearing within and evolving social democracy' (Hendrick, 2016, p99). As well as written material, Winnicott is credited with bringing psychoanalysis to the mainstream by delivering around fifty BBC radio broadcasts between 1939 and 1962 on parenting and six lectures open to the public with accompanying pamphlets (Schwartz, 2003). That acceptance of the need for expert guidance has continued to prevail ever since, although the mode of delivery of intervention has evolved, particularly since New Labour's term in office.

The proliferation of parenting advice introduced by New Labour through their SureStart programme and Family Nurse Partnerships came during a time of increasing media focus on this area of life. A whole raft of self-help and reality television programmes were produced alongside the introduction of a state-funded parenting telephone helpline. As technology has developed, these have been replaced by websites, social media pages and apps. These developments are part of the professionalisation of parenting: This is no longer deemed to be something mothers naturally and responsively do, but instead has morphed into a series of technical competencies which need to be acquired. Use of non-traditional means of information dissemination is done with the express aim of targeting parents who are not engaging with traditional sources of

information (described as being hard-to-reach). There is no notion that these parents may be fully conversant with the information but have chosen not to follow it, such is the presumption of righteous authority emanating from parenting practitioners.

During the New Labour years, reality television programmes took over the role previously held by books, manuals and parentcraft classes tackling issues such as behaviour or nutrition. These programmes portrayed mainly working-class families in a decontextualised manner and attention was drawn to behaviour rather than material circumstances (Jensen, 2010). Self-help and self-improvement were the motif of these programmes with the aim of replicating middle-class norms (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). Although this mode of delivery was new, Skeggs and Wood identify a longer history of surveillance and normativity predating and 'potentially replicated in the numerous reality programmes which emphasize instructions in "parenting" skills' (2012, p34) which they posit contributes to women being overrepresented consumers of self-help material. Whether produced by the BBC (as national broadcaster) or commercial broadcasters, these shows draw upon themes running through government committees (Ferguson, 2010). This crossover between entertainment, celebrity endorsement and government policy is exemplified by the 2005 healthy school meals campaign of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, followed by the Department for Education and Skills investing £15m to set up the School Food Trust (Bristow, 2009). Notably this type of televisual output rose to prominence alongside rising individualism, consumerism, and the project of self, wherein 'the individual is made responsible for their life choices whilst the intervention of the state is rolled back in terms of welfare support' (Skeggs and Wood, 2012, p29). State intervention in terms of welfare support may have been receding, but as the discussion around early intervention explains, other more insidious forms of intervention were increasing. By 2007 a national parenting academy had been established, with £30m of government money, complementing the telephone helpline already set up with state-funding, Parentline Plus (Bristow, 2009). Creation of the parenting academy endorsing the belief that expert involvement is necessary for optimal parenting (Bristow, 2009). Despite a significant reduction in funding for these initiatives, the idea of educating parents in how to raise their children has continued to be disseminated via non-traditional channels such as websites and apps (as discussed in the previous chapter), an example of which is the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* which chapter 5 analyses. This section has explained some of the ways in which parenting advice, and modes of delivery, has evolved over the preceding decades to become increasingly targeted towards those parents

perceived as problematic ie working-class mothers, with the emphasis on cost-effectiveness and behaviour change.

3.10 Conclusion

Enduring notions of 'problem families' which rely on themes of generational transmission, poverty being the result of poor life choices and the need to protect children from their parents remain remarkably constant over the last century. However, since the rise of neoliberalism, shifting notions of risk have meant that parents are seen to pose the greatest risk to children, not simply through the previous channels of violence and sexual abuse but in the looser categories of neglect and emotional abuse which may include failure by parents to invest adequately in their children's human capital. Persistent educational inequalities have come to be blamed on poor parenting; since government measures show educational standards to be improving (DfE, 2018), there must be a reason for the attainment gap (Andrews et al, 2017) between pupils of different socio-economic backgrounds. The result is that systems of developmental and educational measurement are used to 'prove' that the children of poor families require intervention to reduce the effects of the generational transmission of their parents' lack of success which impacts upon how much they invest in their children's human capital. At once this stigmatises families in poverty while exonerating the state from blame for poverty (Lambert 2018), or attainment, while pursuing intrusive interventions for the alleged benefit of those families. This framing targets working-class women, seeking to address their mothering and disregarding material circumstances.

To solve the problem of children growing up in poverty, parents are encouraged to place them in formal childcare from a younger age and parenting homogenised to a set of technical skills which should be followed to achieve desired outcomes. Quasi-government bodies, charitable organisations and philanthropists adopt a moralising project based on notions of rescue (Clapton et al, 2012) which can be seen within early intervention projects too. Beneath this model, there is a complete silence from bodies campaigning for child protection on welfare issues of social class and inequality (Clapton et al, 2012) which suggests either short-sightedness or deliberate ignorance and a willingness to instead draw attention to perceived inadequacies in the parenting of those in poverty.

Failure to reach desired outcomes lies with the individual rather than programme design or delivery. Government policy serves to create an idealised image of a 'good' mother which ought to

be recreated to achieve success and adequately invest in their child's human capital. Ideas of good motherhood have always abounded and serve to act as a regulatory and exclusionary basis whereby mothers may position themselves against a benchmark of motherhood (Rudoe, 2014). In creating a government-endorsed 'good' mother figure, it further compounds the self-regulation and could lead to mothers feeling they are no longer free to mother in ways which suit them and their family and instead be constrained by a 'one-size-fits-all' model based on outdated middle-class sensibilities which do not allow for personal and cultural ideals. Despite living in the backdrop of an individualistic society it seems that mothers, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, cannot be individuals in the way in which they raise their children without being stigmatised. Their rejection of these ideals is framed as a personal failure or portrayed as a lack of knowledge. Ever more convoluted means have been dreamed up to seek out and inform working-class mothers who are believed to require correction rather than investment in housing, services or infrastructure which would deliver practical help. Despite those interventions continually failing to achieve the desired effect, working-class mothers have continued to be targeted by these campaigns. My research is necessary to understand the reality of working-class women's lives and to seek their perspectives on interventions which aim to target them. Rather than devising new ways of targeting working-class mothers, this research will demonstrate that it is the message rather than the means of delivery which requires attention.

Chapter 4: Methodology

To begin this chapter, I explain my role within the research and how I use autoethnography to feed my insights into the project and discuss some of the problems with this research method and how I seek to mitigate them. Next, I set out my methodological position, explaining my use of Foucault and Bourdieu to define power. I consider the rise in websites as a source of parenting advice, why this specific parenting website was selected and describe why it provides a good insight into dominant understandings of 'good' mothering. Then, I look at how knowledge is constructed, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, and what critical discourse analysis is and what it involves. Following that, structure, agency, and habitus are considered as a way of understanding working-class culture and values before using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capitals to define social class and how it is operationalised within my research. Finally, I turn to the interviews, recruitment of participants and analysis, followed by a short discussion of social reproduction and its impact on mothers. As a member of working-class fields, I knew there was resistance to dominant 'good' mothering discourses and that mothers hold alternative values, so expected to encounter these during the interviews. Since I am a member of those fields, it was important to acknowledge and address that within this chapter.

4.1 Autoethnography

Originally, I did not set out to use an autoethnographic approach but as I explored my theoretical perspective, I realised that who I am, and my own experiences, are central to this project's design. In designing the interview schedule and preparing for interviews I undertook a series of self-interviews to gain ethical insights (Pascoe Leahy, 2022). Through this process I began to understand the importance of my narrative and how it could add to the data. However, I was concerned it may be self-indulgent or overshadow the women's narratives, so it was essential to include reflection and critical analysis. Autoethnography is often viewed as too subjective or lacking rigour; however, as this chapter shows, my understanding is that very little research is truly objective. During the writing of chapter 3, I had many 'light bulb' moments when I related what had been happening in policy to what was going on in my own life at that time and past events could be interpreted from my current position (Ellis, 1999). Those moments were documented and used to understand the impact of policy, so it was a natural step for them to move from personal notes to

autoethnographic data. First though, I needed to understand what autoethnography means, who has used it, how and to what effect.

Autoethnography provides a platform for personal experience to be valued as a source of knowledge and offer 'a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding' (Wall, 2008, p39). In using this approach, I am centring myself in the research since the questions have come out of my own experiences. I am interrogating my 'participation in one or more cultural groups, communities, and contexts while contributing to critical social research' (Hughes and Pennington, 2017, p1). Key to my understanding of the world are the hidden effects of power and their impacts on people within their everyday lives. One of the key rationales for undertaking an autoethnographic approach is 'to help reveal power, domination, privilege, and penalty in both the extraordinary and the mundane social issues of our larger cultural contexts' (Hughes and Pennington, 2017, p59). Mothering is simultaneously ordinary, routine, and commonplace while at the same time essential, important and life-affirming, meaning it is viewed as of little value while being scrutinised minutely. Autoethnography requires a critical study to be undertaken of oneself 'in relation to one or more cultural context(s)' (Hughes and Pennington, 2017, p9). In the case of this research, this relates to geography, gender, and social class as it is a study of working-class women living in the UK.

Within my biographical writing, I aim for an interpretative autoethnography, moving outward 'to culture, discourse, history, and ideology' (Denzin, 2014, p. x). In so doing, disruption of knowledge which is taken-for-granted may occur (Freire, 1968/1972). Our own experiences motivate us to share and examine them to critique the status quo and right wrongs (Adams, 2011). When writing my narratives, I sought to connect with the emotions felt (Ellis, 1999) to remember additional details. Using a 'systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall' (Ellis, 1999, p671) I sought to understand and write about my experiences. Autoethnographic writing 'opens to debates over questions of knowledge, and its representation and presentation' (Denzin, 2014, p71) so functioning as a form of social activism (Denzin, 2003; Pelias, 2011). In deploying autoethnography, I am 'privileging the personal over the institutional' (Denzin, 2014, p83) and challenging 'empirical science's hegemonic control over qualitative inquiry' (ibid). My experiences are a social critique which does not seek scientific validity (Denzin, 2014). Having described what autoethnography is and how I am using it in this project, I will turn to criticisms of the method.

Criticisms levelled at autoethnography as a method are that it is not 'proper' research (Sparkes, 2000) or is too reliant on individual testimony and introspection (Coffey, 1999). Often it is the closeness of the researcher to the subject matter which is a criticism of autoethnography (Méndez, 2013) but I would argue that it is a strength of my research rather than a failing. I seek to mitigate the perceived shortcomings of autoethnography as a method by using it critically and interpretatively to build social theory. Using my own narrative and positioning those experiences within social theory, increases the validity of the method and seeks to include those who are not part of the dominant culture and 'who have learned in the past that their ways of knowing and experiencing the world are unimportant' (Hughes and Pennington, 2017, p41). In writing my own story, I gained insight and understanding into the process the women interviewed experience thereby allowing for a greater appreciation of the importance of the everyday. Méndez (2013) used autoethnography as a tool to understand her interviewees' stories. My interpretation of the women's narratives is richer for my having been through a similar experience first which built a deeper connection to and understanding of the subject matter and consequently with the women during the interviews. I was acutely aware that I did not want to misinterpret the women's narratives by projecting my views onto them and was mindful of the power I held in 'selecting and interpreting the data' (Reay, 1996, p63). Autoethnography contributes to my analysis of the interview data, creating a powerful form of knowledge production. Rather than shrinking away from the 'unsettling territory' (Hey, 1997, p3) of everyday knowledge, this research embraces it, both through the biographical interviews and my autoethnographic vignettes. I am purposefully and deliberately engaging with the complicated and messiness associated with autoethnography. Using my embodied researcher voice to engage with the data has added to the existing body of research in the field of autoethnography.

Although not always explicitly labelled 'autoethnography', there has long been a feminist reflective tradition, particularly amongst working-class writers, of including biographical detail in their writing (Steedman, 1986; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Skeggs, 1997; Ribbens, 2011; Letherby, 2000). It may be that they describe themselves in terms of their 'insider' position or use the term biographical rather than autoethnographic. In essence, their stories form part of their data as they share a similar position to their participants so, even where their writing is not explicitly stated as autoethnography, there are commonalities between this method and their approach. Cooper and Rogers describe their roles as insiders as being 'a powerful reflexive position used to gain deeper engagement and insight into participants' understanding of lived experience' (2015, p15). Their

beliefs about sociology as a 'living, organic discipline' (ibid) means that their position is strengthened by the intersection of their experiences with those of their participants. Holding a similar position to their participants meant they were able to identify with them more closely and empathise with their personal situations (Cooper and Rogers, 2015). In a deliberate move to reduce power imbalance between researcher and researched, personal narratives can be shared with participants (Cooper and Rogers, 2015). For me, this was incidental rather than planned; sharing stories, and finding commonalities is what we do as social beings. However, when connecting with participants who share similar narratives, uncomfortable or unanticipated emotions may be evoked (Cooper and Rogers, 2015). When Gayle Letherby's (2000) participants were revealing intimate details about themselves, she felt a responsibility to share some of her story, if asked about, in return. I feel the same, especially if it is a source of shame or guilt for my participants. I chose to 'be myself' as far as possible, so where I had a similar experience, I might use this to empathise, enabling the production of 'narratives rich with candidness and critical engagement' (Falconer, 2016, p76). However, I was keen not to exploit this and so tried to keep my own stories for occasions where the women seemed to be seeking validation or reassurance.

Drawing on existing reflective accounts of feminist writers enabled me to consider practical and ethical issues surrounding this method, such as issues of power and how being the editor affects the research and its presentation (Letherby, 2000). Foremost, when writing autoethnographically, I was aware that I had chosen to share my story but ancillary characters within those stories had not. I sought to protect their privacy by, as far as possible, omitting them from the narrative or being deliberately vague about identifying characteristics (Adams, 2011). Having agreed to confidentiality and keeping participants' information anonymous means that there is no outlet to process difficult topics which arise during interview, especially where they are issues which directly correlate to my own personal history. To deal with this I used a research journal 'to grapple with these issues instead' (Letherby, 2000, p104). Whilst writing this chapter, I have undergone a significant introspection regarding my positionality bringing me closer to the project and precipitating incorporation of autoethnography into its design. This process of self-reflection has taken its toll on my mental health since I have revisited times when I have been the object of stigma evoking difficult memories. Despite this, it has been a necessary and worthwhile process; highlighting the effect of how mothers are viewed is integral to one's identity and sense of self.

Alongside interrogating my own identity and grounding my experiences sociologically, I have been grappling with several large theoretical concepts. Using the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault to describe the relationship between power and knowledge has been especially challenging. At times I have felt that I am just not 'clever' enough to understand what is being said and that perhaps these types of works are not for people like me. I realise this was exactly the point that Bourdieu (1977) was making and wonder why he wrote in such an inaccessible way. My relationship with him felt quite personal, in that I was annoyed that his writing style was so difficult to access. These difficulties with understanding are deeply entwined with my classed identity and the battles I had helped me to recognise that my ambivalence towards self-defining as 'working-class' was inextricably linked to the stigmatisation I had received as a young, working-class mother. Bourdieu's habitus provided a theoretical understanding of why I, as a now highly educated person, still am not fully middle-class. Understanding my own classed identity from a Bourdieusian perspective confirmed my decision to focus on working-class women rather than all women. Having explored my positionality in relation to the research, the next section will consider my research question.

4.2 Research Question

To what extent do family policy and 'expert' discourses of parenting impact on and shape working class mothering practices?

I was interested to discover how intensive parenting and attendant policy and dominant discourses impacted on the day-to-day lives of working-class mothers. From my own experience, I know that not all mothers accept the ideas being promoted but may be under social pressure to conform to those expectations. I wanted to know how mothers navigate that path between engaging with expert advice targeted at them and questioning the values being promoted. Uncovering when and how they resist dominant discourses would give insight into their position and values. To answer my research question, I first needed to establish what dominant discourses were being promoted before interviewing working-class mothers to establish their narratives. To establish current 'good' mothering discourses, I focussed on the BBC parenting website *Tiny Happy People*.

4.3 Dominant media discourses

The choice to focus on websites rather than leaflets, television programmes, parenting classes or other media was made as people are increasingly turning to internet sources for advice and

websites have been a key vehicle for delivering parenting advice. After reviewing the most searched for categories *Tiny Happy People* (THP) was selected. As a UK resource, produced by the BBC and with extensive content, it would enable a thorough analysis to draw out parenting discourses, therefore providing substantial source material for the critical discourse analysis by which to establish current dominant 'good' mothering discourses. Influencing the decision to select THP for analysis within this project is its public online availability, links to BBC online content (a high traffic website) and authoritative standing of the BBC.

Notable is the history of the BBC since it is the world's largest and oldest national broadcaster, established in 1922, and becoming publicly owned in 1927 under Royal Charter (Leighton, 2005). It is funded through an annual licence fee, determined by the government, who set the terms and conditions under which the BBC are allowed to broadcast. The BBC is the UK's most widely viewed news broadcaster and despite competition from other media sources, 'remains a popular and widely trusted source of information in the United Kingdom' (Lewis and Cushion, 2019, p480). Their Education Strategy aims to address 'societal and educational deficits within the UK' and THP is a 'major strategic initiative to reduce the number of children starting primary school without the expected levels of communication and language' (Foulkes, 2020, p19) with the overall aim of the BBC's Education Strategy to 'encourage social mobility in the UK' (BBC, 2018). Despite long-standing claims of BBC impartiality, the 'structure and culture have been profoundly shaped by the interests of powerful groups in British society' (Mills, 2020, p3) and form an integral part of the establishment (Mills, 2020). The institutionalised power and dominance of the BBC means it plays a crucial role in establishing and reinforcing cultural norms and therefore the content on THP is likely to be more influential than that of an independent website. It is distinguished from other sites of parenting education in that it is accessible, open to all and its mode of delivery is video-heavy, featuring and representing parents. How those parents are represented will form part of the analysis; however, it is first worth considering how working-class mothers have previously been portrayed in the media.

4.4 Knowledge and Power

Having chosen THP as an illustration of parenting norms, my interpretation of knowledge and its relationship with power needs unpicking since it is not something which can be taken for granted; it varies from person to person (Skeggs, 1997), both between groups and individuals, along classed, racialised and gendered lines and the intersections between these groupings. People or

organisations creating knowledge influence topics, methods and parameters of what is worthy of knowing and hierarchy of knowledge. From the choice and object of study to the methods used to collect and analyse data, decisions and assumptions are made even though this is not always explicitly stated. It is important to look more closely at dominant discourses as they have the power to influence people's lives. Given the spotlight on working-class mothers and their parenting behaviours, dominant parenting discourses are hugely influential in shaping how mothers are viewed. The representations on THP are aimed specifically at this group of mothers so are worth studying to see what assumptions are being made and which values are being imposed.

It was of particular interest to me that, despite the gender-neutral term 'parents' being used throughout policy, it was always the mother who was the object of derision. Both my situation as a lone parent and welfare-recipient were determined by the father of my children – as the one who left and the one who earned below the required income threshold – but it was me, as mother, who was responsibilised since public and policy discourses are gendered. Note for example the absence of major concern or stigma surrounding teenage fathers. At that time, I had the experience but not the theory to understand what was happening or to situate it theoretically, so this project is, in part, an undertaking of that endeavour. I position the voices of the women in this project at the heart of knowledge-production since they, like me, understand and are the most knowledgeable about what it means to be a working-class mother, rather than people whose experiences lie entirely beyond that reality. In highlighting the voices of marginalised mothers in public discourse, a participatory space is provided for a range of narratives to be heard (Field, 2006). In so doing, I am moving towards praxis: consciously practising knowledge production, producing and reproducing objective meaning (Bourdieu, 1977). There is a constant clamouring for working-class mothers to change their behaviour instead of a consideration that it is perhaps the field which ought to change. Researcher positionality 'is central to the *processes* of subjective construction' (Skeggs, 1997, p4) and when undertaking a critical discourse analysis, it is essential that I set out my sociopolitical stance ie 'point of view, perspective, principles and aims' (van Dijk, 1993, p252) which this chapter does.

4.5 Theoretical underpinning

Within this thesis I use the work of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu which inform my views on the relationship between knowledge and power. It is often claimed that Bourdieu and Foucault should not be used together to explain power given their different explanations (Bang, 2014).

However, I am using them as theoretical tools to do different things. Foucault's work effectively demonstrates how power runs through us all, 'securing domination through the cultivation of an entrepreneurial subjectivity' (Masquelier, 2019, p136). His interpretation of power views it as 'instrumental in guiding and normalizing particular conducts' (Masquelier, 2019, p137). This is useful to demonstrate the power of discourses and the ways in which people become self-regulating. Bourdieu's work is used to highlight the discrepancy between social groups and the effect of power on them since Foucault did not attend to the fact that risk is not apportioned equally or 'anticipate agents in a position to assert the legitimacy and illegitimacy of particular practices' (Masquelier, 2019, p141). Therefore, 'Bourdieu's concept of power can illustrate the strength, location and hierarchy of power, with his concepts of habitus, field and capital' (Bang, 2014, p26). Having considered the distinct uses of these two theorists of power, I will explore their theories in more depth and explain their importance to my ontological approach.

Governments consolidate power by bringing order through regulating, demarcating, and arbitrating the everyday life of citizens described as 'technologies of power' (Foucault, 2012, p141). It is through political power that the lives of the population are regulated since institutions wield power over the human body in the name of social good – termed biopower (Foucault, 1978). These new 'technologies of power' work to regulate and reproduce, making populations self-governing and self-disciplining. In this way sovereign power becomes biopower, creating norms which are institutionalised thereby becoming every day and commonplace (Foucault, 1980a). Instead of gaining order of the population through punishment and control, increasingly people become self-governing as they absorb those social norms. This type of power relies not on external forces but instead 'we scrutinize, regulate and discipline our selves' (Lawler, 2014, p70). By normalising power in this manner, it flows through individuals within their bodies, gestures, behaviour, aptitudes, and achievements (Foucault, 1980a). When we consider whose norms are imposed and which institutions wield power, it is important to consider this from a social class perspective since power is not held equally between social classes. Foucault theorises what power is and how it works; his view of people is that we are all subject to power, but he does not consider the uneven distribution of it or impact of social position. I will consider the relationship between power and social class below using the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, who considers the interrelationship of people from different groups and how those groups act to enforce and reproduce power. Before this, how discourses operate needs to be considered in more detail.

A discussion of discourse is necessary to explain what is meant and understood by that term and how it is critical in creating and constituting social norms. It is important to uncover and deduce who is driving dominant discourses and therefore who gains power by them and who cedes it. Discourses constitute and reproduce relationships through fields such as policy, media and education. They are 'metalanguages that instruct people how to live as people' (Thrift, 2005 in Vincent et al, 2010, p124) and are a means by which power can be exerted. They become dominant through several mechanisms, less often through direct coercion by those in power, but mostly indirectly through complicated webs of interwoven factors (Bourdieu, 1977). In order for dominant discourses to function, they must deploy a common language which is generally understood, enabling those dominated by the discourse to be complicit since they hold and adhere to the principles of the discourse (Bourdieu, 1998). This can be seen in the language of development which is used by early educationalists and pseudo-neuroscientific references to brain building for example. In this way, 'power and knowledge are bound together: the extension of power involves the production of knowledges by which people can be known and understood' (Lawler, 2014, p71). An examination of discourses can be used to understand not only which norms and values are being imposed, but whose norms and values, through the undertaking of a critical discourse analysis.

4.6 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is grounded in Foucauldian theory and is therefore a useful tool for interrogating normative constructions of good parenting. It can be applied to any 'text' including images or the audio-visual material featured on THP. I use CDA to identify dominant discourses, to critically explore the underpinning assumptions, and to show links to broader structural inequalities and the interests of the ruling classes. Discourse analysis serves to 'reveal the bases of these common assumptions and to show how they are related to different interests in society' (Burnham et al, 2008, p250). Discovering whose interests are being promoted reveals who is driving those messages and why. In revealing the winners and losers of particular discourses, 'discourse analysis can contribute to the understanding of social processes' (Burnham et al, 2008, p251). When analysing the content of the website, key terms were tagged, and other terms added as they emerged during the analysis process. Those terms were then used to map out 'truths' the website establishes, together with a combination of 'language use, verbal interaction, conversation, texts, multimodal messages and communicative events' (van Dijk, 2011, p2) to

analyse the content of the website and form a coherent discourse. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis of THP helps us understand the social practice of mothering and who informs it.

In using CDA, I am positioning myself not as a neutral bystander, but as a 'social critic', taking a central role (Wetherell et al, 2001, p384). I am aware that meanings develop and evolve over time and are not a static entity and my own experiences as a mother reflect those changes. What it means to be a 'good' mother is not an objective 'truth'; instead, it is historically and culturally situated, with racialised and classed realities, so an interpretivist approach is adopted within this research. This reflects the socially constructed nature of the social world and the contingent nature of 'knowledge' since there are 'multiple realities which are knowable only through representations of culture, or deconstructions of language and discourse, with no single truth or accessible reality' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p146). I recognise that narratives the women relate within their biographical interviews (including my own) are constructed and represent their experiences and multiple realities situated in the time they are recorded. As questions of power and their impacts on the lives of women are central to this project, feminist theories of co-production, validating and contextualising lived experience and acknowledging the importance and intersection of class, gender and race, underpin my methods since these more adequately understand and represent women's lives and experiences (Skeggs, 1997). The next section will consider the impact of social class on knowledge production and how this serves to include or exclude different voices.

4.7 Structure, agency, and habitus

Discourses and the work of Foucault go some way to demonstrating the interrelationship between knowledge and power and how it is used to impose norms and create dominant discourses. Bourdieu offers the notion of symbolic power and an acknowledgement of class interests in the reproduction of privilege (and therefore allows discussion of social justice). Symbolic power is the imposition of 'the principles of the construction of reality – in particular, social reality' (Bourdieu, 1977 p165) making it a significant form of political power. Bourdieu's theory is drawn upon to explain the relationship between the social classes, presently and historically, (although he did not actually use the term 'class') thereby revealing the unfair expectations placed upon working-class mothers by 'good' mothering discourses, supported by early years policy and validated by 'neuroscience' (Edwards et al, 2015).

The amount and combination of capitals which people carry have been used to determine their social class (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). Commonly, economic capital (based upon income and assets) and institutionalised cultural capital (educational qualifications) are used as a short-hand manner of outwardly assessing social class. Bourdieu's (1986, 1990a) objectified and embodied cultural capital are used more discretely as a means of classifying individuals and families and are rooted in middle-class definitions of 'good' taste; for example, classed assumptions are routinely made based on clothing, speech, and food choices. It is these less measurable capitals which are used to distinguish between people who have similar economic or institutionalised cultural capitals but differing class origins. Social and symbolic capital are not readily available to many working-class people as they are subject to symbolic power: a privilege attaching power 'to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p138) and attribute objects, organisations or groups of people 'as desirable, as having high value and status, and as having a good reputation' (Bunar and Ambrose, 2016, p38). Mirroring and maintaining power relations, symbolic capital 'therefore has powerful social consequences' (ibid).

In terms of my capitals, despite acquiring some economic capital through my teaching job and qualifications, I continue to be viewed as working-class due to my accent and ways of being. Much of my mothering has taken place in 'survival mode' due to financial circumstances so I continue to be viewed as working-class despite having acquired middle-class attributes or capitals. Neoliberalism and social mobility ideals have dramatically altered ideas about class and classed identities, rendering it a more slippery concept. It is this deliberate slipperiness in relation to social class which makes it so hard to define and individual definitions and self-identifications vary so broadly. For that reason, instead of asking interviewees to self-identify as working-class, I took a mixed approach to determine whether they fell inside or outside my definition of working-class based on a combination of factors, including their household income, educational level, job type and where they live, whilst maintaining an awareness that these are not exclusive categories. Participants are low on economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and possess a more specific working-class social capital meaning that they cannot access resources in the same way as middle-class mothers.

A further layer of classed distinction which is less easily quantifiable is habitus which is a product of experiences within the family and supplemented or overridden by the paths our lives take. Bourdieu (1977 p82) uses this term to draw attention to the way social divisions may present

themselves. It is at once an individual and collective process since people are situated within social structures (Bourdieu, 1990b). Describing norms, values, attitudes, and conceptualising 'the present in terms of the influences of the past' (Reay, 1996, p69) produces 'individual and collective practices' (ibid) as habitus. Although many variations exist within social groups, there are class markers which emerge by choice and necessity, related to how individuals and groups look, move and speak: the 'bodily hexis' (Bourdieu, 1984, p84), as well as less immediately apparent aspects, including cultural tastes (Bourdieu, 1992b) and ways of thinking (Reay, 2015). This wider interpretation of social class goes beyond categorisations based on household income, occupation type, educational qualifications and shows that social class is simply part of who you are rather than being based upon arbitrary criteria. When an individual is part of a couple or family, it can add further layers of complexity since they may well hold different combinations of capital or classed positions. For example, in my family, I hold postgraduate and professional qualifications, while my husband has Level 2s and does manual work. Both of us have spent long periods in poverty and so a shared fear of unpaid bills, homelessness and insecurity looms in many of the decisions we make, influencing our spending and social habits while reinforcing our classed position. It is entirely subjective though since we assess others relative to our own position. Using Bourdieu's habitus as a means of understanding social class 'allows us to do this without recourse to the kinds of class essentialism, cultural deficit or deprivation models' (Jensen, 2010, p185). Diane Reay (2005) expounds upon Bourdieu's theory to describe the 'psychic landscape of class', which is the thoughts and feelings generating classed practices. These are aspects of identity etched onto a person in the ways they think and feel, going beyond socio-economic categories or practices (Reay, 2005). Reay's work explains why someone may continue to be labelled working-class despite having academic qualifications, stable income and high-status employment, giving the outward impression of social mobility, while others may be more able or willing to adapt, mimic or inhabit another habitus.

According to Bourdieu, society is made up of a series of fields, with those central to the production of knowledge (science, medicine and education) developed and dominated by elites, meaning their knowledge forms the basis of those fields, perpetuating power imbalances (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). In the same way, there are working-class fields or areas where different values, rules and knowledge can dominate, and it is through access to these fields that I was able to capture some of those differences. Since the fields of science, medicine and education are increasingly relied upon to support and validate social structures, members of the working class

are disadvantaged and oppressed by this power imbalance as it justifies and reproduces inequalities. Children are assessed in relation to educational qualifications, statutory testing, and development stages, underpinned by scientific claims about brain development and psychoanalysis and in this way a distinction is drawn. In categorising children in this way, instead of directly denigrating a social class, this is done via education, described by Bourdieu as 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Instead of direct violence, this is a deliberate misrecognition or refusal to accept someone or something as legitimate (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013). It is manifested by establishing 'hierarchies of discrimination (some things are better or more worthy than others)' (Moore, 2014 p101). Working-class women therefore 'defend against misrecognition and devaluation, through the performance of respectability and by reversing dominant symbolic moral values' (Skeggs, 2011, p503). Since it is an indirect form of violence it is difficult to object on classed terms. In the same way working-class parents were portrayed in reality television programmes (described above) social class was inferred by class markers rather than explicitly stated.

Instead of collectively describing the working-classes using that term, classifying children in terms of their educational achievement individualises their failure and can then be tied to poor parenting. Family is a key mechanism for transmitting privilege and power down through the generations, in terms of family wealth. Using education to select individuals, the privileged transmit power generationally conferred by the neutral authority of academic institutions so ignoring hereditary transmission of power and privilege (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Poor parents are pathologised because they have no privilege to pass down, so are identified as the problem rather than a system which reproduces inequalities. Instead of using earlier terms, such as problem families or maladjusted children, to distinguish between the poor as those deserving or undeserving of help, people can be distinguished intellectually: 'The poor are not just immoral, alcoholic and degenerate, they are stupid, they lack intelligence' (Bourdieu, 1998, p43). The failure then is individual, rather than societal and in this way inequality is legitimised by focussing on the actions of individuals rather than underlying structures (Bourdieu, 1984). With the increasing expectation on parents to remedy the attainment gap, and poverty more generally, mothers are placed in the same bind, be a 'good' mother or fail your children (and society). In reducing 'good' mothering to a series of tasks to complete, and detaching it from economic constraints, the success or failure of the project lies entirely with the individual mother. The following section will set out how I undertook the interviews.

4.8 Interviews: Recruitment and analysis

CDA of THP allowed me to explore dominant 'good' mothering discourses, but to understand how these impact working-class mothers and to what extent, it was necessary to conduct interviews. In total, twenty biographical interviews were conducted with working-class mothers, of children aged between two and five years. This age group was selected as it is within the target age range of THP and meant participants had a child of preschool age or in a primary reception class. This is an age at which children, or more specifically their parents, receive state-intervention aimed at improving their child's development whether that be a government-funded nursery place, parenting classes, or additional health visitor/family nurse partnership support. All participants are White British, living in the same local authority in southeast England (full details of participants can be found in Appendix 3). The participants are all white in part due to recruiting from my own networks and the local authority from which participants were drawn has a higher proportion of white people than the UK overall (ONS, 2022). Furthermore, as I am using my own position as a white working-class woman to interpret narratives alongside my autoethnographic data, I am giving an insight into white working-class women's experiences in a local authority in the South East of England. My own embodiment thus allowed for a depth and richness of understanding that I might not have produced in relation to other ethnic and cultural groups. As discussed in chapter 1, white working-class has been produced as a specific category which does not enjoy the same privileges and normativity whiteness commonly bestows on the middle-classes. This is a group targeted by 'class disgust' and labelled 'chavs' (Tyler, 2008), portrayed as members of Troubled Families in need of domesticating (Turner, 2017).

Being aware that many of my potential interviewees would be struggling to afford day-to-day necessities I did not want my interview to form a further burden upon them. It was important to recognise their 'work' in sharing their narratives and reimburse them for their time. When advertising for participants it was made clear payment was to reimburse them for their time. Warnock et al (2022) believe normalising payment of participants is part of a wider challenge to neoliberalism's corrosive effect on Higher Education. Women often bear a great deal of unpaid reproductive work, so I did not wish to add to that with my interviews (Rai et al, 2014). In reimbursing the women for their time, I hoped to confer 'a sense of respect towards participants for valuing their time' (Warnock et al, 2022, p198). Since the interviews were likely to be an hour long, I chose £20 as being just over double the current minimum wage. Initially I intended to provide a cash payment so the women could decide how they wanted to spend it. This was partly

informed by my own situation when I was given a supermarket voucher for some work I had done. I found it insulting that the person 'paying' me was stipulating what I should be spending my money on. However, a requirement of the funding out of which participants were paid was to provide receipts so I was compelled to give vouchers rather than cash. To make the payments as cash-like as possible, it was open to the women to choose whatever type of voucher they wanted. Although this created additional work for me, it was something I felt very strongly about so would not compromise on. Often poverty is viewed as a result of 'poor life choices, a lack of work ethic, and an acceptance of dependency' (Walker, 2014, p138) and those living in poverty viewed as financially irresponsible. When people are given essential help, this often takes the form of being given food or supermarket vouchers as though they cannot be trusted with money. In giving the women the choice in voucher, I was attempting to acknowledge that they are best placed to decide what they spent their money on. People in receipt of welfare benefits often feel that their lives and spending are under surveillance (Pybus et al, 2021).

Often, research participants are thanked in the acknowledgements but for me, they need to sit centre stage. These women have welcomed me into their homes and shared their deeply personal, emotional and, at times, traumatic narratives with me. I have played with their children, drunk their tea, laughed, welled up and been deeply touched, not only by their openness and strength in the face of, at times, extreme hardship, but their care and love for their children in actions and words. The experiences we shared have at times aroused difficult memories for me: a cold house, an empty belly, a black eye or an ex-partner who won't take 'no' for an answer. Unanticipated emotional labour can arise when conducting research within a community of which you are a part (Brown, 2022). This was the most difficult part of the interviewing process but also what kept me going; having that commonality with the women reinforced my view that I was the person to do this project and it was worth doing. Within qualitative research there is precarity, with 'slippage between researcher and researched producing moments of intensity and fragility as well as identification' (Warnock et al, 2022, p200). To manage this, I used my research journal to off-load those thoughts and feelings and discussed them with my supervisors. Brown (2022) notes the importance of support and patience of supervisors in navigating difficult emotions evoked by this type of research.

I explored how working-class women experience mothering, their values, and practices and to what extent they accept, amend, or reject dominant discourses. The interviews examined how those discourses impact family relationships and mothering and what alternative values they might

be drawing on. I started from the question: 'How do working-class mothers understand their role?' To answer my research questions, biographical interviews were chosen to elicit narratives which could build a picture of the impact of dominant discourses and how they might be resisted or subverted. I wanted to understand how working-class mothers understand their role in the current context (discerned from THP). Interviews enabled me to develop a close rapport and allow for an openness which may not have been possible in focus groups. I was aware the women may have been subject to stigmatisation and so may not wish to discuss such personal subjects in a group situation. Since working-class parents are often depicted as 'pathologically different and morally questionable' (Gillies, 2004, p15) there may have been a reluctance to be interviewed within my chosen demographic. However, since I am a parent of young children from a similar background to my participants, I was able to readily access networks for recruitment. Within my network are many working-class mothers of young children who I have met through preschool, school, clubs, friends, or family. I shared details of my research project within these networks informally, through social media, WhatsApp or face-to-face to recruit mothers for interview. Recruitment via existing networks and snowballing through working-class networks (Gillies 2004 and Gabb 2008) is a common method used in family research. I wanted to ensure participants were at one remove from me to give greater confidentiality (Gillies, 2004). Once these sources were exhausted, I broadened my search to include local Facebook groups. As I live in the same area as my participants, there was potential for our paths to cross beyond the research, and I used the writing of Sarah Marie Hall (2017) to begin to reflect on and navigate these overlaps. Interviewees were provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) outlining the demographic criteria so they could confirm they fit within the parameters of my definition of working-class before proceeding. That definition meant that their household income was below the ONS median (£29,500) and highest educational qualifications were Level 3.

All but one interview took place in participants' homes, adding to the richness of the data collected, allowing for a more comfortable place to talk about personal issues and providing an additional layer of understanding through seeing mothers in their own environment (Pascoe Leahy, 2022). A 'thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach was used, with topics or starting points for discussion covered flexibly in a fluid structure that allowed for unexpected issues to emerge' (Edwards and Holland, 2020, p582). The narrative allowed for 'reflection on the past and present experiences of family life and relationships' (Gabb, 2008, p150). In this type of interview, it is up to the participant to select 'which areas and events to disclose' and to set the

pace (Gabb, 2008, p150). Once the initial question was posed, I took on the role of 'active listener', intentionally stepping back (Gabb, 2008). As per my interview schedule (Appendix 2), I began the main part of the interview by saying:

> *I would like you to tell me your story of being a parent, all the events and experiences which were important for you. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for afterwards.*

Given the unusual nature of biographical interviews for the interviewees, it was important to make explicit the expectation that they should talk at length without further direction, since they may have been expecting a more formal question and answer type interview. As a backup I used a series of prompts to encourage the narrative where women were unsure what was expected. Following this stage of the interview, a short clip from THP was played which the women were invited to comment on. This was to ascertain, firstly, whether the women had come across the site themselves (or been directed to it by health or education practitioners), secondly, to see whether they engaged with THP's messaging and, thirdly, their thoughts on the format. Directly after the interview, I took field notes about the interview with my impressions – what Wengraf calls an 'instant debrief' (2001, p142). Field notes provide 'information on the situated context of the research encounter and offer an invaluable glimpse of everyday living' (Gabb, 2008, p149), serving as a memory aid for the researcher. Using a research journal also allowed me to capture initial impressions post-interview (of interviewee's general demeanour, body language etc) and post-transcript (choice of language, laughter, pauses) to contribute to the data. The notes formed part of the ongoing analysis which is described in more detail below.

Turning now to the analysis of the interviews, it was important for me to retain a sense of the women's voices within the research rather than impose my own voice over theirs. For this reason, I chose not to conduct CDA of the interview data and instead selected narrative analysis, a method whereby stories are studied to explore how people experience the world (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Biographical interviews were used to explore how working-class mothers' own meanings, understandings and narratives are constructed from or in resistance to dominant discourses. The aim of narrative stories is to 'understand personal identity, lifecourse and generation, the sociocultural and the historical world, through narrated experience and its meaning – the ways that individuals package their stories and make sense of their lives' (Gabb, 2008, p38), generating knowledge, disrupting certainties, and allowing a glimpse into the 'complexities of human lives,

selves and endeavours' (Andrews et al, 2007, p103). Stories are viewed as knowledge, within narrative analysis, and therefore constitute 'the social reality of the narrator' (Etherington, 2004, p81). In the biographical interview process the participants are the producers, the process is reflection on those stories by the researcher and the product is the interpretation by the researcher of the narratives (Riessman, 2015).

Stories are part of everyday life and as the focus of this research project is lived experiences and everyday life a narrative analysis of the biographical interview data can contextualise life experiences (personally and socially) in significant and connected ways (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Interviews were initially analysed on a case study basis looking at the 'connections and threads' across the account to discover fundamental themes (Gabb, 2008, p153). Alongside this life events, 'the meaning these have for the person; and the way the story' was told (Brannen and Nilsen, 2012, p34) were considered. Narrative analysis of each case allowed an understanding of how participants 'understand themselves, their strategies for living and how they make theoretical sense of their lives' (Etherington, 2004, p75). During analysis, I recognised that depending on their sociocultural backgrounds, people may 'encode their own perspectives and emotions in different ways' (Minami, 2015, p79). As well as sociocultural backgrounds, gender and power can be explored 'in terms of social structures, relationships, institutions, states and resources' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p147). How participants situate themselves within their narratives (Wortham, 2001) gives insight into their mothering identity which goes beyond a focus on language in isolation. This can shed light on 'how connections between social structures and ideas are envisaged …. making connections between ideas, institutions and hierarchies' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p147). In terms of analysis at a language level, Wortham's five cues to positioning were used as a mode of analysis: the way people, objects, events and actions are referenced; verbs which suggest alternative motive or assessment of actors within the narrative; quoting another using a different voice or register which may illustrate their feelings towards that person; evaluating events which positions the participant in a moral role and as sharing normative values; and participants' use of mental verbs, adverbs and discourse markers which 'convey (un) certainty, evidentiality, subjective vs. objective perspective, and common ground' (Wortham, 2001, p75). Throughout the research a reflexive consciousness was deployed 'to achieve an emotional and critical distance' (Gillies, 2004, p16) and 'avoid over-simplistic appropriation' (ibid). This is particularly important since I am personally invested in the

participants and their position. The researcher must account for their 'situated selves in a scholarly product, thereby lending the research credibility and validity' (Riessman, 2015, p233).

Once transcripts of the biographical interviews had been reviewed individually to compare with the overriding themes from THP analysis, I looked for themes recurring across the data set. The terms of analysis began with the overarching themes and discourses appearing in both THP and the biographical interviews. Interviewing mothers of young children, who are the target audience of THP, I anticipated the subjects of this stage of the analysis to align. I was interested to explore points of correspondence and divergence and whether this was impacted upon by other factors, such as mother's age, number, or age of children etc. The research provided a platform for me to interpret and critically deconstruct the mothers' narratives in a process of co-construction. Often missing from discussions of poverty and welfare benefits in the media and academia is 'a real and sustained engagement with people who have direct experiences of the problems' (Herrington et al, 2020, p135) being written about which motivated me to undertake this research and include my narrative within it.

4.9 Conclusion

Within my research I hold several, sometimes contradictory, positions: young mother, older mother, in poverty, professional, working-class, middle-class, working mother, at home mother. It is from this mishmash of identities that I began my research since I am not fully one thing nor another. The positions I held which attracted stigma and those which attracted praise or valediction serve to highlight those features valued in society: my full-time work as a single parent was held up as being good whereas some mothers are viewed as neglectful for working full-time (but only if they are partnered). Had I chosen not to work then I would have been viewed as a drain on society's finances. Later when I chose to be at home, this was deemed unacceptable since my husband was poorly paid and we required in-work benefits to supplement his wages. To be a full-time mother and viewed as 'good' is contingent on whether you are partnered and if so, how much they earn rather than any inherent qualities you as a mother may possess – focus instead is solely upon economic circumstances.

As a teacher working in an affluent area, parents who worked long hours used the provided wraparound care and were not able to attend events held within the school day: they were seen as selfish by staff for choosing employment over their children. When it was solely the father who

was in this position, however, no judgement was made. Single parents were always viewed negatively by staff. In gaining my professional qualifications, I allowed myself to step out of the stereotype single mother which I held before, becoming more respectable. In moving away from my home city, I was able to build a new identity where I was a respectable professional. My own story within which I hold multiple identities, perhaps shows that others also hold a range of identities rather than the single ones which are often used to label others. None of us hold a single identity and those multiple identities we hold are viewed subjectively by others, depending on their identity (with geographic and temporal parameters). Those identities form part of who we are, how we experience the world and how we are seen within it.

In this chapter, I have set out my methodological position which has structured and informed project design. The research is positioned within a feminist perspective drawing on critical discourse and narrative analysis methodologies. I began the chapter by setting out my position in the research and how I am using autoethnography to include this. I have explained my view of knowledge and power impacted my methodological decisions. My research question and the tools I have chosen to answer it were described. Following this, I explained my selection of THP to explore current dominant discourses of 'good' mothering. Then, I looked in more detail at how knowledge and power are related and work to impose norms and values on people so that they effectively become self-governing. A more detailed explanation of how critical discourse analysis works to uncover dominant discourses was included before considering the impact of social class, under the heading: structure, agency, and habitus. After this, I described the process of recruitment, biographical interviews, and analysis of the women's stories. The following chapters present my findings, beginning with CDA of THP and considering the underlying messages being conveyed.

Chapter 5: Current 'good' mothering discourses according to BBC's *Tiny Happy People*

It's gold dust really for families to be given those tips and tools to be able to use, particularly in those first five years.

Quote from HRH Duchess of Cambridge at the launch of the BBC's *Tiny Happy People*.

When my son was five, I was told he may never learn to read; he was labelled as having 'special needs' and assigned an educational psychologist for a period of time. This shocked me as I'd assumed he was 'normal'. I bought a set of books to try to help but given the long hours I worked at the time it was never going to work. To allow me to pick him up from school, I asked to reduce my work hours but, this meant we couldn't afford to live in our house. We ended up moving in with my parents for several months until a housing association flat, close to my son's school, became available. It was good that I could collect my son from school for the first time but the social housing we lived in was damp, communal areas used for drug-taking and we now lived in the street next to his father who could be difficult. Reducing my working hours, having always worked full-time, meant I no longer had a lunch break when I'd previously met friends, got shopping, or paid bills. It removed my full-time worker status which deflected some of the stigma attracted through being a single mother and it meant we were in our fourth address by the time he was six years old. This glimpse into the challenges of housing and managing conflicting demands of a child struggling with their education and earning enough to live shows that a website of advice isn't what is needed for parents experiencing difficulty.

With my younger children, despite no longer being the sole-earner, when they needed more of me, money was a huge factor. Money versus time is a universal issue but when you have less, it is the difference between enough food or not; paying the bills or not; having a home or not. The worst part is feeling impotent to improve things. Especially with my younger children, less money equates to greater strain on the adults in the household; my reduced hours or unemployment

helps the kids but increases pressure on my husband, balancing competing needs of family members and trying to hold it all together. It's the worry of waiting for pay day or when working on a zero-hours contract, paying upfront for childcare, being out of pocket until hours are processed and uncertainty delay causes. This occupied my mind when my children were young, not maximising interactions, and caused despair when their needs were impacted by our circumstances. Would this website have been 'gold dust' for me when I first became a parent? No. I didn't have the head space to deal with learning techniques as there were more pressing issues to contend with. Gold dust would be a life free from housing or financial worries. Putting the children first meant concentrating on keeping a home and afloat financially rather than working on their skills. Concerns have been raised about each of my children's development when they were younger but, I was too busy attending to the present to concern myself with the future.

This chapter uses a critical discourse analysis to discern current 'good' mothering discourses being promoted by the BBC's *Tiny Happy People* website (THP). To do that, it will begin by looking at the authorship of the website, and the BBC's status as commissioning editor, before considering how THP began and its launch. Next, it will look at the website's focus: the word gap, why THP was designed with the intention of compensating for this perceived gap; how it attempts to do this; and explores the word gap concept which is contested and subject to sustained criticism. Then, the target audience will be considered through a review of the BBC's commissioning briefs for THP. Following that, the selection of HRH Duchess of Cambridge as a figurehead in the launch and promotion of THP will be explored, together with the role of other 'ambassadors' selected to promote the website's content and message. Finally, content of the website will be analysed, and five key themes determined, which will be subjected to detailed discussion before the chapter concludes with a summary of the 'good' mother who is constructed by THP which feeds into the interviews and data analysis.

5.1 BBC's history and mission

Prior to looking at the website itself, I will consider the BBC's position as the creator and producer of the site. As described in the previous chapter, the BBC holds a unique position as national broadcaster, deeply enmeshed in the British establishment, closely linked to government who set their parameters of operation (Leighton, 2005). It has a long history of providing educational content as part of its services; even before the advent of the internet, or indeed television, their radio broadcasts of the 1920s and 30s sought to bring education into the homes of the masses.

During this time, it was under the management of Lord Reith who 'placed great emphasis on using radio, and later television, to educate and inform the public, and his legacy is felt at the BBC' (Cody et al, 2004, p244). Matthew Thomson argues that children's television was part of the post-war settlement which created a separate space for children away from the dangers of the adult world. The BBC was central to this offering of a space for children and 'the vision behind early BBC children's programming and its aim of providing 'a special developmental landscape for the child' (Thomson, 2013, p108). Despite successfully presenting itself as a social good, BBC children's output was described throughout the post-war period as 'condescending, paternalistic and middle-class' (Thomson, 2013, p130). As will be explored within this chapter, despite describing the situation over sixty years ago, those descriptors could readily be applied to THP. BBC online educational content first appeared in 1998 in the form of Bitesize, a curriculum revision site for children (Lee-Wright, 2010). Since then, their online content has evolved and expanded to include educational resources for pre-schoolers through to adults.

The BBC's wider educational content has been described as attempting to 'curricularize' television (Buckingham and Scanlon, 2003), is widely used in schools and is the UK's most viewed news broadcaster (Lewis and Cushion, 2019). The BBC claims impartiality despite being an integral part of the British establishment whose content is influenced by those in power (Mills, 2020). In occupying a 'traditionally and institutionally guaranteed position' as educators (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 p21), through their status and reputation for delivering educational content, the information being transmitted by the BBC is held in high esteem and technical competence presumed. It is this technical competence, conferring authority upon its content, which lends THP a higher degree of status than other parenting websites. Content is validated by the BBC name, and its establishment position, represented as impartial, correct and of high quality. Paid for by licence fee, there is no advertising on the site and content is freely accessible.

5.2 Origins of THP

Following a pilot in 2019, as part of Greater Manchester's School Readiness programme aimed at closing the language gap (Barlow, 2019), THP was launched nationally via press release on 13 July 2020. Accompanying the release was a photograph of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge who described THP as 'gold dust' for parents and expressed a wish it had been available when she became a mother (BBC, 2020). Evidence (taken from Department of Education, National Literacy Trust and the Education Policy Institute) was cited, within the press release, of persistent

gaps in language, particularly in relation to children in 'deprived areas', and the 'big difference' parents and carers can make which are presented as the reasons behind the creation of THP. Alongside the BBC's press release and a slot on breakfast television, several of the 'ambassadors' (discussed below) read the Cbeebies bedtime story (aired nightly on the BBC channel, aimed at children aged two to seven years, and read by well-known guest storytellers). Various bodies published articles on their websites, announcing the launch of the site, including the Institute of Health Visiting (2020) who write: 'Evidence shows the attainment gap that exists in the UK between wealthier and poorer communities begins before children start school.' Again, in connecting the attainment gap to parent behaviour, this article implies a failure by parents to talk to their children. THP is touted as a vehicle to reduce the 'word gap', mimicking policy approaches to poverty focussing on parental behaviour rather than structural inequalities. On the THP website, which **'**hopes to pay a key role in halving the UK's word gap' (Institute of Health Visiting, 2020), each video has an emphasis on language acquisition despite appearing under different categories; 'Fun with bubbles' (listed under 'Sensory Fun') is subtitled 'Use simple instructions to help them develop their language'; 'Homemade Playdough' ('Getting Crafty' section) is subtitled 'Making homemade playdough is a fun way for your child to explore their creativity and learn new words.' More explicit is the video entitled: entitled 'Babies: Their Wonderful World - How much of a difference can a parent make?'[2] which uses 'an innovative word tracking device' and has 'an algorithm to log every word he hears and every word he says over the course of a day'. Over a two-day period, the device is used: the first day the mother uses her usual speech; on the second, she is instructed 'to really maximise on every opportunity that you can to engage in verbal interaction with him, so we want you to really talk as much as you can' (BBC, 2023a). The video highlights her effort results in 700 additional words being spoken which is compared to her child's speech:

> on day one, he produced about 2,500 words. But on day two, when you were speaking more to him, he produced about 2,800. So that's an increase of about 13%. So even though you only spoke five percent more. You managed to get 30% more speech out of him. (BBC, 2023a).

Despite this measure of language disregarding *what* is being said, focussing entirely on quantity of words spoken, THP presents this as 'evidence' that mothers saying more words to their child

[2] Video available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/babies-wonderful-world-word-counts/z7bvjhv

develops language. The next section will look at word gap research and why this has come to be relied upon.

5.3 Word gap

The concept of a word gap, in its current inception, originated in the US, arising from a study by Hart and Risley (1995) who claim children from low-income households are exposed to 30 million fewer words than those from affluent households. The study involved recording the quantity of words spoken from parent to child in 42 households to prove their theory of a gap in language between children from low-income households which has been used to explain the attainment gap (whereby those children have poorer educational outcomes). Despite the original study's 'considerable methodological shortcomings' (Allen and Spencer, 2022, p1187), and subsequent research contradicting its findings (Sperry et al, 2019), it has been cited over 670 times (Anders et al, 2016) and the word gap adopted in England as an explicit policy target (Cushing, 2022). Conceptually the word gap is criticised for its reductive interpretation of language acquisition, mono-cultural approach, and its role in perpetuating oppressive power structures along raced and classed lines (Rosa, 2016). Each of these will be expanded upon and contextualised within the current political system.

Counting individual words and using that as a proxy for quantifying language acquisition, decontextualises language (Blum, 2015), disconnecting it from those who use or create it (Franklin, 2021). As demonstrated on THP, mothers are expected to 'act as the child's in-home teacher from before birth' (Blum, 2015 p75); programmes aimed at improving children's language rely upon mothers speaking directly to their babies and toddlers despite this not being the norm in much of the world. THP states that a quarter of children are starting school behind in literacy development. Connecting children's early language with future school success, is 'fundamentally misconceived', (Hackett et al, 2021, p913) resulting in unsuccessful interventions. The focus on word gaps and vocabulary in early years environments leads to language being decontextualised from the usual environmental, sensory, or spatial supports which prompt it (Hackett et al, 2021) meaning counting words is not an accurate measure of a child's language learning or comprehension. Instead, there should be an understanding 'that language involves more than words, syntax and meaning – that something mobile, dynamic, relational and multi-sensory moves, and moves in, language' (Hackett et al, p925). Those aspects are not readily quantifiable, so instead word gap metrics are favoured since they allow comparisons to be drawn. THP promotes replication of the early years teaching

environment within the family home, but this could have the opposite effect to its intention, potentially removing the aspects of home which make it distinct from educational establishments: informality, family relationships and lack of inhibitions (Hackett et al, 2021). Use of the quantity of words spoken as a measure of language development is an overly simplistic interpretation of language which disregards its multi-faceted nature.

Despite the flawed nature of the concept and Hart and Risley's findings being contested, claims of a 30-million-word gap continue and are used to justify policy remedies which ignore underlying issues (Cushing, 2022). Word gap ideology persists because it promotes individual responsibility, aligning with neoliberal ideals, and is strengthened by 'claims of scientific objectivity', (Cushing, 2022, p20) thereby increasing its supposed reliability. In doing so, it reinforces existing power structures, preserving and concealing 'structural issues of poverty, racism, ableism and classism', (Cushing, 2022, p15). Those issues are instead interpreted 'as a linguistic problem requiring linguistic solutions, rather than as a politico-economic problem requiring politico-economic solutions' (Rosa, 2016, p165). Consequently, children from those families are deemed lacking in language, and low attainment is connected to deficient parenting (Anders et al, 2016). Focus on the word gap as an explanation for poor school performance rests on a belief of 'a cultural, cognitive and linguistic deficit located within the speakers, their families, and their communities' (Cushing, 2022, p5) rather than the impact of structural barriers. Remedies aimed at addressing a perceived word gap serve to blame the 'victims' for not taking the 'correct' action and ignore all the positive practice which take place in working-class homes, devaluing any non-normative ways of thinking and communicating which occur (Johnson, 2015). Instead, their 'language practices are perceived as deficient, incomplete, and indeed, full of gaps when compared against the language practices of the idealized white middle-classes' (Cushing, 2022, p2). Ultimately, word gap ideologies work to fortify and uphold existing power structures: increasing mothers' responsibility for their children's future outcomes; and reinforcing deficit narratives around marginalised groups. In England, word gap discourses:

> have subscribed to this logic under a guise of scientific objectivity, social justice and 'research-led' policy making, with Ofsted and Oxford University Press in particular occupying a position of institutionalized power which coerces schools and teachers into reproducing word gap ideologies in their own settings. *(Cushing, 2022, p21)*

In this way, institutionalised power is wielded by the BBC, using THP as a vehicle to promote word gap ideology and compounded by conflating it with social mobility.

A stated intention of THP is 'to help improve social mobility across the UK', (Appendix 7, p1), simultaneously reiterating the percentage of children not reaching the expected levels at age 5 (Appendix 7). Emphasising an improvement in social mobility highlights that they believe that working-class people should be aiming to move out of their social class as if there is something inherently wrong with being working-class. What social mobility does not address is that mobility works in both directions and there will always be working-class people. Viewing social mobility according to attainment at age five is an extremely simplistic view since it entirely ignores social and structural causes of disadvantage and inequality, instead personalising attainment to focus on individual behaviour. Social mobility does not work on either a collective or individual level since it does nothing to remove oppressive power structures (Reay, 2017). Even assuming social mobility is desirable, tying it to 'personal drive and the will to succeed', (Blandford, 2017 p24) although popular with governments, is a simplification of the issue – shifting responsibility onto the individual who is often not in a position to effect change. Attainment at five is measured through the baseline assessments undertaken by reception class teachers which are informed by assessments undertaken in preschool settings. Teacher assessments have stronger demographic effects than those obtained through objective measures (Melhuish and Gardiner, 2020), suggesting teachers are influenced by family background when conducting assessments. Confirming this, Simpson et al's (2019 p25) research in early years education found 'practitioners are unlikely to be immune to the negative constructions evident in policy'. This research revealed practitioners blamed 'poor parenting' for children's low attainment and poverty (Simpson et al, 2019). Despite claiming parents were difficult to engage, practitioners were negative in their approach towards attempting to engage with them (Simpson et al, 2019) which is similar to the THP view of their target audience being 'hostile' (discussed further in the following section). It is unsurprising that addressing parents in a patronising manner may result in hostility. Judgements about mothers whose children do not have the expected language skills when starting school creates a reliable governance method since they are often made indirectly, so are less likely to be defended (Allen and Spencer, 2022). In looking at who THP are targeting, its emphasis on the word gap (used as a proxy to connect working-class parenting to children's attainment), and the behaviour change approach to promote social mobility, the purpose of THP is exposed. The next section will explore in more detail how parents are framed by the production team behind THP.

5.4 Commissioning Briefs

An online search about THP returned several commissioning documents allowing insight into the intentions of THP, their target audience and the processes behind filming of clips and creation of animations. The function of the briefs is to commission people to create content for the website, including creating content alongside health and childcare professionals, content aimed at specific groups (eg those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, or for parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). Some of the briefings address specific types of content, for example, animation or live action.

The briefs claim that until very recently, early years settings and the home learning environment have not been government priorities (Appendix 4). Thirteen early years policy changes were made between 1998 and 2018 (Akhal, 2019) which would seem to dispute that claim. The Education Policy Institute's report into government policies and their impact on early years provision concludes that, through policy change, the government has effected reformation of the early years sector (Akhal, 2019). For the BBC to state that early years and the home learning environment have not been prioritised by governments until very recently suggests that they do not have much knowledge of this area of policy or wish to represent the issues the website addresses as ignored by, rather than very closely aligned with, government policy.

The stated intention of THP is to 'teach techniques, model behaviours and empower those adults to stimulate their children's language and communication skills', rather than lecture parents (Appendix 4, p10). They identify that their target audience of 'young adults from less advantaged backgrounds' do not usually access BBC content and may even be 'hostile' towards it, so are aiming for THP to be less like traditional BBC fare (Appendix 4, p10). This hostility towards BBC content may relate to the move away to new forms of media consumption by young people, such as that found on social media platforms eg Instagram or TikTok. However, use of the word 'hostile' conveys an image of their target audience as ill-disposed or antagonistic rather than disinterested. In constantly reinforcing their message of encouraging parental talk towards young children *and* that they are targeting parents from less advantaged backgrounds, it is compounding the view that parental behaviour, rather than material circumstances or the prejudice faced from educational professionals, is the cause of their children's low attainment. THP is actively constructing their target audience (through their commissioning briefs) as hostile, young, dysfunctional, less advantaged adults whose children are prone to neglect. This has echoes of the culture of poverty

described by Oscar Lewis (1963) and the narratives surrounding teenage pregnancy of the New Labour years.

Within the briefs, it is stipulated locations used are 'relatable, down to earth, everyday inner city, rural, or coastal' and to avoid those which could be viewed as 'aspirational' or 'out of reach' (Appendix 5 p3). 'Relatable' to whom? Presumably their target audience of parents from 'less advantaged' backgrounds. However, the clips provide an acceptable, uncluttered, sanitised version of working-class homes with no sign of the problems evident in many homes of those living in poverty: damp, poor state of repair, lack of furnishing. Videos depict the suggested range of inner city, rural and coastal, although, again, there is no evidence of the realities of deprived neighbourhoods: fly-tipping, vandalism, drug use or violence. All social problems are neatly removed so focus (and blame) is upon parents' behaviour rather than the reality of life in poverty, with working-class mothering situated as deficient in relation to middle-class mothering. It is poverty through a middle-class lens, whereby the difference between the social classes is behavioural thereby removing any responsibility from society at large (including themselves). This moves classed concepts away from material resources, focussing instead on character traits and qualities (Reay, 2017) and framing poverty as a parenting problem to be managed at an individual level. Their missionary zeal means that they believe educating parents is the solution rather than pushing for an improvement in material conditions. The briefs require activities to use ordinary household objects rather than requiring costly or special equipment (Appendix 5). In specifying this, they are giving the impression that this removes any obstacles to participation and the activities are therefore accessible to all, meaning lack of money is no excuse for failing to engage with the content.

It is highlighted that they do not want to 'scaremonger' as children develop at different rates (Appendix 6), although the content itself is divided up by development stages. This would appear to run contrary to the requirement not to 'scaremonger' and the constant reinforcement during the films themselves for parents not to worry. THP is described as supportive, fun, and providing 'a daily comfort and gentle reminders to our parents to keep talking to their little ones' (Appendix 7, p2). The language 'gentle reminders' is extremely paternalistic and seems to suggest that were it not for THP then parents would forget to speak to their children. As well as being targeted at younger parents with preschool children, THP is particularly focussed 'on the seldom heard, easily ignored, lower socioeconomic background audience (C2DE)' (Appendix 7, p2), implying these

groups are the ones who do not speak to their children. It is unclear whether they mean these parents are seldom heard and easily ignored by the BBC or wider society. Reminiscent of New Labour's socially excluded (see chapter 3), it is a patronising portrayal of working-class people who require middle-class saviours to rescue them. Once again, social mobility and the negative impact of the word/attainment gap producing a 'significant barrier' (Appendix 8, p2) is referenced. Barriers to social mobility are based solely on the word or attainment gap rather than the negative impacts of poverty itself.

One of the sections of THP is 'child development', which will be described more thoroughly in the analysis below; however, the commissioning brief for this aspect of the site provides information about the knowledge being used to inform the content, notably 'fundamental theories, concepts or explainers studied in the field of developmental psychology, theory and neuroscience' (Appendix 8, p3). Film makers are encouraged to look at when parental interaction 'lacks content', stating that fathers' conversations with their children 'has been found to stretch a child's language development often expanding their vocabulary' (Appendix 8, p4).

> It might also be interesting to look at parents and the use of their language. This will help parents to see when they are actively supporting the development of their child's language 4 and when their interaction lacks content. E.g. the language parents use when playing with their children and what effect this has. It has been observed that dads use of language around play is often different to mum's choice of language. Dad's [sic] chat around play has been found to stretch a child's language development often expanding their vocabulary… could this be explored in a science experiment for example? *BBC (Appendix 8, p4)*

Expecting film makers to discern whether parental interaction 'lacks content' is assuming that those film makers are experts in parental interaction over and above the parents themselves. It may be that they are drawing on the research of Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagas (2006) who found that fathers', rather than mothers', language input was more closely linked to children's language development. Highlighting a supposed superiority of fathers' talk suggests mothers' talk is lacking, presumably *not* expanding their children's vocabulary, and *limiting* language development. Suggesting exploration of this phenomenon through a science experiment invokes gender stereotypes which situate men as more suited to certain roles. Videos featuring mothers tend to

suggest using everyday household chores as a basis for talk. Day-to-day interactions, which are likely to use more everyday language, are most often undertaken by mothers.

The briefs were interrogated to understand how parents are being constructed by the THP production team. THP is described as one of the BBC's education campaigns which are 'large scale, impactful initiatives that aim to tackle a societal or cultural deficit', (Appendix 4, p8). In targeting 'societal or cultural deficits', the BBC are aiming content at parents they deem 'deficient'. Content is sought which portrays parents 'from less advantaged backgrounds', (Appendix 4, p4) with the requirement that some films include regional accents. In England, civility, social class, and Standard English are conflated, so that regional accents are 'stigmatised as ignorant, sloppy, and impure through their association with lower class speakers' (Cushing and Snell, 2022, p3). Regional accents are shorthand for working-class.

5.5 By Royal appointment

THP was launched by Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, in July 2020, as part of a five-year project sitting within the BBC's wider content, aimed at addressing 'societal and educational deficits within the UK' (Appendix 7, p19). Its launch was widely reported in the press and television, alongside interviews with the Duchess of Cambridge (a mother of three young children), whose involvement in the development and production of some of the content is celebrated. The prominence of THP was enhanced through close involvement of the Duchess of Cambridge: she was interviewed on breakfast television and in various media outlets to publicise the website. Despite not having a background or any formal qualifications in early education – beyond being the mother of royal children - the Duchess of Cambridge has set herself up as 'expert', presented as such by the BBC and other media outlets and given free rein to develop content for the site. In the BBC's press release for THP, the Duchess of Cambridge is described as having early years and mental health as a particular focus for her royal duties (BBC, 2020). Under the Early Years section of the Royal Foundation website, a connection between early childhood and adult problems is drawn:

> For the last nine years, The Duchess of Cambridge has spent time looking into how experiences in early childhood are often the root cause of today's hardest social challenges such as addiction, family breakdown, poor mental health, suicide and homelessness. *(Royal Foundation, 2020)*

Her mission revolves around the conviction that the less fortunate are getting it wrong and can be taught how to be better people. According to the Royal Foundation (2020), the estimated social cost of late intervention is £17bn each year and brain development from the early years is described as being 'crucial'. In 2020, the Duchess of Cambridge launched a 'landmark survey' of parents and her own Centre for Early Childhood, describing early childhood as the 'social equivalent to climate change' (BBC, 2021). It is evident that the Duchess of Cambridge is carving out an area for herself in the early childhood field.

At first glance, the decision to choose a member of the royal family to head up a campaign aimed at parents from disadvantaged backgrounds could be construed as unusual. However, as wife of the heir apparent, her mothering role is paramount to her position: production of an heir. It is of no surprise that Britain magazine's list 'Top 10 British Mothers from History' draws half of its entries from the monarchy, with the Duchess of Cambridge coming in sixth place (her mother-in-law takes the top spot) (Grafton, 2021). To understand this choice, a consideration of the British media's portrayal of the Duchess of Cambridge is useful as it is reproducing national culture and normalising middle-class values (Repo and Yrjölä, 2015). Repo and Yrjölä (2015, p743) identify 'how royal subjectivity becomes infiltrated by gendered, classed and raced neoliberal modalities of selfhood and self-governance'. The Duchess of Cambridge is simultaneously celebrated as evidence of social mobility (despite gaining her status through marriage rather than education for example) while embodying austerity's desired image of motherhood which includes planned parenthood and upper middle-class resources, symbolically depicting normative values with the inference that young women should aim for those ideals (Repo and Yrjölä, 2015). It detaches parenting from the material situation, representing it as classless, based on what you do without recognising how parenting is determined by who you are and your resources.

Acting as technologies of power, the media shapes and regulates bodies and subjectivities governing everyday life by compelling individuals to self-manage their own habits, practices, and behaviour (Foucault, 1980b) going beyond the mirroring or constructing of public opinion (van Djik, 1991). Personal happiness is used as an instrumental, disciplinary technique which 'obliges individuals irrespective of their socio-economic background to view their emotional life on an economic footing in terms of constraints, interests and investments aimed at shaping their own lives' (Repo and Yrjölä, 2015, p744). It can be seen how, in using the Duchess of Cambridge to head up this campaign, the BBC are trading on her status to attract interest in THP. Her privilege is

ignored, and she is held up as an aspirational figure – commitment and hard work are the only requirements – others who are less successful must try harder. She is 'celebrated as a role model for young women and mothers' (Allen et al, 2015, p913). As mother to the future king, the Duchess of Cambridge's own position is closely scrutinised with several narratives being eminent: 'thrift and ordinariness; domesticity and retreatism; and the respectable maternal body', (Allen et al, 2015, p911). These themes align closely with the 'good' mothering demonstrated in THP (expanded upon below), tying in with her existing image as hard working and self-governing: mothers ought to be actively and constantly 'working' to improve their children's language skills or face the consequences of them not only failing to do well at school but the added emotional burden of them being unhappy. The next section will consider the role of the ambassadors who represent THP and promote its message.

5.6 Ambassadors

Alongside the Duchess of Cambridge, several other 'celebrity parents', drawn from television, music, and social media, are named as THP ambassadors. Their role is to use their social media presence to promote THP, undertaking promotional work to increase engagement with THP social media and web content. Embodying similar attributes to the Duchess of Cambridge, the ambassadors are 'self-made', perceived as achieving success through their individual effort. Each portrays a respectable form of parenthood, committed to self-betterment and entrepreneurialism (in the eyes of the producers), so are likely to be recognised and respected by working-class mothers. Drawn from sport, music, social media, and reality television, the ambassadors are drawn from areas of popular culture which will particularly appeal to THP's target audience. For example, former reality show *Love Island* contestants Dani Dyer (a single mother of one) and couple Jess Shears and Dom Lever who met on the programme[3]. Former England rugby union player, Ugo Monye, is another ambassador who highlights the lack of money his mother had when raising five children on her own while stressing the hard work this took. Jennie McAlpine, formerly of long-running soap opera *Coronation Street* shares the importance to her that THP is created by 'experts' and is 'a trusted website'. Within the ambassadors' statements and videos, there are references to the ease at which THP's activities can be included in their busy lives (see figures 1 and 2 below).

[3] Information about THP's ambassadors can be found at https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/ambassadors

Louise loves how Tiny Happy People activities are arranged by age, making it easy to quickly find something to try each day.

“

As a working mum, Tiny Happy People is so easy because it's in my pocket. In 20 minutes, I can pick an activity and feel like a mum winner.

Almost any daily activity is a chance to talk, bond and have fun. Discover your new favourite activities to share with your little one by **clicking here**.

Figure 1: Louise Pentland, Ambassador to THP, commenting on its ease of use.

“

Tiny Happy People has reminded us that doing the everyday stuff with your child, really does help them.

They find Tiny Happy People perfect for their busy schedules because the videos are short and you can easily fit them into your day, such as at lunch time or before you go to sleep.

Almost any daily activity is a chance to talk, bond and have fun. Discover your new favourite activities to share with your little one by **clicking here**.

Figure 2: Ambassadors Jess Shears and Dom Lever highlighting how easily THP's activities fit into their busy lives.

Research on celebrity mothers and their reception in the UK finds they ‘do a great deal of work in registering and shaping normative ideas about which ways of doing motherhood are valuable and which are not’ (Allen et al, 2015, p920). Social media use and its prevalence amongst people today mean that social media influencers and celebrity mothers contribute to building mothering ideals.

The celebrity parents chosen to represent THP are noted for their self-reliance. In highlighting these individualised accounts of achievement gained through hard work, a shift is facilitated ‘from structural frameworks for understanding “success” and “failure” towards intimate, personal ones’ (Mendick et al, 2015, p175). Women, particularly those from the working-classes or Black women, can only be successful through being seen to be hard-working and even then, it is often not enough (Mendick et al, 2015). Motherhood is frequently treated as unambitious within policy rhetoric, since it stands against the ideal neoliberal, post-feminist subject (Allen and Osgood, 2009). In treating motherhood in this way, working-class mothers, especially those who are young, are othered as making poor decisions for themselves and their children. Further discussion of the ‘good’ mother ideal produced by THP will be undertaken in the next section.

5.7 Video clips and animations

Having explored how the initiative was developed, some of the aims behind THP and its target audience, this section examines the discourses evident within the website itself, drawing out key

themes. THP consists of a sophisticated multimedia website with links to hundreds of videos, animations, and text-based advice. It is supported by social media platforms on Facebook and Instagram which in turn link back to the website to promote engagement with its content. The format of the website is a purple background with *Tiny Happy People* logo which is written in white text with the 'happy' in yellow with sun rays[4]. The strap line below reads: 'Your **words** build their **world**' (their bold) so the emphasis is on what parents do or can do just by using their vocabulary. This metaphor of building is one of construction of knowledge (Goatly, 2002) implying a need for it to be worked on explicitly. The site is very clearly part of the wider BBC content, with links to other parts of the BBC web-based content and iPlayer which carries their television content. All pages of THP carry the BBC logo prominently and authoritatively. On the home page, the page name and subtitle are followed by a brief description (see figure 3 below).

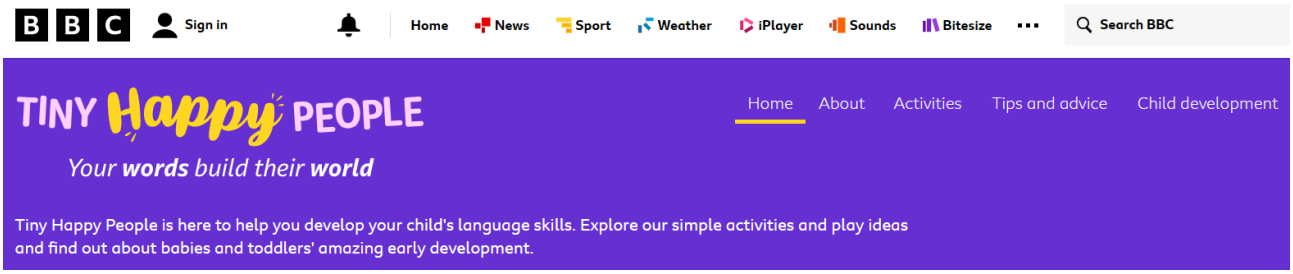

Figure 3: Information taken from THP home page

The use of just two sentences is representative of the rest of the website which is low on written text and predominantly audio-visual. These two sentences introduce the main themes which arise out of the other clips: parent responsibility; ease of application; and importance of research/expert advice.

Beneath these explanatory sentences, there are links to the three areas of: activities, advice, and development. Each of these includes a photograph of parent playing or talking with their child. Diversity is actively demonstrated in the choice of parents featured: family groupings (mothers, fathers and grandparents), ethnic backgrounds and parents with visible physical disabilities. Despite very visibly and performatively doing 'diversity', THP promotes one form of parenting: White, English, middle-class and able-bodied, so although people of different backgrounds and with visible disabilities are shown, no other cultural practices are referred to (see figures 4 to 7 below).

[4] The website is available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

Figure 4: Doing diversity: Sikh dad and child

Figure 5: Doing diversity: Black dad and child

Figure 6: Doing diversity: visibly disabled mother in bi-racial couple

Figure 7: Doing diversity: Older dad or grandad

Diversity is evident; siblings, however, are less apparent: instead, the videos tend to feature an adult or adults with a single child. Use of a high degree of audio-visual material over written text suggests the content is targeted towards younger people, who are more likely to use TikTok and

Instagram which rely on short video clips, and created for those who may not have a high level of literacy.

Simple in format, the site has just five tabs: Home; About; Activities; Tips and Advice; and Child Development. Each of those pages has one or two sentences of description, followed by video stills which may be selected to watch the clip. Content is split into age categories, covering the period from pregnancy, through to school-starting age. Below a year, age ranges are split into three-month sections, followed by 12-18 months and 18-24 months, then 2-3 years, 3-4 years and 4-5 years. Behind each of these age ranges are a selection of clips showing parents modelling 'good' parenting by talking to their children and engaging them in activities which will build their language and promote child development or engaging with experts. Tips and Advice mainly links to written content entitled 'long reads' with links to other parts of the website where video clips may be viewed. Apart from the 'Child Development' section, all the clips are videos of 'real' families filmed in and around their homes. The child development section consists of animations, split into baby, toddler, and preschooler sections, some of which feature a voice-over, while others have the characters speaking – voices used feature the regional accents required by the commissioning briefs. Strong regional accents, particularly northern accents are apparent. Regional accents are often seen as a social indicator (Wotschke, 2014) so, stronger, or more distinct accents are associated with working-class people. Introducing the website, the 'About' section shares its purpose and aims, beginning with an emotional plea to parents:

> When children start school they should be able to speak to their new friends in full sentences, ask teachers simple questions and understand what they're told to do. When they have these skills they'll feel more confident and they'll be happier.
>
> But children starting school all across the UK today are unable to do these things.[5]

It goes on to state that one in four children are behind in literacy development when starting primary school. THP's focus on parents working on their child's development infers that children starting school behind in language development have parents who have not worked sufficiently hard. In this section, there is no mention of the relevance of a child's birth month meaning children starting school will be aged between *just* four years and four years eleven months; summer-born

[5] Wording taken from https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/what-is-tiny-happy-people/z6c9y9q

children are generally behind their peers since they are younger. Also ignored is the fact that language acquisition varies massively in young children. If the headline figure of one in four children starting school without the required language learning is not enough, this page states that it rises to one in three in some areas. Although it does not explicitly state which areas, it is implied this relates to their parents' lack of work on developing their language skills. Discourses become dominant when they are backed up by social and economic forces (Bourdieu, 1991) for example: the word or attainment gap, lack of school-readiness or child poverty are highlighted to demonstrate how important 'good' mothering is to overcome those problems instead of viewing them as direct and indirect consequences of poverty. Also assumed is that 'development' is quantifiable to determine children are 'behind'.

Taking one of the video clips within 'Activities', 'Making a puzzle'[6], as an example, which highlights THP's 'good' mother. Less than a minute long, switching between three different mother-child pairs, it shows them cutting up an old cereal box to create a jigsaw puzzle before building it together. In one house there are educational posters on the wall behind where the family are doing the activity. All mothers have regional accents and are modelling praise throughout the clip while text is superimposed over the video, reinforcing key messages: 'helps your child's coordination and concentration'; 'doing the puzzle helps develop problem solving skills'. Highlighting the activity is accessible to all as 'scrap card becomes a fun game'. Homes and outdoor locations featured within the video clips meet the stipulation not to appear 'aspirational' (Appendix 5). However, they do not portray their target audience's reality; none of the homes are overcrowded or depict the deprivation faced by many families. What is shown within photos or video clips has been deliberately selected and some homes seem to have been 'curated', not reflecting the situation for many families. In each instance the parent is engaged one-on-one with the child, obscuring other aspects to their role and identity which include combining parenting (of multiple children) with paid and unpaid work. There is little evidence of poverty and its attendant scarcity of furnishings and resources, or chaos of rooms being used for multiple purposes, both features of many working-class homes (including my own).

In terms of the simplified instructional tone and illustration style, animation content is like other BBC material, such as *Bitesize* (online educational resources aimed at school-aged children). Within the animations, many classed stereotypes are used, such as mothers with huge, hooped earrings

[6] Making a puzzle video can be found at https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/making-a-puzzle/z79hhbk

and fathers wearing hoodies and baseball caps (figures 8 and 9 below). Characters' body language suggests a lack of energy, engagement, or enthusiasm since most are looking down, moving slowly and have unsmiling faces. Despite the voice-overs describing 'good' parenting behaviours, it looks as though the parents are not demonstrating these. Class markers which allow social class to be implied rather than explicitly named (Bourdieu, 1992b) are used within these animations, such as jewellery, clothing, hairstyles, and tattoos.

Figure 8: Classed and racialised image showing father with shaved hairline and flat top, a style synonymous with Afro-Caribbean barbershops

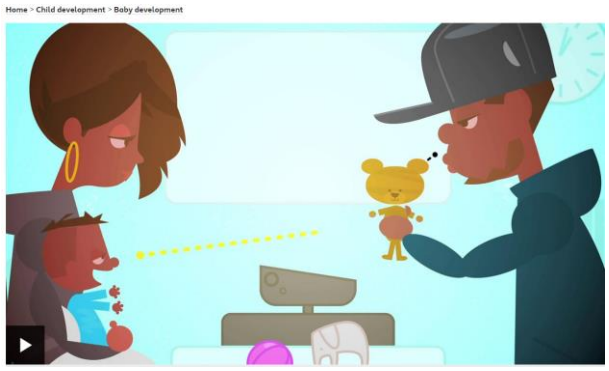

Figure 9: Classed and racialised image showing a mother with large hooped earrings and a father in a hoodie and baseball cap

Several themes are apparent on THP; a discussion of how these feed into 'good' mothering discourse follows. Given the large amount of content on the website, I chose to focus specifically on the clips under the 'Child Development' and 'Activities' tabs. Animation content, within the Child Development section, is listed as having been developed in collaboration with the Duchess of Cambridge. Within the Child Development section, animations and live action clips are included, organised according to stage: baby development; toddler development; and preschooler development. Since the age range I am looking at for the interviews with mothers is two to five years, the six animation clips in the Preschooler section contributed to my analysis, allowing me to

identify five key themes: children's language acquisition needs to be worked at; parents are responsible for 'teaching' children to talk; parents' behaviour builds the child's brain; parents require instruction in how to behave; and following the advice of THP is easy and cheap to build into your routine. I noticed a greater emphasis in the baby section about building brains, so those clips contributed to my analysis in relation to that area. The next sections will expand upon each of these aspects.

5.8 Language acquisition requires work

As described above, the supposed word gap is a result of parents not interacting enough with their babies or children. The assumption is that only words spoken directly from parent to child contribute towards language acquisition, explicitly stating: 'They don't just automatically pick it all up, though'; 'They need feeding with words as much as they need feeding with food' (from the clip 'How do babies and toddlers learn words from repetition?',[7] – see figure 10 below).

Figure 10: Mother teaching her child words

Parents are told it is not enough for children to absorb language through everyday interactions which occur naturally in the home. Instead, the target audience of THP is required to learn the correct method of developing language in their children and then apply it daily, replicating the suggested conversations and interactions. This forms part of a method of parenting often referred to as intensive parenting (Hays,1996). It is inferred this parenting method is essential to ensure children acquire the expected level of language learning to meet school readiness requirements. Since the concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003) of intensive mothering is more usual in middle-class families, it is assumed that it is the mothering those children receive which give them an educational advantage rather than economic resources or educational capital. THP's model ignores

[7] Video available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/amazing-toddlers-talking-tots/zfck92p#:~:text=Repetition%20increases%20confidence%20and%20strengthens,up%20speech%20into%20individual%20words

theories of natural language acquisition and instead focusses on the need to work at it. The cultural setting is key to children's mastery of language since language is culturally situated (Bruner, 1983); 'before language proper comes on the scene, the child has "natural" ways of embedding his gestures and vocalizations into contexts of action and interaction', (Bruner, 1983, p131). The one-size-fits-all mode of delivery of language promoted by THP means:

> all the positive socializing practices supportive of linguistic and cognitive development that take place in non-affluent homes are ignored, and any non-normative but constructive forms of thinking and communicating that exist in non-affluent communities are devalued. *(Johnson, 2015, p47)*

Placing an expectation on parents to adjust their behaviour and learn 'correct' ways of communicating with their children, THP promotes the idea that children's language acquisition requires explicit parental instruction. Emphasis on parents working at their children's language acquisition is connected to brain building, which again is regarded as something to be worked at.

5.9 Brain building

Neuroscientific terms relating to 'brain building' are used throughout to support the notion that learning is something which must be done with and to the child rather than something which happens naturally. Use of THP's activities is linked to brain development, which is framed in terms of brain building, such that the brain requires specific activities for it to grow and without those it will remain small (see Gillies et al, 2017 for a detailed critique of the flawed research this claim is based upon). References to brain building are framed in terms of the parents' influence on that growth: 'Play doesn't just keep them busy, it's essential for brain development'; 'Those amazing little brains are brilliant at making connections'; 'Scientists have found that children between four and five use an area of the brain called the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex when they hear rhyming words'; 'Children love learning new words and their brains are constantly thinking about them.' It is notable here that, in describing children's love of learning new words, they say *their brains* are constantly thinking about them rather than *they are* constantly thinking about them. Detachment of the brain from the child is a feature of the way in which neuroscience has been co-opted to emphasise the importance of parental behaviour over external factors (Gillies et al, 2017).

References such as these create an expectation that mothers ought to be actively engaged in building their child's brain, creating a 'good' mothering ideal of continuously working at improving

their child's prospects. In THP, the videos constantly describe what parents should do for their children, creating an ideal of a selfless parent as caring for others (Skeggs, 1997). Parents are expected to actively cultivate their children's brains and structural inequalities are entirely ignored. Accompanying the language of brain building, graphics depict babies' brain: growth (figure 11); energy use (figure 12); and exercise (figure 13).

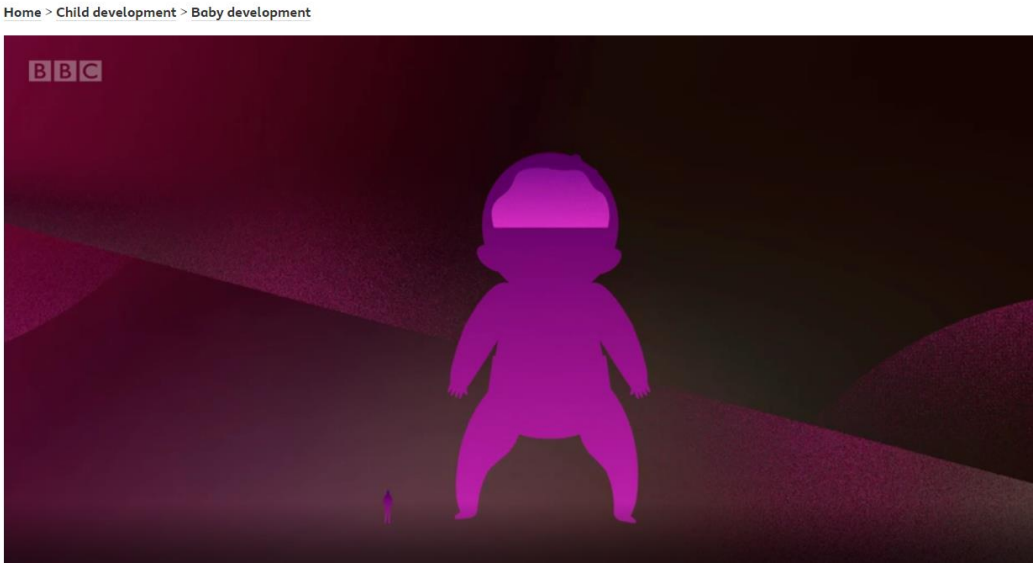

Figure 11: Video still simulating a baby's brain growing

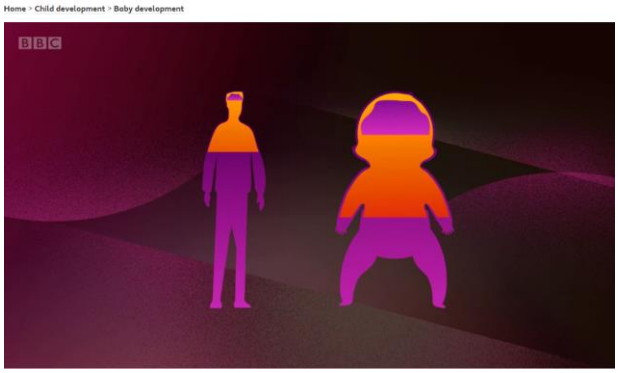

Figure 12: Video still depicting the amount of energy a baby's brain uses compared to an adult brain

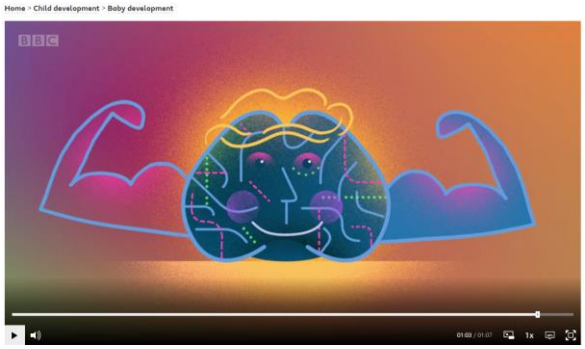

Figure 13: Video still showing a baby's brain 'getting in shape' through parents talking to them.

These ideas link to the notion that parents are responsible for actively working to grow their babies' brain. Since parents must be working at their children's language acquisition and building their brain, they are framed by THP as teachers.

5.10 Parents as 'teachers'

Parents are required to 'teach' their children to talk through following the tips and advice on THP. It is not enough to assume children will absorb language through everyday life; instead, planned interventions are necessary to ensure your child does not form one of the quarter of children who start school behind their peers. Throughout the clips, modals and imperatives are used to emphasise parental responsibility: 'you can' or 'you will need'. The importance and power of parents is stressed: 'the most important person to help your child's language toolkit grow is… you!'; 'there's no-one more powerful than you!'; 'Just keep talking to them!'. In using this language, it is clear that parents must undertake these types of activities to ensure their children grow up into 'Tiny Happy People': Their happiness rests upon parents' compliance with the advice of the website. At one-point parents are asked, 'if you want to help your child's language learning' (as though there are parents who may not), with the recommendation that 'all you have to do is answer their questions!' In tying language learning simply to parents answering questions, it suggests that those children who do not meet the required standard have parents who *do not* want to help their child's language learning and have *failed* to answer their questions.

Increasingly, parents are expected to actively engage in children's education, from before they begin school and even during pregnancy. Goatly (2002) provides a list of education metaphors deployed with reference to acquisition of knowledge and skills, commodifying education and ignoring any social aspects: give, have, possess – which all appear within the transcripts in this section. Using this type of language strengthens the idea that education is something that can be owned, and that, simply by following THP's advice, children will possess that knowledge. It feeds into ideas related to what counts as knowledge and who owns it (discussed in chapter 4). Middle-class educational success is entirely detached from parents' considerable social capital and instead linked to them exhibiting behaviour which bestows knowledge on their children. That behaviour is then taught to working-class parents through THP.

5.11 Parents as learners (or children)

THP is framed as though parents do not know how to behave towards their children. Videos are very prescriptive, even giving sentences parents can use to speak to their children. Since the BBC commissioning documents refer explicitly to the age-range and socio-economic groups being targeted, it suggests that the producers of THP view young working-class parents as lacking the knowledge to raise their children. Each aspect is broken down into activities, many of which are highlighted as being easily integrated into a family's daily routine, so that parents have a script for household tasks, including doing the washing up, sorting laundry and changing baby's nappy. These are broken down in video clips with key aspects highlighted to parents through use of text superimposed over the images. Some of the wording is presented in a different coloured font to simplify the instructions further (see figures 14 to 16 below). Although entitled 'Everyday ways to learn', which is referring to the child learning language, the videos are highly prescriptive in nature and are instructing parents of how to ensure their children are learning through engaging in menial household chores alongside their parents.

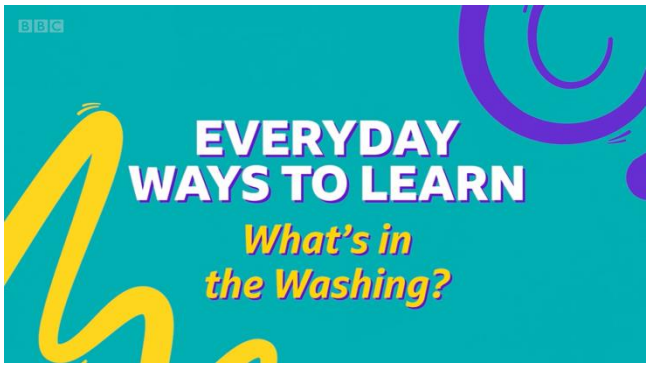

Figure 14: Title page of video clip demonstrating 'everyday ways to learn'

Figure 15: Text overlaying images to instruct parents.

Figure 16: Specific words highlighted in a contrasting colour to simplify instructions.

Underneath this video parents are told: 'By chatting and interacting with your child, you might even make these jobs enjoyable.' Suggesting that the work of social reproduction could be lose its mundanity and even become 'enjoyable' simply by following the advice of THP disregards the additional time that would be taken by including children in household chores – something which many of the mothers raised (see 8.8 for a discussion of this) and is thoroughly patronising and ignorant of the realities of being responsible for the work of social reproduction. The video entitled 'Can you help me change a nappy?' has a bullet-point list below it with suggestions of what parents can do with key points highlighted in bold text (see figure 17 below).

How to make the most of changing your baby's nappy with your child

- Ask your child if they'd like to help you - having this time together is a **great chance to talk**!
- You could even encourage them to copy you by using their favourite doll or teddy.
- Explain to your little one what you need to change their little sibling's nappy. This could include wipes, water, cream and, of course, a nappy!
- You could **ask your little one** what order they think they need to do things.
- As you change your baby's nappy, explain to your child what you are doing. **By explaining what you are doing, you are introducing new vocabulary**.
- When you have finished changing the nappy, **say thank you to your little one for helping you**!

Figure 17: Instructions on how to speak to your child

In the commissioning documents, teaching techniques and modelling behaviours were referenced, suggesting that their target audience is technically lacking and may not exhibit 'correct' behaviours. It is a patronising and insulting idea that parents do not know what they should be doing since it assumes there is a single method of parenting and that any problems which young working-class parents have are a result of them lacking knowledge or the will to talk to their children rather than lacking resources. This assumes that parents should make everything into a learning experience rather than doing things because they are necessary, enjoyable, or fun. In assuming that everything should be a learning point, a value judgement is being made and human relationships are instrumentalised. This invalidates alternative value systems and imposes a single acceptable model, based on middle-class ideals. To translate those ideals to a working-class audience, THP highlights how easy this is and that money is no barrier to their application.

5.12 Ease of application and low cost

THP negates barriers to participation for its target audience (of lack of time or money) by stressing how easy integration of the activities into everyday life is and that even routine household tasks can be made into learning opportunities. These messages are woven through the videos and within the statements made by THP's ambassadors (see 5.6 above). THP has made the case that it is necessary for parents to work at their children's language learning to avoid them starting school behind their peers. It has attached these ideas to research and 'science' thus increasing the power of those messages. Key terms of reference attach powerful inferences and assumptions producing the objects of discourse (Fraser, 2013). It is difficult to argue against messages to build a child's brain. The power of discourses lies in the taken-for-grantedness of them and by the mechanisms at work within them being concealed or misinterpreted (Bourdieu 1991). Alongside this is the gendered nature of the site which, despite being aimed more generally at parents to give the superficial impression of treating parents equally, is targeted more specifically at mothers (see figure 18 below).

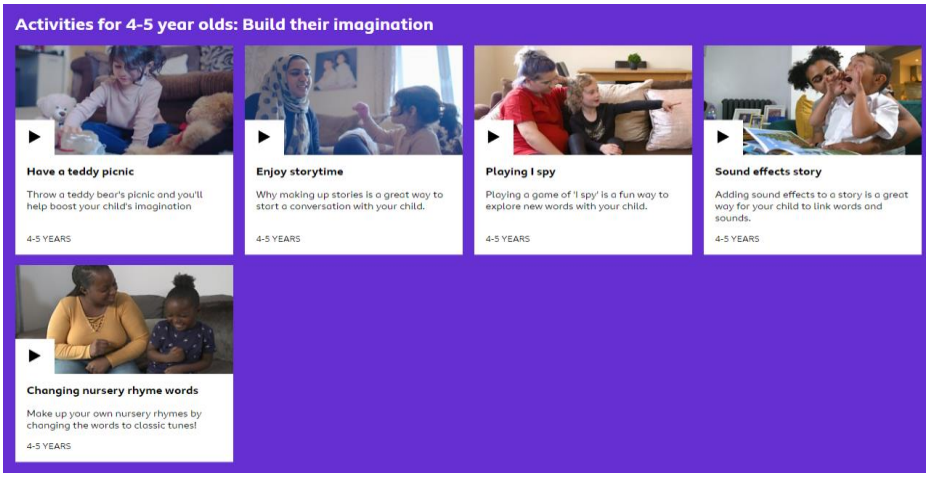

Figure 18: Videos mostly feature mothers

Activities are demonstrated with their ease and low or no cost highlighted to show that anyone can participate in them since large financial outlay is unnecessary, but the activities do take time and space which is not something all have equal access to. Implicit is a suggestion that in replicating this type of parenting, working-class parents may break the cycle, if only they choose to mimic middle-class 'good' parenting (Simpson, 2020). It rests entirely on the fallacy that middle-class children do well at school because of their parents' behaviour rather than the privileges which come with access to secure, stable accommodation, food, and enrichment activities. Remedies to address poverty and the attainment gap focus entirely on parental behaviour, rather than eradication of poverty. It is inconceivable that there could be any other solution than to change behaviour which is a feature of discourses, configured historically and culturally, making some ways of thinking possible while others are impossible (Foucault, 1980a). These ideas build on the notion of meritocracy where anyone can succeed regardless of background. In this way, functioning in a pedagogic and disciplinary mode, popular culture propagates dominant discourses, 'both drawing from and exceeding policy', (Mendick et al, 2015, p167). These themes work together to produce THP's 'good' mother figure whose careful management, of resources and self, allows her to create educational activities for her children, unquestioningly undertaking the unpaid labour of social reproduction entirely. Mothering in a time of austerity, hard work and frugality is important since 'cultural representations coincide and collude with political and economic imperatives' (Allen et al, 2015, p920). Classed and raced discourses feed into 'good' mothering norms, which have been heightened by austerity, with the expectation that mothers face the joint impacts of neoliberalism and welfare cuts privately and individually by becoming 'more enterprising and self-sufficient' (Allen et al, 2015, p920). Not only must they work, flexibly, to meet the demands of their employers, but must also be working at home – above and beyond

previous requirements of social reproduction – to educate their child and ensure their future success.

5.13 Conclusion

Where once middle-class women turned to the magazine advice column (McRobbie, 2013), then the TV shows of the early noughties or websites such as Mumsnet, now it is social media which dominates this arena – with THP making use of these platforms to disseminate their video clips and direct parents to their website where women may learn to be 'good' mothers. They are targeted at young, working-class mothers who, through following the advice on THP, will be able to maximise their interactions with their children, building their brain and their word count to ensure they are school-ready. Parents are constructed by the website as lacking in knowledge and needing to learn how to best parent their children. THP constructs a model parent for its users to emulate in order to avoid their children's failure. That mother seeks out, listens to and follows the advice of professionals rather than relying on instinct or the support of friends and family. She knows her children's language acquisition will not occur naturally and requires her explicit input. Positioned as her child's first teacher, she follows the advice of THP seamlessly building it into her routine. Interactions with her child are planned to provide maximum brain building and she is ever ready to salvage empty cereal packets or toilet roll tubes to provide a brain building activity for her child.

A 'good' mother is produced by THP, one who is hard working, frugal and attentive to her child's needs by actively working to build their brain by talking to them in the prescribed mode. She listens to and follows expert advice since her child's happiness rests on this. It is easy to do; only a bad mother would not strive to incorporate these tips into her family's daily life or would fail to attend to developing her child's language skills at every opportunity. Learning is not viewed as a natural process but one which must be worked upon and constructed by parents since it is their responsibility to ensure their child does not begin school deficient in language skills. Her parenting 'aligns with the core values of neoliberalism: ready for change, improving performance, being successful', (Ledin and Machin, 2016, p8) and she is actively engaged in those processes to ensure her child's success. Construction of 'new entrepreneurial identities and re-engineering the bourgeois subject' is key to neoliberalism (Hall et al, 2013, p19) with these subtle forms of power impacting social attitudes, creating, and compounding 'good' mothering discourses. These discourses allow us 'to position ourselves and to judge others and their hopes and dreams' (Mendick et al, 2015, p164).

It is clear why this discourse exists; it fills the gaps left by austerity cuts to services for children and families by placing the onus on parents by offering them guidance on how to build their child's language skills. The social problem of poverty and its associated attainment gap is used to apply normative values to parenting, since 'discourses develop around social problems' (Reisigl, 2018, p52). Female success rests on what Angela McRobbie terms a 'visual media governmentality' where failure is 'symbolised in the abject body of the "single mother" and in the bodies of her untidy children or "brood"' (McRobbie, 2013, p122). Building on Foucault's theory, the idea of 'visual media governmentality' falls within the 'specific dimension of gender and media' (McRobbie, 2013, p132). Through THP, it is not simply a televisual medium which is used to govern mothers' behaviour but social media and digital technology, governance occurs within the private domestic realm (McRobbie, 2013). When I was a young parent, who would have formed part of THP's target audience, being instructed to incorporate their activities into my daily routine (in such a prescribed manner) would have been impossible. Instead, given the already strained situation I was in, serving to delegitimise my mothering. As described at the outset of this chapter, gold dust for me as a parent is security of living standards rather than intrusive advice on how to interact with my children which may salve the conscience of the middle-classes but does nothing to improve the situation for those it is aimed at.

Chapter 6: Idealised notions of home: realities and effects for working-class mothers

Representations of home extend beyond a place in which we live to provision of a stable, secure, and private site of care which mothers provide as part of their 'homemaking'. This chapter considers those conceptions of home and their attachment to idealised notions of family and 'good' mothering. It will draw on a central theme of the interviews, namely the material circumstances of home life. These circumstances contain the women's mothering and those aspects which contribute to creating the home: A concept deemed universal, but which is value-laden and not a reality for many working-class women. The chapter will begin with the concept of home. After this, I will reflect on my own experiences of 'home' and how they diverge from this ideal. Following that, I will discuss *Tiny Happy People'*s use of this idealised notion of home and why that is problematic. Points of departure from notions of 'home' for the women interviewed will be expanded upon to highlight how these aspects frame working-class mothering: the isolation of displacement; managing housing instability and uncertainty; organisation or lack of space, facilities, and privacy; and provision of heat and food on a low income.

6.1 Home as a reflection of mothering

Home is a value-laden concept, with fundamental significance, since it is central to modern understandings of family life connected to 'ideas of a "proper" or a "real" family and of the linkages between ideas of home and family and notions of individuality and privacy' (Morgan, 2011, p75/6). It is viewed as a sanctuary, providing a secure, stable, and private site of care. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, moralised notions of 'good' mothering are connected to provision of a clean, safe, and hygienic home. These depictions create a vision of home as somewhere stable, permanent, and rooted. It is a private space; an environment that is carefully and deliberately created by mothers to provide a clean, safe, and warm place with nourishing food. To lack those elements not only creates an immediate concern for mothers, but symbolic notions of home correlate this with inadequate mothering which discredit them and their family. Deeply entwined within this are historical representations which label working-class women as 'dirty, dangerous and

without value' (Skeggs, 1997, p77). Within this context, home then 'came to be the place where an ethic of good health and morality was fostered' (Lawler, 2014, p78). These older ideas are still very much alive in modern conceptions of home.

For the women interviewed and me, the concept of home has served to invalidate our mothering since the home we are providing does not fit within the idealised vision. Instead, it is characterised by transience, chaos, and scarcity. In previous chapters I have described some of the housing situations I lived in with my eldest child. The places and ways we live shape who we are and often leave deep and lasting scars. Like several of the women interviewed, I have moved multiple times and am not living in my hometown. Pregnancy with my eldest child led to me moving into my first home: a back-to-back rented through a housing association. Rented housing often lacks the security or privacy of home ownership and does not allow for the same degree of control over the physical space. Furnishing on a low income meant furniture was acquired on a piecemeal basis. Multiple moves require us to restart this process since cheap or second-hand furniture is easier to replace or do without than pay to transport. This is far from the idealised image of home, whose décor and furnishings are believed to reflect the identity and taste of the occupant.

In the previous chapter I described some of the unsafe aspects of places I have lived related to antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood and damp conditions. Keeping a home clean in these circumstances creates additional challenges. Lack of money has meant that even when my homes have had a functioning heating system, I have often not been able to use it. My first place had prepayment meters which are an expensive method of providing utilities and have the added difficulty of finding somewhere which sells the correct type of token or machine to add credit to the card. Gas and electricity are bought in small amounts as that is all that the budget allows which means more frequent trips to buy them. Now, despite no longer having prepayment meters, there is a reluctance to use heating since we do not know whether our monthly payments will cover the use and we are afraid of getting into debt when we don't know if we will have work. My experience of this is not an isolated case; other family members also wear coats indoors, or sit under blankets, as did several of the women interviewed. The interviews took place before the recent energy bill increases when these practices have become more widespread.

While doing a teacher training degree in my late twenties, I moved between unemployment (whilst on placement) and in-work benefits throughout the four years. Sometimes my son received free school meals but there was often a lag between signing back on and receiving benefits leading

to arrears with my rent. My adult son calls this time the 'toast years' since that was mainly what we ate. More recently, having got married and since my younger children were born, we have returned to a restricted diet of toast and cereal as we have struggled to manage. Many of the women interviewed described rationing food and heating in a similar manner.

Renting reduces the amount of control over your environment. When living in a housing association flat, the housing officer would come in and inspect how we were living. On one occasion, she claimed I was responsible for the damp because I dried washing inside rather than in the communal outdoor space. It is almost twenty years ago, and my son and I remember her name. That home did not feel private as she could visit whenever she chose to do an 'inspection'. The women I interviewed had similar stories, of poor housing conditions being blamed on their behaviour or landlords making their presence felt within the home whether they were there or not. A core theme arising from the mothers' accounts was the disparity between the reality of home for them and the universal concept assumed by *Tiny Happy People*. They spoke about the material constraints which frame their mothering and impact their ability to provide the idealised family home. *Tiny Happy People* applies a neoliberal lens of choice and assumes decent stable housing as a basic available to every family, but my experiences and those of the women interviewed reveal a very different picture; their mothering is contained by 'socio-economic reality' (Gillies, 2007, p146). The next section will consider how home is utilised by *Tiny Happy People* and universal assumptions being made within this construct.

6.2 Activities to try at home

The advice provided by *Tiny Happy People* is anchored in a very particular and unspoken construction of home, promoted as: '**Simple, fun, free activities to try at home**'. These words are taken from the home page of *Tiny Happy People*. Simple, fun, and free suggest ease and convenience, giving the impression of common sense; why would parents not try them? However, for the women I met during this project, 'home' often was not the stable, familiar, and comfortable place which this word evokes. Issues with housing were frequently raised in interviews, including homelessness, eviction, overcrowding, lack of space or unsafe accommodation. Many of the women described problems they have with housing, either being evicted as landlords want to sell up, fleeing domestic violence or having properties which are too small or unsuitable for their family's needs. Several families are living away from their family networks as they have had to

move to be able to find affordable housing. For some, this has led to isolation and left those mothers lacking support or connection.

The impact of social class on housing and providing a home is far reaching, affecting where people live (including geographically), who they live with and how they live. All the mothers interviewed are faced with challenges to varying degrees related to their material circumstances which require practical, physical and emotional labour: spending time to create new networks when they have had to move away from wider family; dealing with uncertainty related to their housing; organising available space and facilities to manage their lack or insufficiency; and considering how to provide heat and food for their families. Taking each of these in turn, I will share the women's narratives which set out the challenging circumstances they are facing and the hidden work they undertake to reduce the impact on their children of these harsh realities. This work requires them to be resourceful, make difficult decisions and expend a great deal of emotional labour in absorbing stress to protect their children and temper expectations to fit the reality of their situation. None of these aspects of working-class mothering are evident in the *Tiny Happy People* clips. The only concession to cost in the commissioning briefs is that activities depicted use everyday household objects. These aspects cannot be neatly removed or ignored since they form the backdrop to working-class mothering and creating a home for their families entails many compromises which the producers of *Tiny Happy People* do not understand or have chosen to ignore. Level of income dictates the degree to which someone can exercise choice over where they live, creating precarity for working-class people which 'manifests through limited housing choices, insecure housing situations, as well as evictions' (Paton, 2013, p94/5). For working-class women, who are more likely to have been uprooted from their 'home' in terms of place and lack choice over the space they call 'home', it is a less certain concept and certainly not the assumed space which *Tiny Happy People* depicts. Instead, *Tiny Happy People*'s 'home' reflects an uncomplicated, middle-class interpretation, extrapolating this to their working-class target audience; their realities, as this chapter explains, are vastly divergent. The following section focusses on the narratives of those women who no longer reside in the location or neighbourhood in which they grew up in and wider family members live. Details of interviewees can be found at Appendix 3.

6.3 Displaced and rootless

Six of the women interviewed had been displaced from their family and support networks due to lack of affordable alternatives. Often this was phrased in terms of choice: moving to an area in

which they could afford housing. One of the women, Ash Lee, was forcibly relocated out of area by the council following eviction. Each of these mothers described not being able to afford to buy or rent in the place they were from, meaning they had no option but to move away from friends and familial support. With the exception of one, moves did not involve huge distances (15 to 25 miles) but the women were uprooted, disrupting 'established and vital connections and relations with schools, health providers and other local services' (Iafrati, 2021, p148). Even relatively short distances can prove difficult without a car when public transport is expensive and unreliable. Being forced to move to places with no existing connections 'can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of support as families and friends are left behind' (Iafrati, 2021, p148). Although all these women have moved away from their family networks, their experiences vary; this section will consider some of their narratives, highlighting the difficulties created by moving away. Although some of the narratives describe making a 'choice' to move, many acknowledge a distinct absence of choice. For example, Lily, who had moved a hundred miles from her family to live with her boyfriend:

> where I was so, erm, desperate to move out of where I was living with my mum, I basically found a guy, whose parents would let me move into their house and that's what happened with my ex-husband, his mum always …..wanted a girl so as soon as she found out he had a girlfriend, and she wasn't happy at home and she wanted to move out, she let me move in straight away, like I'd been with him for about four weeks, at the time, I was like, 'aw fantastic', but looking back, it probably was not a good thing to do

Lily's narrative explains the lack of options she felt were available to her as a young working-class woman trying to move away from a difficult home life. As she alludes to, this was not as 'fantastic' as it seemed; when that relationship broke down, she was stuck with her children away from her own family:

> I am still surrounded by all of his family who hate me…cos he told them that I cheated on him repeatedly throughout the marriage which I did not, I didn't have time (laughs) so every time I leave the house, like I bump into one of my disgruntled ex-in-laws

Despite this, the mothers described support networks they have built up with other working-class women in their locality. Again, this is variable, depending on the area that the women live in. Lily, Briony and Frankie live in reasonably stable established neighbourhoods, whereas Brooke and Jess live in areas where there is a high turnover of tenants, meaning less of a community to become

part of. This had been more difficult for Brooke, who moved during the pandemic and whose children were not yet of school age, so she did not have the benefit of that network to draw upon. Her only company (other than her partner who is at work most days) is her children:

> yeah, I don't drive (laughs) so I'm literally just here with the boys mainly, I've tried to go to some mum groups, but just feel like they're always so cliquey, and it's just like, I don't know, don't really feel welcome (laughs)

Brooke's isolation and consequent absence of support has made it more difficult for her raising two young children. Lack of affordable housing meant both Brooke and Ash Lee relocated, however in Ash Lee's case it was enforced rather than chosen:

> then we got the eviction notice from the landlady there, saying that she was selling up and I was like, 'we've only been here like nine months, like give us a break, let us get our feet settled', but yeah, it wasn't to be and, we got evicted where, he was, working self-employed he couldn't prove his income at the time, I was obviously on benefits, they class you as like, 'the benefits mum', and I was like, well, we can't get a private rental so we had to go down to the council with the eviction papers …… they moved us from temporary accommodation in [another town], for four months…… but from there we then moved to, [current location], and me and the girls have bin 'ere ever since

Not only do the moves mean that Ash Lee has had to twice start again: setting up home, establishing connections and making friends, but they have impacted her children's relationship with their father, her ex-partner. Lily, Ash Lee, and Brooke's narratives describe some of the realities of relocating: isolation, difficulty maintaining relationships and lack of support. Having been displaced longer ago, Frankie, Jess and Briony have built up networks so felt these realities less acutely. Although Ash Lee is the only one who had been forcibly relocated, there was little choice for the other women since they were unable to continue living in their existing communities. Their *choice* to move was often related to their desire to have children which necessitated more space; moving away from support networks at the very point they needed them most.

The current lack of affordable housing is 'a legacy of neoliberalism characterised by reduced government intervention and increased faith in the private market that ultimately underpins market failure', (Iafrati, 2021, p148) which is most acute in London and the South-East. This is a

problem more generally for many but is felt most keenly by families on the lowest incomes, who have experienced the greatest rise in housing costs due to their reliance on private rentals (JRF, 2018). For them, 'inequalities of the market are played out through housing' (Iafrati, 2021, p149). Like Ash Lee, those placed out of area by local authorities were from 'the poorest and most vulnerable households' (Iafrati, 2021, p149). Particularly in South-East England (where the women interviewed live), there is 'increasing transience and displacement of vulnerable households to areas where they have no ties or connections' (Iafrati, 2021, p149). That 'transience' is not limited to those moved out of area; across other interviews, instances of repeated house moves were described: due to eviction, inadequate or unsafe housing and relationship breakdown. Areas of high rents and housing demand create housing insecurity which is 'exacerbated by the relative ease at which tenancies can be terminated, through the use of 'no-fault' eviction orders, which mean that no reason has to be provided for tenancy termination' (Moore, 2017, p448). The authority where my research was conducted covers a relatively large geographical area, made up of numerous smaller towns, villages, and communities, many of which are poorly served by unaffordable and unreliable public transport; even moves within the authority could cause difficulty, especially if women did not have access to a car. The next section will share the narratives of women whose housing situation has been, or is, steeped in uncertainty and what this has entailed for them and their families.

6.4 Impermanence, instability and lack of safety

For many of the women interviewed their mothering has not been rooted in one fixed place, but instead has involved temporary housing and multiple moves. Uncertainty and instability characterised the housing situation, since becoming mothers, of several of the women interviewed. Ash Lee's eviction is not an isolated instance; Ella, Keira and Sarah, together with their families, share this experience. Numbers of evictions have risen sharply since 2005, and are concentrated specifically in London, the East and South-East which account for 81% of all no-fault evictions (Clarke et al, 2017). A rapidly expanding private rental sector houses ever larger numbers of those on low incomes 'who struggle with the insecurity of the sector' (Clarke et al, 2017, p9). Lack of adequate, safe, affordable housing means that both Courtney and Sophie have experienced multiple moves. The narratives shared in this section highlight the difficult circumstances in which many of the women are raising their children and the associated uncertainty, stress, and financial implications. None of these factors are acknowledged by *Tiny Happy People* as potentially impacting their target audience. Lack of social housing or affordable private rentals meant living in

temporary accommodation, for Ash Lee, Sarah, and Keira, until somewhere more permanent could be found. Somewhere safe, stable, and secure to live is fairly fundamental, particularly for families, but, given the current housing situation in England, increasingly this is not the case. It is not simply a case of housed or homeless; there are households in a state of limbo between the two, experiencing 'housing vulnerability' (Iafrati, 2021, p138). This 'vulnerability' can last for extended periods, during which families do not know when they will be moved so cannot make plans, or decisions related to employment or their children's schooling. Perhaps they will begin to put down roots and then be moved again. Being evicted often leads to people losing their possessions or having to get rid of them (Clarke et al, 2017). When recounting their narratives of housing vulnerability, the four women were matter of fact and resigned to their situation; this could be described as resilience or an acceptance that this vulnerability is a feature of working-class life after forty years of neoliberalism which has pared back social housing to a minimum, increasingly relying upon private landlords and the 'market' to provide. Keira now rents a flat from a housing association on a new estate, offering a stable and permanent base for her two young children. She describes the drawn-out period of uncertainty before they moved in:

> it was literally, built new and then I was in it, like two weeks, three weeks later, so everything was lovely, just before Christmas as well…..I was in a temporary house, flat in [location]….I went in a temporary hostel erm with, obviously my eldest, then went into the temporary flat for a year, then got this…. it's so settled now

Each of these three addresses are only a few miles from each other, but far enough to cause disruption, especially with very young children and no access to a car. When families need to be housed at short notice, usually due to eviction, this tends to be in a hostel. To receive help with housing from the council, families often had no option but to await the bailiffs to avoid being 'classed as intentionally homeless; this was described as an extremely stressful experience' (Clarke et al, 2017, p37). This was Ella's experience:

> three years we've been in this year, we was in temporary accommodation before that for about six months, because before that, that was when I split up with their dad and I fell into a bit of rent arrears, that was private renting, and then, erm, he asked me to leave, but then the council don't help you until you've got bailiffs involved and the bailiffs have to be at my door before, the council help me, and it was just all while [middle child] was newborn so it was all just a bit like, a pain in the bum, but yeah, we're settled here and it's nice

In Ella's case, she was evicted due to rent arrears following the breakdown of her relationship. Ash Lee and Sarah received 'no fault' eviction notices when their landlord sold the property. Sarah describes the hostel she was placed in with her partner and four children:

> it's where they put all the *troubled people* shall we say? People just out a prison, addicts, that kind of stuff….. the week we moved in we were kind of just stood at the back door and we were warned by someone that was like, 'be careful of that bloke he's a paedophile', 'oh great! Thanks' (laughs) and we had no say in that at all....we were then moved to a maisonette, right by [local school], you know the maisonettes right outside….which was horrible, and, now we're here in another temporary house

Further complicating this already difficult situation, of moving three times in little over two years and still being in temporary accommodation, Sarah explains the impact these moves have on decisions around her children's schooling:

> now we're here in another temporary house… but yeah, when we first moved over here, I couldn't get them into a school over here and I thought, 'oh it's okay, cos [eldest] will be goin', maybe I'll get 'em in later', that didn't 'appen, and now [second eldest]'s goin', now I've got the two, but we're in a temporary house again so I don't know where we're gonna end up so, do I move 'em? Or do I just leave 'em there?

This constant uncertainty and instability around housing makes it impossible to plan since families do not know where they will be living. Sarah does not know whether to keep her children in their current school (over four miles from their current address) or move them to one closer to where they are living. Her decision of where to apply for a school place for her youngest must be made without knowing where they will be living. *Tiny Happy People* quotes figures of children not starting school with the required language skills but ignores the key issue of housing which affects their target audience. Sarah is looking for a private rental but there is nothing suitable:

> everywhere that's in our price range is too small, and that's not me saying it, that's me phoning up to enquire and the landlord sayin', 'this is too small for you', even though they're bigger than this (sighs) or everywhere that is bigger, there is no way that we're gonna afford

The lack of affordable housing means that there is little chance of Sarah securing permanent housing for her family, leaving them in a prolonged state of precariousness and creating a deep sense of impotence. Very few can avoid the unpredictability of private rentals as it is very difficult to get onto the local authority's housing list. Hannah described making multiple attempts to be accepted onto the Council's housing list, which was only granted once she involved the local councillor. Prior to this her applications were rejected. Similarly, external agency involvement meant that Sophie was accepted onto the housing list and moved very quickly due to her specific circumstances:

> we'd moved a couple of times due to domestic abuse…. the baby was, not even two months old when I moved and I'd had a caesarean…. so, we got moved very, very quickly, erm, after threats of, er, against me and to take baby and things and, between us, involved with a, erm, domestic abuse charity, the Police and Social Services, in between them, they thought it best I, er move

There is little social housing available in their authority, so it is only in extreme situations, such as Sophie's, that families are housed directly, or even accepted onto the waiting list, as in Hannah's case. Ash Lee, Ella, Sarah, and Keira's narratives of being moved into temporary housing are more common. Ella and Keira now have the relative security of living in housing association accommodation, while Ash Lee and Sarah remain in privately rented housing. Ash Lee has been told by her current landlord that he intends to sell the flat she lives in, so anticipates another period in temporary housing. The 'lower end of the housing market is dysfunctional, with the balance of power in favour of the landlord' (Clarke et al, 2017, p46); tenants are more likely to encounter rogue landlords and poor-quality accommodation. Courtney's narrative explains why she has 'moved lots of times' since having her children:

> first place, we was on the fourth floor, so obviously once I had the baby, trying to get a double pushchair, cos [eldest] was only like two and a half, erm, so we couldn't go, we couldn't live on the fourth floor, and [eldest] tried to fall out of a window…. he was a climber, he was always climbing and one time he climbed on the baby's cot, got on the window, opened the window, and I come in, grabbed him, and we was like, the next day, we was like, we gotta move, so we moved to another place and it was awful, it was disgusting, we stayed there for four months, [youngest] ended up in hospital because it was mouldy everywhere, she ended up in hospital, we moved out of that place, like a week later, we

> moved straight into my mum's, after that, lived there for, six months, while we were waiting up, saving up for our wedding, cos we only got married two years ago, and then we moved to this place, we've been at this place for, nearly two years, so we've done, yeah, we like this new place (laughs)

Moving out of the rental due to it being insanitary, meant that Courtney and her husband lost their deposit so were unable to rent again without moving back in with her mum first:

> when you've gotta save up a thousand or one thousand five hundred pound for a deposit…. we didn't get it back on our last place because we didn't stay to the whole six-month contract, but we couldn't cos our daughter ended up in hospital because of it

Despite the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 introduced on 20 March 2019, tenants living in properties at the lower end of the housing market have little power to effect change. A lack of affordable housing for them to move into should their landlord fail to fix issues and the immediacy of need (particularly for families with young children) mean forfeiting their deposit or enduring landlord neglect. This section has shared some of the uncertainty which surrounds working-class women's lives, both in terms of past, present, and future housing concerns. It exemplifies the difficulty in providing adequate housing on a low income and why 'home' cannot be taken for granted by *Tiny Happy People*'s target audience. For adults to experience eviction and its corresponding insecurity is difficult but having to deal with that and try to raise children while protecting them from the severity of the situation requires a great deal of work, on a practical, physical, personal, and emotional level. Eviction affects mothers financially, increases parental stress and impacts mental and physical health (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015) and that of their children (Clarke et al, 2017). Prolonged maternal mental ill health is more likely if families are evicted when their children are under three years (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015) which is the case for the four mothers interviewed who had been evicted. Difficulties arising from displacement or uncertainty around housing were not the sole problem encountered by the women interviewed; often the physical space was problematic, being cramped, crowded, or poorly maintained. The next section will consider this in more detail.

6.5 Overcrowding and danger

So far, I have considered the place in which the mothers live; this section will explore the space itself, and the effects of living in accommodation that is not fit for purpose. Several of the families

were living in homes which did not meet their family's needs, being either too small, shared with others or lacking adequate facilities. This created additional work for mothers who had to reconfigure space, organise washing rotas, decide who sleeps where and manage children's objections. For example, although Charly lives in a house which is adequate for her family, it is her mother's house who intermittently moves back in with them when she falls out with her partner meaning it is not their own space. The front room is also Charly's office, the children's playroom, and her mother's sometime living room. The narratives of Emma, Jane, Sarah and Hannah shared in this section, demonstrate some of the work which goes into navigating space. None of these issues (or the related time and emotional work which goes into dealing with them) are visible on *Tiny Happy People*; each video depicts parent and child interactions in a room which is being used for its primary purpose. To deal with these issues requires creativity, diplomacy, and compromise but that is entirely overlooked, and those working-class mothering skills devalued. These aspects of parenting are beyond the experience of those setting 'good' mothering norms and part of mothers' invisible reproductive work, discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Sharing these narratives gives a glimpse into that work, starting with Emma who, along with her husband and their daughter, live with Emma's parents:

> we've literally got two rooms upstairs, cos we were living here to save up to buy a house, erm, so we had one bedroom that we turned into like a living room/kitchen area, so it had like work surface, cupboard, everything, like a little under-counter fridge, erm, and then our bedroom, erm, (laughs) our living room's now turned into her bedroom

During the interview, when asked what would make Emma's life as a parent easier, her mum interrupted, saying Emma should get her own place, before laughing: 'no that's making my life easier' - her mum's comment revealing the underlying tension of their living arrangement. Using rooms for multiple purposes is something which Jane talked about. She lives with her husband and six children in a three-bedroom house. Currently, Jane and her husband are sleeping in the front room with their youngest child as there is not enough space in the bedrooms for the children. Doing *Tiny Happy People*'s home activities would be far from easy in this context. Jane described the lack of space and the modifications the neighbouring house has:

> yeah, erm but like next door, theirs is open, like their wall's open so it's one big room, and I'd like that but you know, I would lose out on a bedroom…..so, it is nice, that we're able to do

> this, but, kids are like, 'but we wanna bigger house so we can all have our own rooms', and I'm like, 'win the lottery then'

Jane was not the only woman who joked about a lottery win as a solution. It is a measure of how unachievable it is that the women used this as shorthand for 'no chance'. Jane has considered trying to move to a larger house to accommodate her family, but a lack of suitable, affordable housing and the likely need for the children to move school make this impossible. As well as the lack of bedroom space, having one bathroom for eight people, which does not have a shower, makes washing difficult and time-consuming for Jane's family:

> we don't have a shower, I'd love to have a shower, I'd be like, 'just get in the shower', like, I might have to ask the landlord…. [eldest two] have a bath every morning, and I start, I run the bath at half six ready for [eldest] to get in it, but [eldest] don't get up till about 7, so then when [eldest]'s had it, I've got to empty it and re-run it then for [second eldest]….all of the little ones uses the same water, just I'm like, just get in two at a time, like [youngest two] and then no, [3rd child] don't like getting in with [4th child] any more

Space is an issue for Sarah too, further complicated by the temporary nature of her family's accommodation, described in the previous section. Sarah lives with her partner and four children in a three-bedroom house. Her third child has additional needs which mean that they need to separate him from the other children. She describes their discussions about how to rearrange the available space:

> we don't know how long we're gonna be here or anything, I don't know what to do about the, the bedrooms at the minute, we were talking, what we might 'ave to do is, leave [eldest] where he is, cos he's already on 'is own, put [youngest] in with [second eldest], [partner] will go in with [third child] and I'll sleep in the front room (laughing) because also this is supposed to be a furnished place as well, the little bedroom's got bunks in it, that bedroom's got bunks in it (pointing upwards) and this bedroom's got bunks (pointing upwards) and a single (pulls a face)…. there's not even a double bed here (pulls a face) there is no double bed here, there's three lots of bunks and one single

The house Sarah and her family live in is let as a furnished family home; not providing a double bed prevents Sarah and her partner from sharing a bed. To meet the needs of her children, Sarah may soon not share a room with her partner either. Lack of space is not limited to those with large

families: Hannah's is a two-person household, but the house is very small and there is not room for her daughter's walking frame to be used indoors meaning she cannot do the necessary exercises to strengthen her muscles or practice moving around required by physiotherapy. She can only be moved inside the house by being lifted into position. Describing their house, Hannah shares some of the associated difficulties:

> (it) isn't amazing, it's very small, with a disabled child who needs a lot of room for mobility, it's not great, but, obviously as you know from a conversation that we've had, I've been trying to get onto the Council list, erm, so, it is just a lot of stress, it's a lot of time

Alongside her daughter's mobility issues, she also has problems with her breathing, exacerbated by the poor quality of their housing:

> we ended up in hospital cos she stopped breathing, she went blue in the face, erm, I think it was about a minute and twenty seconds, but it was the scariest minute and twenty seconds of my life, er, ended up being rushed to, er, er, [local] Hospital…. when she gets poorly, she gets poorly, she gets better, and then it, she's still wheezy …. this is the problem with this house, because it's so old, and because I haven't got a tumble dryer so there's wet clothes hanging everywhere, and the heat and…. they won't do anything about it, I have to just clean it, and get on with it

Overall, Hannah was very upbeat despite the obvious difficulties she was having and the lack of support. When talking about trying to find more suitable accommodation, she began by explaining how flexible she is about the type of place they move to, but her frustration with the situation is evident:

> as long as it's open downstairs, I couldn't care less about the stairs, I'm happy to take her up a couple of stairs, but it is, it's the fact that I have to pick her up to move her somewhere in here, in this living room, and then she goes, she wants to go out there (points to kitchen), so I have to pick her up to move her out there because, she can't, (sighs in exasperation), I would show you the frame, it's quite big, it's about (puts her arms out wide) this big, but you can imagine her trying to get from there (points to one side of the room) round to there (points to the other side of the room), when I have to get her out of the front door in the pram, I have to move this sofa right back, to be able to get the door wide open so that, to be able to move out the house, it's, it's not feasible

The challenging circumstances experienced by these women, and their attempts to reduce the impact on their children, described within these narratives highlight the substantial emotional labour involved. It explains the difficulty for working-class mothers of providing adequate housing for their families which dictates their priorities and absorbs their time and emotional energy. The next section will consider components which contribute to the making of home: food and heating. Taken for granted by *Tiny Happy People*, these aspects are presumed universally available, and the scarcity experienced by many working-class families hidden. For the women interviewed, they are not a given; their narratives will explain how they balance providing the essentials of food and heat on a limited budget. Those realities do not feature in the image of a family home; managing on a low income is part of being working-class and mean that money (or its absence) is never far from mothers' thoughts.

6.6 'Everything's always about money'

When money is scarce, expenditure is rationed. Each of the mothers talked about the budgeting decisions they make to ensure their families' needs are met. Many of the women's narratives described financial difficulties and their careful management to provide food, fuel, and clothing for their children. Their household finances allow little room for manoeuvre, creating concern about rising prices and future costs, as well as the ability to provide extras when celebrating birthdays and Christmas. This is not uncommon given the current financial situation, but for working-class women and their families, it is more acute. In the UK, during the preceding decade, there has been 'unprecedented growth in emergency food aid provision, apparently in response to growing numbers of people experiencing food insecurity' (Pybus et al, 2021, p22). At times, the women described struggling to provide food or heating, forming part of home. For some, they have got into debt or relied on charity to provide the basics; others have reduced their intake to leave enough for their children and protect them from the situation. Going without and concealing the extent of hardship from children is seen as good mothering (Carroll and Yeadon-Lee, 2022). Having to use food banks can be stigmatising and shameful (Pybus et al, 2021) and due to demand, it is not always possible to access food this way, so parents go without. Almost all the women talked about financial concerns; as Brooke summed it up: 'it's just, just money, everything's always about money'. Lack of money restricts mothers and looms over every decision, as Briony explains:

> it is all financial, that is my main thing, if I had more support then I wouldn't have to work as much which would mean that I'd have more time with my children…like that is it,

> finance, the money is the only thing that is stopping me doing that and that is the bit that makes me sick because it is bloody paper, and yet, how I want to be a parent is depicted by how much of that I have, and that makes me really angry

Frequently, the women described their concerns related to rising costs and the impact that has on their day-to-day spending. Alice voices her concerns centre around this:

> when you think you've got your budget under control and, it's not, clearly….. definitely all the, er price, when you think you've got your budget down to a tee, and then you, you, you think, oh no

Alice, like many of the women interviewed, has a carefully managed budget, despite popular opinion that it is lack of financial understanding or cookery skills which lead to working-class families struggling. The women were acutely aware of costs and how to manage resources; it was the scarcity of those resources which was the issue. Often the way families are portrayed in the media has an impact on public perception of them. Sophie raised this and how it contrasts from her actual life:

> I never have enough money, ever, I live hand to mouth, and, I do not have a glamorous lifestyle, erm, everything, everything I own is second hand, or third hand, or, er, gifted, or, erm, and I, yeah, people need to sort of like, have a bit of a reality check

Foregoing essentials and not buying new are familiar aspects of surviving on a low income as women act as 'shock-absorbers of poverty' as part of their household management (Lister, 2021, p69). Mothers frequently described the sacrifices they made to provide for their children; Ella was talking about her house which she moved into nearly three years ago:

> yeah, the only thing, cos it's housing association, erm, it comes with no carpet, no nothink, so I 'ad to, erm, my bedroom still has no carpet at the moment, just cos I can't afford it, whereas when I got the carpet done, the kids obviously took priority over me, cos they play in there, I go upstairs to bed and come down again

Financial worries are not limited to those with three or more children. Kelly is single with one child and is employed full-time. She describes some of the tough decisions she is making to manage her budget:

> I've, it'll be two years in August, I've lived here and it's getting harder because of obviously pricing, costs, my, cos I get universal credit, and it matches my wages, it bumps my wages up, erm, I'm noticing that, I was with the company that went bust, the green energy, went bust, then had to change to summin else, and that automatically, like they will keep you that for three months, now we're going a put it up by thirty pounds, then we're gonna go up another, and it's like, you, you, then start to realise how small a money you're gonna be left with…. so it's like, can I afford to put my, for four hours of an evening to stay warm or do we just go to bed, that's gonna be the thing….and food I'm trying to last two weeks, so that's how I'm trying to get round my food shopping is getting stuff that's gonna last longer…..bread lasting longer, kind of thing, putting it in the freezer and only get a couple of slices out when I need it

Kelly's narrative highlights the type of decisions, and emotional toll, working-class women are grappling with, choices need to be made between food *or* heating. Likewise, Aimee described managing money as 'the biggest struggle'; A car is necessary for Aimee's employment, but her income does not provide enough to fill it with petrol. Kelly and Aimee describe the ways in which they are managing to cover costs on a low income by making cutbacks or incurring debt. Sarah's partner works in retail, so his hours vary week-to-week. The fluctuating nature of her partner's income means that they have had to ask for help:

> a little while ago we were also having to go, it was before the Christmas rush, between summer and Christmas, his hours dropped down again and I had to go to, erm, the family liaison lady at the school and say, 'look can you help us out with some food, cos his hours have dropped right down', and cos so many other people are doin' it I can't even do that now, cos they've changed all the criteria, so I can't even do that…. asking for food, it's horrible….they kept giving us loads of tuna (laughs) I don't like tuna, the kids love it, I can't stand it, I can't stand the smell, when I'm doin' it for the kids I'm (holds nose) erm, and, there's only so much you get in that packs as well, it's all dry stuff, there's no fruit for the kids, or …. most days, me and [partner] don't eat breakfast or lunch, we will just eat a meal in the evening and that's so the kids have got stuff to eat

Sarah protects her children from the full reality of their poverty by going without food whilst they are at school. Missing meals has added health implications for Sarah since she is diabetic. Food is

not the only essential which is rationed; when I visited Sarah, it was February and bitterly cold inside their house; she admitted:

> I can't remember the last time we had the heating on (hugs herself).
>
> *[Me]* Yeah (laughs) I did notice you've got two jumpers on.
>
> Yeah, yeah, always got two jumpers, erm, me mum asked what the kids want for Christmas and I said, 'buy 'em all new blanket', and they've all got a really lovely, fluffy blankets so if they're cold watching the TV then they're gonna get their blankets, sit in the blanket, cos I can't afford to put the heating on (laughs) … then again, you feel really bad cos ……

Sensing Sarah was becoming upset, I made a joke about it being good for the environment to save us both from our shared guilt, shame, and embarrassment. It is not the lack of heating per se which is upsetting, but that the children are affected. A cold house is a symbol of our failure to provide a proper home for our children. Our role is to protect our children from the reality of poverty: self-sacrifice to absorb and mitigate the effects of poverty. Management of shame in relation to poverty is an important feature of working-class mothering; humour is one method deployed (Lister, 2021). Fuel poverty means being able to see your breath indoors, spending the day sitting in bed or under blankets and layering up. It affects how you live your life; from the activities you do with your kids to a reluctance to have visitors as they will see how you live. The women's narratives shared here describe vividly the impossible choices working-class mothers face in ensuring their children are provided for. It is a fine balancing act which requires careful management of the household budget while simultaneously attempting to shield children from the brunt of those decisions. It may mean a reliance on credit to provide food or limit the type of food parents can provide (Pybus et al, 2021). In times of scarcity, mothers prioritise their children's needs above their own (Erhard, 2020), whether by not having carpet in their bedroom, sleeping in the living room or missing meals.

6.7 Conclusion

Representations of home portray this as a place of safety, security and privacy which are closely linked to idealised notions of family and 'good' motherhood. These representations, and the assumptions that *Tiny Happy People* makes about home as a universal and uncontested place/space, position working-class women outside good mothering norms. From the narratives

shared in this chapter, it is evident that many of the women interviewed were experiencing significant material constraints which prevented them from providing an adequate home for their families. This was not through lack of effort on their part, but through successive governments pursuing a neoliberal agenda resulting in the creation of a housing 'market' which leaves home ownership beyond the reach of many working-class families. Instead, they are renting privately and being housed in poorly maintained and inadequate properties which are not fit for purpose. At any point they may be served with an eviction notice and with few properties available within their budget, or unable to raise a deposit, must remain in the property until bailiffs arrive in order to receive help from the local authority with rehousing. Usually this translates to several months in 'temporary' accommodation, but as the narratives shared in this chapter describe, the temporary nature of accommodation can run into years. Alongside this broken housing system, a deliberate stripping back of the welfare state has led to punitive reductions to benefits which impact many working-class mothers and their families. Over this period, employment has become more precarious, particularly for those in low-paid jobs, adding additional pressure on household finances. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

This chapter began with my own narrative of providing the fundamentals of housing, heat, and food and how those difficulties are unseen or unacknowledged by those whose reality falls outside that experience. For *Tiny Happy People* to impose a requirement on working-class mothers to curate a 'suitable' Home Learning Environment for their children or risk future low attainment is inappropriate and offensive. The reality for working-class mothers is that their social reproductive work encompasses many aspects with which middle-class parents do not have to contend, or certainly not to the same extent. Home, for these mothers, was uncertain and could mean leaving their support networks, multiple moves, eviction, inadequate, unsafe, or overcrowded housing and a lack of control over where they lived, when they moved or the furniture and fittings therein. None of these aspects feature on *Tiny Happy People* or are even given consideration since the suggested activities are viewed in isolation from the context in which their target audience is living. Organising housing, space, food, and fuel is a complicated, time-consuming, and exhausting process when there is little money and few options. It can involve relying on credit cards or charity to provide food, rationing food and heating and a degree of stealth to conceal the extent of the situation from children. Beyond these practical elements, representations of home and their divergence from working-class mothers' realities mean our mothering is invalidated. *Tiny Happy People* reproduces the idealised home as central to 'good' mothering and the role of mothers, in

producing this home, in order to validate their mothering. Since the mothers interviewed are not able to provide an idealised home for their children, they are seen to be failing them. Instead of blame attaching to government policies of deregulation which have led to increased precarity at work and insufficient affordable housing, working-class women are held responsible for failing to provide the idealised home in impossible circumstances. Their behaviour is deemed to be at fault: should have waited to have children, should have had fewer children, should have made sure you could afford them etc. Meeting those criteria would mean we would never have become mothers. So tied up in the image of a 'good' mother is this idea of providing a home: haven, welcoming space etc. Significant policy changes, made in consultation with those directly affected by them, are necessary to address the availability of affordable housing and a basic minimum income. Without access to these necessities, as this chapter has explained, working-class women's lives are consumed by trying to provide these. The following chapter will focus on time, the draws on mothers' time, *Tiny Happy People*'s presumption that this is readily available to facilitate the intensive mothering being promoted and how that links to social reproduction.

Chapter 7: Mothering and the classed implications of time

This chapter concerns the implications of 'good' mothering discourses, which are based on intensive mothering ideals, on working class women's time. Throughout the interviews, the weight of the women's workload was striking, particularly when considered alongside the expectations of *Tiny Happy People* which assumes mothers have limitless time to integrate their activities into daily routines. To understand assumptions related to mothers' time more fully, it is necessary to consider what intensive mothering is and how this increases reproductive work. Using the women's narratives, I will explore the gendered and classed effects of this work which *Tiny Happy People* is adding to. I will discuss the strategies devised by the mothers to manage their time and how these coping strategies are used to blame working-class women for not adhering to *Tiny Happy People* endorsed 'good' mothering. Narratives from this chapter and the last serve to exemplify that working-class mothers' time is not an empty space waiting to be filled with *Tiny Happy People* prescribed intensive mothering tasks. These chapters explain why promotion of intensive mothering ideals is particularly detrimental for working-class women.

7.1 Intensive mothering and time

As with Bowlby's attachment theory of the 1950s, intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) is based on mothers' time and how this is spent. Time is positioned as an essential component of mothering. While attachment theory demands mothers spend time with their children, intensive mothering stipulates how that time is spent: on investment in their children's human capital. It assumes that mothers' time is a void waiting to be filled and that guidance is needed as to what they ought to be doing. While attachment theory was popular with policymakers keen to increase birth rates (Franzblau, 1999), intensive mothering has risen to popularity alongside a 'neoliberal offloading of social and fiscal support for families' (Ennis, 2014, p9). Dual-earning households have thus become normalised at precisely the same time as expectations on mothers have increased. In assuming mothers have limitless time in which to engage in the intensive mothering promoted by *Tiny Happy People*, the work they are already doing (and time it takes) is ignored and diminished. The

work of social reproduction (of which intensive mothering forms a part) is often overlooked and noticed only in its absence. It includes all those tasks which 'maintain and reproduce life, both daily and generationally' (Hester, 2018, p345). As well as childbearing, this includes care work (of self and others) and maintenance and organisation of the home, 'which have traditionally been performed by women for low wages or no wages' (Hester, 2018, p345).

Despite claims of greater gender equality, it continues to be mothers who undertake a greater share of reproductive labour (Fraser, 2013) and 'carework is emphatically and unequivocally gendered' (O'Reilly, 2021, p21). It is not simply the act of doing the work, but the planning, management and organisation which predominantly falls to women. On a practical level, it is making, remembering, and attending appointments, ensuring each member of the household gets to the right place, at the right time, wearing the correct clothing and with the correct equipment. This involves not only doing the tasks but coordinating them and being constantly attentive ready to troubleshoot when problems arise. It is constant and all-encompassing, but 'remains invisible, devalued, and taken for granted' (O'Reilly, 2021, p25). Due to the invisible nature of social reproduction, this is not viewed as work, so it is assumed mothers' time is free and can be filled with learning activities. In framing those activities as something which can seamlessly be integrated into daily tasks and routines, the physical and mental work social reproduction requires is erased. Often this work is 'difficult, repetitive and emotionally draining' (Hester, 2018, p351). The relentless nature of social reproduction is summed up in the following comments by Sarah and Jane:

> Sarah: If I 'ave one day off washin' it's like that (holds her hand above her head)
>
> Jane: At the moment I 'ave two bags of socks that need pairing cuz the drawer's a little empty now but I can't do it when [youngest's] around cuz he'll just wanna play with it all, so he's gotta be asleep for me to deal with it all

These are tasks that are necessary but ultimately unfulfilling and yet as part of 'good' mothering women are expected to not only undertake them willingly but enjoy them as part of their mothering role. Charly explains what her day-to-day life is like:

> it's just too much, I know that sounds really bad but, erm, yeah, [Changing youngest's nappy] I just can't stand stuff like this, this is just really hard work (laughing)

However, these tasks are only noticed when they do not get done, by the tower of washing, bags of unpaired socks or dirty nappies. Promoting intensive mothering ideals, as *Tiny Happy People* does, dictates that time mothers spend with their children should be utilised investing in their future development. This increases the burden on mothers, who already undertake the majority of housework and the invisible emotional and intellectual work 'organizing, remembering, anticipating, worrying, and planning that mothers take on for their family', (O'Reilly, 2021, p25). Briony's comment describes this:

> the mental burden, my husband goes, 'well I help out', yeah but you don't, you help out when I tell you to do things, my brain never stops, there's still three pieces of washing on the line that I haven't put away yet and I will remember to do that

Highlighting the gendered impact of social reproduction, Briony acknowledges that it is usually easier to do things herself. This was something several of the women brought up, particularly in terms of the division of labour and the types of social reproduction they and their partner undertook. Frankie told me that they usually go on family camping holidays:

> my husband loves it, he makes a campfire and, obviously the children have a great time, it was such a nice time last year, but obviously it's the, it's the mum that has then to do, sort out everything and queue up for everything and get the children to sleep

It is a holiday for everyone else in the family, but not Frankie as she is required to 'sort out everything'. Lily too spoke about this issue more generally rather than in relation to her household:

> you know, it's all about equality, like we've been fighting for equality but all we've done is shot ourselves in the foot really, cos now we're expected to have work, have children, and work, and cook, and clean….It's never 50/50.

On top of this work already being undertaken by women, *Tiny Happy People*'s intensive mothering model requires mothers to make learning opportunities out of their everyday tasks, when in reality they are generally undertaking several other physical and mental tasks at the same time, such as preparing food, putting away clean clothes, pre-empting tantrums or worrying about bills. Mothers are required to 'hold their children and their schedules in their minds at all times' (Ennis, 2014, p12). Social reproduction norms (discussed in chapters 2 and 3) and expectations mean that tasks performed are viewed as a 'labour of love', meaning 'they often do not count as something that

requires time and energy' (Müller, 2021, p460). In ignoring or making invisible the tasks of social reproduction, women's time is envisaged as a limitless resource which ought to be filled with actively working to improve their children's future life chances by increasing their word count. The women's remarks regarding *Tiny Happy People*'s stated aim of increasing talk highlight that this is not something that fits well within their realities. They were much more likely to tell me about their children talking too much given that they are usually combining several roles at once. Sarah expressed this succinctly:

> maybe a clip to make them stop talking might've been more handy (laughing)

Courtney and Jess expressed similar sentiments. Describing her eldest, Courtney said:

> [he's] very, very chatty, he doesn't stop talking all the time…. he'll talk to anyone, honestly, he'll be, if he was here, he would be talking to everyone he could see, it's like, sort of, 'stop talking to people' (laughs)

This was something that Jess found very frustrating, explaining:

> we counted once, like he asked me 670 questions in a day, cos he is just constant but between that I must just get mummy, mummy, mumma, like I must get it a thousand times a day, like, no exaggeration, like easily I must get a thousand times a day

Encouraging talking is not something these mothers would want to be doing and immediately highlights the disconnect between *Tiny Happy People* and its target audience. The working-class women interviewed are already overburdened and do not need another thing to add to their to-do list. A complete misunderstanding of the nature of working-class women's lives is apparent in the aims of *Tiny Happy People*. Being poor increases the time it takes to do many routine tasks, whether it is shopping around to find the lowest prices, using public transport to get around or getting everyone washed in a house with inadequate facilities. Economic constraints 'generate temporal pressures, resulting in diminished time available for caring activities' (Hester, 2018, p350). Working-class women are particularly encumbered by these additional time commitments since they cannot outsource reproductive work being solely responsible and needing to find the additional time necessary. That time exerts 'a profound cost in terms of earning potential, other caring responsibilities, and individual health and wellbeing' (Hester, 2018, p349). To exemplify the

time implications of working-class women's social reproduction, the next section will share my reflections before returning to the women's narratives on this theme.

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I described my life as a single parent and moving between in-work and unemployment benefits. Having to purchase pre-payment tokens for utilities took much more time, planning and organisation than payment by direct debit, but this is often not available for those on low incomes or avoided for fear of getting into debt. More recently, my younger children have become eligible for free school meals and consequently we receive supermarket vouchers in the school holidays. This is a welcome boost but is another task which requires administration. Firstly, I receive an email per child with a redemption code. Each code needs to be entered into a website to redeem them before selecting my chosen supermarket voucher and amount. After that, I will receive a further email with a link to the voucher. Next, I can print the voucher so it can be spent. Finally, I present the vouchers in the supermarket once I've done my shopping. It is a different voucher from the ordinary gift voucher so that it cannot be spent on alcohol but that means it identifies me to the checkout staff as having a low income. This time-consuming and demeaning process could easily be circumvented by adding the amount to the benefits I already receive. However, that would mean that I could spend the money freely however I wished rather than it being used solely for groceries.

The fragmentary nature of our working lives since having our younger two children has added an additional layer of stress and uncertainty: between us we have had thirteen jobs in the last nine years. This situation was mirrored in many of the women's narratives, as were the logistical issues around organising childcare when working hours are irregular requiring ongoing planning, negotiation, and alteration. As my reflection demonstrates, the time social reproduction takes has classed implications, particularly in relation to employment and childcare. The next section will explore these more fully by considering how these classed inequalities manifest in relation to housework, childcare, employment, travel, and children's additional needs.

7.2 Classed implications absent in *Tiny Happy People*

This section will consider the classed implications of social reproduction, highlighting the time mothers were spending on things made invisible in *Tiny Happy People*, including housework, multiple children, employment, the effects of displacement on travel time, and how parenting children with additional needs increases the time spent on social reproduction.

7.2.1 Employment

Intensive mothering reinforces traditional gender norms 'at a time when patterns of family life have changed considerably, with more women in the paid labour market' (Cappellini et al, 2019, p470). Earlier constructions of family life which relied on a breadwinner model meant that the breadwinner need only concern himself with the work which formed his employment. However, the dual worker model expects both parents to be employed but neglects the question of social reproduction. Mothers are expected to span both public and private realms, managing their time to ensure both jobs are done in what is termed the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 2012). Balancing employment and children is an issue common to many mothers. For the working-class women interviewed this is often more acute given the type of employment available to them, the low-paid nature of which makes paid childcare infeasible. For those mothers with partners, their partner's employment often restricts their options for paid work due to its irregular hours, being shift work or low wages resulting in lack of affordable childcare. Several of the mothers expressed a desire to find employment (or increase their hours) but were unable to due to the low paid, precarious, and irregular work available to them which required them to rely on free childcare provided by family or friends. This was often in response to the difficult financial pressures they faced, described in the previous chapter, but set against their own mothering values about combining care and employment, termed gendered moral rationalities, (Duncan and Edwards, 1997). Much of the work available is termed 'flexible', but for working-class women this flexibility is 'more often imposed than sought' (Mulgan, 2005, p75), leading to 'less personal autonomy, greater insecurity, more stress and less satisfaction' (ibid, p76). Flexible employment is flexible on the part of the employer, leading to people being nominally employed but with no certainty of when they will be working or the number of hours. This means they cannot plan ahead, since they do not know how much time or money they will have. In effect it creates additional work and consequent time burdens since there is no routine which can be followed, each day or week must be organised individually. This is the situation for Sarah's partner who works in retail:

> he's only on an eight-hour contract, which is as much as a zero hour contract because, he works in (national retailer), now obviously before Christmas, he's doin' absolutely every hour, working six days a week, everythin', he's only getting two or three days now

This impacts their ability to plan and budget accordingly as they do not know how many hours he will be working. It prevents Sarah from engaging in employment as she does not know when he

will be working to make childcare arrangements. Instead, Sarah volunteers at her youngest child's nursery several days a week. Her partner's precarious work creates uncertainty around their household income. This type of work has increased as worker protection and trade union power have been dismantled and reduced (Standing, 2011). More precarious workers make some people nominally self-employed, albeit involuntarily. Charly is currently employed in this way; she is due to be contracted as an employee but there is a degree of uncertainty around this:

> it should be from the first of March, but we don't actually know what the terms and conditions are at the moment so we've gotta go through that but they're leaving it and leaving it, I think what the saddest thing is is that they knew that we all needed contracts, so I think it's just a bit of a, we're just gonna say what we want and you're just gonna take it anyway

Charly knows that her employer is likely to offer poor terms. Her youngest is three months old and her employment status meant was not eligible for maternity leave when he was born, so Charly only had a few weeks off. Working from home removes the need for childcare, meaning Charly will accept whatever terms she is offered since it allows her to combine mothering with employment.

7.2.2 Working-class women's employment realities

The employment the women or their partners do is generally precarious, low paid, involving shift work or anti-social hours. These are common employment patterns for parents, particularly working-class mothers; such work schedules intrude on family life (Zilanawala, 2021). This means that they are having to manage time carefully and are often caring for children while they are working or when they are 'off shift', so would otherwise be sleeping. Within 'working-class families, employment instability and the realities of low-paid work are an everyday reality for children' (Pimlott-Wilson, 2015, p1893). This theme will be explored in more detail in the section detailing some of the time management solutions the women use. Several of the mothers are currently or have been self-employed, leaving them (partially) outside usual employment rights, such as paid maternity leave which Charly was ineligible for since she is involuntarily self-employed, despite working for a company. When she first became a mum, the same applied to Tara who was self-employed. Both these women returned to work after only a few weeks following the birth of their child due to financial pressures. Mothers in self-employment are often described as mumpreneurs (discussed in chapter 5). Charly and Tara's situations contrast with the

assumption that self-employment is 'an automatically empowering, meritocratic alternative, which in the majority of cases is far from the case' (Littler, 2018, p184). Precarious work creates problems for Sarah's family since her partner's irregular work means financial insecurity, leading them to lack the basics (discussed in the previous chapter). Contrary to media portrayals of unemployed mothers, Sophie, Ella, Sarah, and Ash Lee expressed a wish for employment. Their narratives show how difficult the reality of that is when you have young children: inflexibility of employers; lack of understanding of the practicalities of arranging childcare; and multi-legged journeys to work, dropping off each of the children. This is a feature of modern motherhood which is exacerbated when mothers are employed in low-paid or low-status jobs. They are more likely to be low-paid making paying for childcare more difficult, working irregular or anti-social hours and reliant on public transport. The 'rise of precarious, low-paid work, often without any guaranteed hours and with few employment securities (such as sickness or maternity benefits) has created additional pressures for workers' (Garrett et al, 2016, pix). Coupled with being overwhelmingly responsible for caring and reproductive work, this means that mothers in employment are often responsible for organising several different types of child-care as well as getting multiple people dressed, ready and dropped off, all before arriving at their workplace. This is often complicated when children are of school age since employment does not easily fit around school hours, as Briony points out:

> she finishes at three, like the day ends at three, how are you spose, how are you supposed to do that, I just, still am baffled by that question and then eight weeks off and then plus, aw it just baffles me how, when both of us work how that's supposed to work.

Organising childcare around school holidays was a big factor for Ash Lee, particularly as she has no family support network:

> I need something that's gonna work around the girls, I can have a good paid job and an amazing job, and, then I'd 'ave to pay someone for six weeks holidays, two week holidays, one week holiday, one week holiday, Christmas holiday to, for childcare, so they'll never get to spend time with me, I'll just literally be, a walking working machine, and I need to work around the kids, I need to have something that works for all of us and that I'm there at the holidays

Alongside the difficulties of matching employment with school times, childcare costs are a huge issue for the mothers interviewed. Ella, who has arranged to return to the community support work she did prior to having her youngest two children, explains why she is delaying her return:

> oh it's a nightmare, cos I have been looking to go back to work sooner, but where he's not two until May, he doesn't get funded till September, so and then obviously I can't afford to pay for a nursery, I already top up [middle child], cos [middle child] gets 15 hours cos he's 3, erm but that would only give him half a day on a Friday so I pay for the top up for that and that's 70 pound a month and that's for half a session a week, so if I paid for him for three days, I just couldn't afford for that…. then with the summer holidays coming up, I've got no childcare, cos their dad works, and obviously, I'm not overly close with my mum, my nan lives down in [another town] so I've got, no one around me really

Ella pays the nursery top up to coordinate pick up for her eldest two children as she lives a reasonable distance from their school and nursery since being evicted. Similarly, as described in the previous chapter, Sarah has a six-mile round trip to take her younger children to school following eviction, which has significant time implications. Having multiple children increases the difficulty of managing employment and childcare, especially when they attend different schools, nurseries, or childminders to each other. Employment was often seen as taking them away from their primary mothering role (which is expanded upon in the following chapter), but this needed to be balanced against their own and others' 'good' mothering expectations. Ash Lee explained:

> I 'ad this epiphany that as a *good* mother I had to be providing for my own children and, like, stop the benefits.

However, once the six-month contract she had taken ended, she chose not to extend because 'I'm a parent and my kids come first'. It was clear that societal expectations were part of women's decision-making process but were often at odds with their values. Lily was one of the few women who questioned whether being a mother was a positive choice for women. She framed this in relation to her teenage sister who was preparing to go to university, saying:

> if some guy says, "I wanna have kids" and you don't, don't have kids, it's not your problem, it's his problem, if he doesn't like it he can go and find someone that wants kids'… at the end of the day, when you have kids, like, the man's life doesn't change, he doesn't have to do anything differently

Logistical issues of coordinating mothering and employment are compounded by gendered moral rationalities, such as those Sophie describes:

> I always worked until I had my children, I had my first job at 15, and, for the man, whether they're with the partner or not, they go out the door, don't think about it, if I were to get a job, right, who's going to take the children to and from school, what's gonna happen on this day, you know, I have all of those factors before I can even consider a job, and then you've got to have a job that can, fit in between those school times, which isn't a very big period of time

Sophie has four children; the older two attend different schools (since one has special educational needs), one has a government-funded part-time nursery place and the youngest is under a year old. The planning involved in trying to organise the necessary childcare for her children in order to maintain employment, alongside her already significant reproductive work, is insurmountable but Sophie knows that, as a lone parent, employment is expected of her. She describes how it feels:

> we're kind of like scrutinised and judged, like, 'well she's a single mum of this many on benefits', it's like, well help me get out of this situation then, cos I really don't want to be like this, you know, but I, I literally don't have any other choice, I don't

There is an expectation that she should be employed but no practical way of doing that which leaves Sophie stuck. Having several children, especially when they have special educational needs, increases women's reproduction work. Sophie was not the only mother who had a child with special educational needs; several other mothers' narratives were on this theme. The next section will consider this more fully and how it impacts on time.

7.2.3 Caring for children with additional needs

Caring for children alongside employment was a common theme as many of the women cannot afford paid childcare and may not have family close by due to displacement. Several of the mothers had children with additional needs: increasing the amount of care required; reducing their time in education; and necessitating additional medical visits, which require time and planning. There is a higher prevalence of special educational needs in children eligible for free school meals (DfE, 2021), and families with disabled children are at a higher risk of poverty (JRF,

2020). Several of the women's children were not accessing statutory education, thereby increasing the amount of time they spent on unpaid social reproduction. Jess's children are home educated:

> yeah, we had issues with the school, obviously [second eldest] is autistic so we had issues with [second eldest] and school, he was in a mainstream, we had his EHCP and stuff but we had issues erm, but at the beginning of lockdown, he literally used to scream 'mama' and that was it, there was no communication, there was erm, and within, six weeks, the anxiety went, the meltdowns pretty much stopped, he started talking, he was just like a different kid and I was like, oh right, you're not going back and [eldest] was like, as I said in Year 1 and by the summer he was doing like Year 2 work and Year 3 and I thought, you know what, you're just happier at home, it's just, yeah, and the more I'm out of it, the more I disagree with the school system

Jess acknowledges that she has little time to herself, especially as she has two younger children at home as well but is adamant it is a necessary sacrifice. In effect, Jess (and the other mothers whose narratives are shared below) are filling in gaps in statutory care. They are organising and managing medical needs and expending extensive emotional time and energy on fighting for their children's rights and needs. For Jess, her solution was to remove her children from formal education. Sophie's second eldest has been out of school for a prolonged period while the local authority found him an appropriate school. He has now been allocated to a school out of area and Sophie explains the difficulty with this:

> it's a long way and he's only 7 and it's an hour's taxi ride and the people are really lovely, but he doesn't know them and also for me, you know, before this school came along, the thought of him even getting a taxi to my mum's house filled me with dread and you're expected, just cos you're a child, a parent of a special needs child, to just accept it, you know, I don't think many people would feel happy sending their 7 year old off for an hour, you know an hour's ride, so it's been a big adjustment for both of us, but, erm, he's only been there one term, because, we, he, he, got removed from his school, mainstream school which obviously not appropriate for him at all, and erm, so it's just been me and him, for the past nearly two years

The delay in the local authority allocating a suitable educational placement has led to Sophie's child being out of school for a long period of time. Following holiday periods, he has a gradual return to ease the transition since he finds this particularly difficult. All of this adds to Sophie's

mental load and reduces her available time. Similarly, Courtney's child's additional needs regularly impact family life:

> my second child, [name], she's erm, she's difficult, she's got process… sensory processing disorder, she's got, potentially autism, she's got hypermobility, she dislocates, she's been to hospital lots of times with dislocations (laughs) it's all fun and games

Although Courtney makes light of her daughter's frequent hospital visits, her narrative describes the implications of those additional needs when planning day-to-day life and which influenced her choice of nursery. Careful planning around appointments and nurseries were discussed by Hannah and Charly. Their children have mobility issues related to their disability requiring frequent medical appointments. For Charly, this is two or three a month:

> we have to plan our lives around the medical appointments which are either late, cancelled or, or, completely pointless like we went to a foot specialist the other day and she was just like, 'yeah it's absolutely fine, I know he can roll his feet but never mind', (laughs), okay

When time is already limited and full, wasted appointments can be especially frustrating and exhausting. Several of the women's children had needed emergency care for severe asthma, including Hannah, whose daughter's multiple needs have impacted nursery attendance:

> she was in nursery but because just recently we found out that she's got immunity deficiency, if she gets a cold, it goes straight to her chest and she gets a chest infection … she was going to nursery, they rang the other day and we, erm, we spoke about it, lengthy, erm, and they said, no, it's best if we keep her off because obviously there's a lot of snotty children around at the moment and, yeah, erm, they would rather, keep her off, make sure that she's okay, because we, we've only had one incidence so far, in February, normally it's every week that she gets a cold, every start of the week, it's, she gets a cold, then Friday it's a chest infection, and then by the next Monday she's fine, then by Tuesday it's, the same, over and over again so, it's just not worth it, it's not worth it… until they figure out how to help her, yeah, I don't think they, I don't think she will be

The nursery's decision means that Hannah's daughter is off indefinitely as they are not able to meet her needs. Hannah was resigned to the situation, appreciating it was for the best but described it as 'heartbreaking' for her daughter as she is very sociable. Aimee's experience with

her daughter's nursery was less agreeable. Repeated absence led to them reporting Aimee to Social Services:

> she was in and out of hospital every couple of weeks and, she just never could attend and in the end they rang me and they said, 'look, we've had to contact social services because we think you're having her off for dodgy reasons sort of thing', and I said, 'I've given you proof of her admissions, all of this', I said, 'I've told you why she's off, it's quite obvious, I mean I get that you've gotta follow protocol but you could've contacted me first and called me in for a meeting and sat me down and said prove why she's been off', and they said, 'yeah, to be honest she's a bit high needs for us, we think we'd have to re-risk assess the whole nursery', and all this stuff, and I was like, 'oh well, honestly, just don't worry about it, I'm not gonna bring her back here because if you're gonna treat her like that and gonna treat me like that, when you're supposed to offer support, I'm not bringing her back', so yeah, she left there

The 'high needs' referred to by the nursery are due to suspected autism but rather than offering support, they have effectively excluded a three-year-old child. Aimee and Hannah's children are left in a similar situation to those of Jess and Sophie: denied statutory entitlement to educational provision due to them requiring above average support. Children with special educational needs have higher rates of exclusion (DfE, 2021) and are more likely to be off-rolled or their parents encouraged or coerced into removing them from school than those without additional needs (Done et al, 2021). These narratives highlight some of the consequent time implications for the mothers interviewed. Managing appointments, participating in parenting classes (which several parents have been required to attend) and the attendant planning to organise these commitments, place a heavy time (and emotional) burden on the women. Not only are they raising young children with additional needs, often in (and exacerbated by) inadequate housing, their children's educational attendance can be affected, causing their mothering to be questioned. Some parents, such as Jess and Aimee, have chosen to remove their children from educational provision to protect them, further impacting their time and capacity for employment, reproductive tasks, or leisure. Outlined in this section are some of the classed impacts of social reproduction on women's time. The next section will explore some of the ways in which the women have sought to manage the conflict between their multiple roles.

7.3 Working-class women's time management solutions

This section will turn to some of the ways in which the women organise their time to overcome their inability to outsource social reproduction due to their material circumstances, most notably lack of access to affordable childcare which was a key theme running through the interviews. These solutions include working around their partner's employment, working at home to enable them to combine their roles, informal childcare arrangements and using technology as a babysitter. When describing these methods of managing their competing time commitments, the women often acknowledged that they were far from ideal and might be deemed unsuitable by others, but they were viewed as a necessity rather than a choice.

7.3.1 Split-shift parenting

When childcare is unaffordable, parents often engage in 'split-shift parenting (with the father working during the day, mother in the evenings)' (Pimlott-Wilson, 2015, p1901). Keira, Tara, and Roxie work alternate shifts to their partners/children's father to avoid childcare costs. Both Tara and Roxie work nights and their partners work during the day. Roxie and Tara work nights, not by choice but necessity since their partners work during the day. Their narratives describe the strain of undertaking the second shift, as Roxie explains:

> as much as when she is at nursery, I've got me time, it's not me time cos, like I'm, obviously I have to hoover every day because of this one (gestures to dog), and there's always something to do and then I've got to plan it out, cos, depending on how tired I are, obviously I have a nap before work and that's only like two hours, so, and then sort dinner out, bathing them, and then going to work

Roxie's youngest is at nursery in the afternoon at the moment (as she is two so attends 15 hours a week through the two-year old funding) and once she is three, will be funded for 30 hours a week. Roxie's narrative explains her difficulty managing employment, caring for her children and housework. Her time is cut to an absolute minimum; not only does she not get any free time she frequently misses sleep as other tasks take priority. It is a similar situation for Tara: her youngest is a similar age and attends a childminder three long days a fortnight while she does her day job. Alongside this Tara does several night shifts elsewhere:

> I do like a night or two a week in erm, like a supported living place at the minute, which again I hate… but it's the only way of doing it at the minute, it's literally the only way of getting by, erm, obviously ideal world and that I'd rather do a, you know, days because of obviously, her, erm, but the shifts at the home that I can only pick up is like eight till eight

Like, Roxie, Tara goes without sleep through necessity which contributes to making things difficult for her and her family. Combining childcare whilst trying to catch up on sleep and housework creates stress for Roxie and Tara. The split-shift nature of their working arrangements conceals the fact that, although they share employment and childcare with their partners, the reproductive tasks of housework and managing family life fall to them, as do the anti-social working hours.

7.3.2 Working from home

An alternative to split-shift parenting is combining employment with caring responsibilities, which several of the mothers do through working in their home. Charly and Briony highlighted the time saved through not having to travel to a workplace. It could be viewed as a practical decision, when in effect it was through lack of choice. Charly returned to work when her youngest was a few weeks old so would not have been able to place him in formal childcare (even if it were affordable) and Briony lives some distance from her physical workplace. Charly frames her working from home as a positive since she can work while spending time with her children. It does mean that Charly ends up working long hours as there is little distinction between work and home. Although working from home solves immediate childcare issues, it effectively means these mothers are trying to do three things at once, which *Tiny Happy People* makes no consideration of at all.

7.3.3 Informal childcare arrangements

Some of the mothers have found solutions to their childcare dilemma by drawing upon wider family members or other mothers to provide support. Several of the women are involved in providing informal childcare (Jane, Frankie, and Ash Lee) looking after other people's children to enable them to work, both on a regular and ad hoc basis. This was mutually beneficial and allowed women to manage their employment or help others do so. Providing and using informal childcare through friendship networks is an important aspect for many of the women I spoke to, especially those who have been displaced or whose partners work irregular hours.

7.3.4 Using screens as babysitters

A common strategy to manage and create time many of the women deployed was using the television, ipad, or gaming devices to occupy their children. Often their narratives highlighted that they knew this was far from ideal and could incur judgement from others, but it was the only way they could make the necessary time needed to manage their work. Prior to her daughter being eligible for a full-time nursery place, Lily describes this:

> she was okay having her at home while I was working but she was literally just plonked in front of the TV and if she had an issue then it was like, 'aw for god's sake', stop what I'm doing, go and sort the issue out, and she's one of these kids that's like, she just always has an issue, if she doesn't have an issue, she'll make one up, erm, so it was, it was quite a relief when she did got to nursery all day cos then I could just work, uninterrupted

Since Lily works for herself, she has some control over her working hours – albeit around school times since she has no family network to rely on for childcare. When she has work after school this again means combining her roles, which leaves her feeling guilty. Charly has similar concerns:

> the telly's a very lovely babysitter but the only problem is is they're learning electronics from a younger age but I feel like that's, more the norm now than it ever has been

The guilt and perceived criticism of others for relying on devices was highlighted by Jane:

> I feel guilty cus they're always on their Switches

She described the comments she has received from people about the number of devices they have, counteracting it with:

> Well, I do have six kids to entertain, and I know that you shouldn't put screens in front of 'em all the time but, sometimes you have to, just to get peace

These time management solutions are often viewed negatively by others, especially when they mean siblings have to take on some of the reproductive labour. It also leaves little time for mothers to work on their children's education, either through following *Tiny Happy People*'s activities or supporting children with schoolwork. Jess is completely reliant on the internet to home educate her eldest:

> he does maths and English and stuff but most of it is literally just, just as we go along, 'oh I don't know, let's Google it' or watch a video on YouTube or …

For Jane, it is not possible to support her children with homework alongside everything else she has to do in the time available, she describes why:

> well, to be honest, they, right, [second eldest] and that, don't, like, they do do their homework but I can't give them my full attention, cus [husband] only has Saturdays off, so Sunday, he's working in the morning and the afternoon and I usually have [another child], so I'm babysitting that day as well until 2, so as soon as [he] has gone, like I'm ironing, that takes me 45 minutes cus of how much there is, then I've got to start bathing the kids

Tara's narrative gives a vivid insight into the lack of time available to allocate to her children's homework:

> I'm working, and I've got [husband's] car so I've literally bombed it back from work to like, pick these up and take them to school…. and I ring [husband] and say, 'I'm just coming down the hill', and he's like, 'yeah you might have to wait a minute [eldest]'s doing his homework', I'm like, 'when's it due in?', 'today', and I'm like, 'you are joking me!', like literally it's like half eight, he's gotta start at like eight forty, and he's doing his homework

The narratives shared in this section pinpoint the difficulty in fitting in all the necessary work required for working-class mothers. It is unsurprising that homework may be low down on the list of priorities given the lack of available time for these women. This often led to some issues between the women and their children's schools through a misunderstanding on the school's behalf about how much the women were able to help their children. Lack of time meant that the women were not able to help with homework and often did not understand it and could not commit the time to help. This was particularly acute during the lockdown period when children were expected to learn online. Tara explains:

> he's upstairs on computer, he's like, 'I don't understand', we're like, 'your teachers just told you what to do, how can you not understand', we're like, 'bring it down', he'd bring it down, we're like, 'nah we don't get that neither like', (laughs uproariously)

Similarly, Courtney found the demands of the school to be excessive, particularly given she also had a toddler to look after as well:

> we didn't really home school, we had Zoom calls, four Zoom calls a day we was supposed to do, he couldn't cope with it, it was like nine o'clock, you had to register, you would do a, a thirty minute talk, then you'd have thirty minutes to complete a task, then you'd be back on to do the next, he couldn't do it, I had like a one year old at the time, I had him, and he was like, 'I can't, I can't do this', he actually said to me, 'it's too much', and I was like, 'fair play mate, we'll practise your writing, we'll practise your reading', and we occasionally caught a few videos and they kept calling us, like, 'why aren't you doing it', my child can't do it, he can't sit there at a tablet all day and have a half an hour to do a, he can't do it, I said, 'you can keep pestering me all you want but he ain't doing it', I can't do it (laughs)

To overcome similar issues, Jane draws on the support of her older children:

> they learn from each other, a lot… [eldest] helps with the phonics cuz I have no idea what I'm doing with phonics cuz it's totally different to when I went to school but she does help a lot out like that, er, yeah, no [eldest] just helps out all time

This is a satisfactory solution from Jane's perspective but is likely to be frowned upon since it is expected that it is her who should be investing the time in helping her children, rather than relying on their siblings. Intensive mothering ideals expect mothers to invest time, money, and energy in their children's education without recognition that these are often in short supply. Combining several roles simultaneously is exhausting, as the next section shows.

7.4 The impact of combining roles on working-class women

When Tara does night shifts, she does not have childcare the following day which means she is trying to look after her child and sleep. *Tiny Happy People* does not consider how employment impacts mothers' time. It simply assumes that when mothers are with their children, they can be working on their children's language development. Tara describes the reality of mothering following a night shift:

> I do Wednesday night, come up literally maybe get two hours on the sofa, then go back to work the next night and have to do the next night and obviously again, she's off on a Friday

> so if [husband]'s not at home, again I'm awake, I'm just like, arrgg, (laughs), just need to sleep, please let me sleep (laughs)….. it's just, it's hard work at the minute, it is just really, really difficult

Tara was not the only mother who described the difficulty and utter exhaustion she felt in combining her mothering and employment. Roxie, another night worker, echoed similar sentiments and the impact of trying to be all things to all people:

> I'm exhausted, I'm hungry, I'm trying to, you know, be a perfect partner to you and, sort the house out

For Lily and Ella, both lone parents, they too experienced the struggle to keep on top of social reproduction while also looking after themselves. Lily felt guilty about relying on convenience foods and her children coming second to her employment:

> I do try and prepare meals when I have time, but it depends what work I've got on, like I'm working after school today, so it will literally be a bung in the oven dinner but when I am a bit quieter, it's like, let's actually make something today, erm, I do feel guilt a lot of the time, cos sometimes I'm tired and stressed out

It is hardly surprising that Lily is 'tired and stressed out' since she is combining her employment with looking after her children and cooking for them all. She highlighted this as one of the biggest difficulties for her and expressed an ambition to earn enough to pay for a cleaner. It is often the monotony and sheer relentlessness which mothers found hard. For Ella, this left her feeling consumed by her mothering role and lacking her own identity:

> I'm not Ella anymore, I'm, I wake up, get the kids ready for school, I come home, breakfast, tidy up, housework, washing, school run, home, dinner, bath, bed, and then I go to bed cos I'm knackered

Many of the women are only just clinging on to some semblance of normality given the all-consuming nature of their work of social reproduction. The quotes below doubtless resonate with many mothers, working-class or not:

Jane: It's nice being a mum, it is nice being a mum, but, like, I said, people are like, 'how many kids you got?' and I'm like 'six' and they're like, 'how do you do it?' and I'm like, 'I don't know', cos I actually don't sometimes (sighs)

Keira: Just, being sometimes, mum all the time (laughs)

Briony: she has to be in her pyjamas and ready for bed because I can't be dealing with any fighting after that, I am just burnt, absolutely burnt…. she'll get on my lap and I'm like, 'mate, I am in the minus, like I haven't even got time to give you a cuddle', just, yeah I have no idea who I am now, I have no idea

Time is a huge issue for all women, but particularly working-class women, which is completed ignored by *Tiny Happy People*. The effects of managing their time left many of the mothers exhausted, but this is not something considered by *Tiny Happy People*; in fact, self-care is often another time burden placed upon women.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the way in which working-class mother's time is limited by the 'disproportionately gendered reality of reproductive work' (Jensen, 2020, p4) and the low-paid, precarious and uncertain nature of their work (Garrett et al, 2016). *Tiny Happy People* does not recognise these constraints; instead, it seeks to instruct mothers on how to speak to their children and avoid them becoming one of the quarter of children who start school without the required language learning. Narratives shared in this chapter demonstrate that the women are constantly working to manage family life, including getting help for their children and trying to maintain their educational provision. Alongside this, lack of affordable childcare means that they are frequently combining several different roles simultaneously. Despite this, the mothers are managing their time, but some of the ways in which they do this are subject to criticism. The intensive mothering model does not allow for employment, having multiple children or no means of outsourcing reproductive work. Since engaging in educational activities is part of mothering expectations (Reay, 2005), working-class women are viewed as deficient for not undertaking these on top of the invisible work of social reproduction. When working-class women use convenience food or screens to manage their time, it is viewed as inadequate parenting rather than a reasonable solution. Using these short cuts, and not having the time to support with education, means working-class mothers are perceived as deficient, when in reality they are managing competing demands on their time

with the resources they have available. Under the current system, these barriers are viewed as personal failings by those mothers rather than symptoms of a broken system. This chapter and the last have considered the constraints of home and time in which working-class mothers are raising their children and how those constraints frame their parenting. The next chapter will explore the women's values: their formation and enactment and the emotional labour involved in raising working-class children.

Chapter 8: ‘At the end of the day, if you love your kids, you’re a good mum’

The previous two chapters have considered the themes of home, tied to an idealised notion of family, and the impact of intensive mothering on working-class women’s time. These two issues serve to position working-class mothers as deficient: available housing is often not the safe, stable, secure place associated with popular conceptions of home; and the practical time management solutions deployed by working-class mothers, who have little time for intensive mothering, invoke judgement. This chapter will consider working-class mothering values and how these are borne out of moral rationalities rooted in classed and gendered experiences and positionality. Ways of doing mothering are classed and give rise to alternative value systems and often lead to misrecognition for working-class mothers (Skeggs, 2011). Three key themes arose from the women’s narratives relating to practises of motherhood, symbolic capital and emotion work. The chapter will begin with mothering identity and its centrality to who the women are and what their life is about. Then, I will explore practices of motherhood which emerged from the women’s narratives: physically being with their children; self-reliance; wanting children; and the fun and enjoyment they have with their children. After that, I will use the concept of symbolic capital as a tool to understand working-class women’s mothering values in relation to how their children present themselves outside the home. Next, I will consider the emotional impact borne by working-class mothers and the necessary emotional work and strategies deployed to manage their emotions. Finally, I will consider the (ir)relevance of *Tiny Happy People* to working-class women’s lives. *Tiny Happy People*’s sole aim is to get mothers to interact and develop children’s cognitive, social and emotional skills. This aim is not shared by the mothers interviewed who view their role very differently.

As the last chapter described, many of the women interviewed are simultaneously managing several conflicting roles, with minimal childcare due to cost. This means that they cannot devote more time to following the advice of *Tiny Happy People*, nor would they want to. Their classed experiences have given them a different set of moral rationalities which impact how they do motherhood and view their mothering identity.

8.1 Mothering Identity

It was evident how much children were wanted (even if they were unplanned) and in several cases, large numbers of children. For example, Jane had always wanted a large family, viewing it as something to do as well as an identity. She has six children and is considering another because when her youngest goes to nursery 'I've got nothink else to do (laughs)'. Children are seen as 'company' and mothers wanted to be, and enjoyed being, with them. Given the expectation on mothers to be financially secure, when mothers choose to have children outside of this, they are continually forced to defend their position. As described in chapter 3, the benefits cap, and associated media discussion, drew attention to larger families, terming them 'benefits broods', (Jensen and Tyler, 2015) as part of a wider 'anti-welfare commonsense', (ibid). Some of these ideas had been adopted by the women; as discussed in chapter 6, Ash Lee described herself as being viewed as a 'benefits' mum' and Hannah listed all the benefits she was in receipt of and how that situates her. Despite this, all the mothers talked about the centrality of their children to their lives, and for them being a mother was an intrinsic aspect of who they are. Particularly for those who became mothers at a young age, most or all of their adult life has been spent being a mother. There were several different positions between the women interviewed. Some had always wanted to be mothers and saw it as a natural step on life's journey, perhaps in response to normative mothering constructs levied by gender and social class (Carroll and Yeadon-Lee, 2022). Others became pregnant unexpectedly, which formalised their relationship with the father or gave them a purpose and helped them to grow up. A third stance related to a loss of personal identity independent of their children. Sometimes women held several conflicting and coexisting positions. Of the women who had always wanted to be a mum, three women viewed this as being at home with their children rather than combining mothering with employment: Emma, Frankie and Jane. Before having children, Emma explained that she was always clear during work appraisals that being a 'stay at home mum' was her goal rather than 'climbing up the ladder'. Similarly, although Frankie is in part-time employment, she stressed 'being a mum is what I class as being my main thing'. This was connected to how Frankie viewed her role, particularly when her children were at the pre-school stage:

> I have friends that do the odd pick up, the odd have them for whatever, but I've never put them in childcare, I've never put them in nursery, when they were two, like I'll wait till they were three, nah, I just think, if you have children, I want to bring my children up

Her mother (who is in full-time employment) provides childcare on the day Frankie is in work. She explained that she could not take on further days at work since her mum could not provide childcare and it would be too complicated and costly to arrange an alternative given her husband's shifts and the different drop-offs and pick-ups required. These justifications for not working are necessary given the expectation that mothers should combine mothering with employment which conflicts with Frankie's intention 'to bring my children up'. Frankie is not alone in viewing her children as her own responsibility to bring up which puts them at odds with dominant mothering norms which include maternal employment. This was a common thread running through many of the interviews, of women bearing full responsibility for their children since they had chosen to have them.

Although Frankie stressed that she had a strong network of supportive and trusted friends, ultimately, she viewed her children as her responsibility to bring up. Due to existing in a time 'when it is seen as shameful to be dependent on others, the need for resilience also becomes part of our everyday common-sense, one which binds us to its terms and reconciles us to its conditions', (McRobbie, 2020, p49). Mothers viewed self-reliance with a sense of pride or wanted to prove they could do it without outside help. Often, they were extremely self-reliant as childcare was unavailable or unaffordable and they felt that *they* were the only ones who had their children's best interests at heart as others did not care about them. To manage and resist dominant expectations that they ought to be in employment, they cited a lack of care on the part of education staff, and the absence or lack of reliability of children's fathers or wider family members. When there is an overwhelming expectation that mothers should be in employment, refusal to participate requires justification. As discussed in chapter 3, since the roll out of early education from age three following the 2006 Childcare Act, there has been an increased expectation that both parents are employed. These expectations have increased with subsequent extensions to funded nursery provisions, targeting provision at two-worker households. Both Charly and Kelly work full-time and share the sense of responsibility described by Frankie. Being the only person who had their children's best interests at heart was apparent in many of the narratives; Charly explains:

> I don't have time away from them because I gave birth to them, they're my problem, like I don't feel like I should put them on other people

This sense of responsibility was evident in Kelly's narrative when she was describing her childcare arrangements for when she is in employment. Although she has a strong family network who live close by, Kelly describes it as her duty to make arrangements for her son:

> I chose to have him so it's my duty to look after him, my duty to sort work out …someone's gotta look after him, my mum was like, moving her schedule around at work, working around me, which I should be working with [child] and it's, it just, that's how I've always felt, it's my child, I chose to have him, I'm not gonna palm him off with anyone else

This language of duty and responsibility echoes that of *Tiny Happy People* which emphasises the influence and importance of parents and draws on ideas of individualised rights and responsibilities. As discussed at 5.10, within clips on the website 'modals and imperatives are used to emphasise parental responsibility: 'you can' or 'you will need',' (Green, 2023, p10) and references to there being 'no-one more powerful than you'. Kelly and Charly's comments both stress the importance of it being them that looks after their children. This tied to their gendered moral rationalities (Duncan and Edwards, 1997) discussed in the previous chapter. It contrasts with Tiny Happy People's stance which is relates to parental influence and stresses the power and importance of the parent.

Several women's narratives were around unplanned motherhood. These accounts were used to highlight the positive influence becoming a mother had on their lives; in terms of personal development or formalising a relationship with the child's father. Several mothers mentioned unplanned pregnancies once they were already mothers, often as a result of being too preoccupied to use adequate contraception. Courtney and Aimee described the shock of finding out they were pregnant, at 21 and 14 respectively. Of the women whose narratives featured unplanned pregnancies, their choice to proceed with the pregnancy was never in doubt. This could be a feature of hindsight because once children are here it is difficult to countenance having considered termination.

Similarly, four women were adamant that they were going to proceed with their pregnancies, despite not being in a relationship with their child's father at the time of conception. On revealing their pregnancy to the father, highlighting that they would be going ahead with or without his involvement. For one woman this formalised their relationship, two had short-lived but abusive relationships with their child's father and the other had no further involvement. Several women

described their pregnancy as giving them the impetus to change their life, triggering self-improvement aligning with previous research (Duncan, 2007; McRobbie, 1991). For younger women, becoming a mother coincided with them becoming adults, thus equating motherhood with growing up, which agrees with earlier research (Rolfe, 2008). Hannah described looking back at herself at twenty as 'making her cringe' due to her immaturity. Aimee saw being a mother as giving her a reason to carry on:

> [I] just don't feel like I'd have a purpose because, I dunno it'd just be hard to carry on with all these issues in the world and, everything like that when you've not got someone else to think about, you'd just be like oh what's the point

These narratives (and those in the previous two chapters) describe the difficult circumstances some of the women are parenting in, however all the mothers overwhelmingly described how much they enjoyed being with their children.

Having a strong relationship with their children meant enjoying each other's company through having fun together and sharing mutual love and affection. Where middle-class mothers tend to focus on future happiness, working-class mothers are interested in this in the present (Reay, 2004). Being a mother was central to the women's identity and part of that identity formation. Although a few of the woman expressed difficulty in mothering being their only role, it is their primary role. There were varying perceptions about whether employment was part of being a good mother or a barrier to it (as discussed in chapter 7). Throughout their narratives, mothers described close relationships with their children and viewed provision of love, care and support as their main purpose. That support frequently entailed anticipating and solving problems for their children and preparing them for outside world. Mutual affection and having fun with each other are very important for the women interviewed. This was for the benefit of both parties and having a good relationship with their children was a source of pride and validated their mothering identity.

8.2 Good mothering: Love, humour and relationships

For the women interviewed there is a cultural value placed on humour which has classed and gendered differences (Kuipers, 2005) with women's humour forming part of family intimacies (ibid). Many of the women regaled me with stories of funny things they had done with and for their children. Frequently this took the form of the women having a laugh with them or clowning around. Humour serves several purposes, with evidence of 'adaptive cognitive and social benefits

for individuals, including a way to relieve tension, regulate emotions, and cope with stress' (Martin and Ford, 2018, p30). Beyond enjoying humour, 'to "have a laugh" has been a significant way to stage resistance to authority' (Skeggs, 2005, p975). Women relished sharing excerpts from their lives which demonstrated the day-to-day enjoyment they and their children gain from their relationship, often in sharp contrast, and antidote, to the difficult circumstances they are dealing with. Their lively narratives often involved them re-enacting the scene for me, complete with actions and voices. Sarah's is one such story:

> it was a windy day and the wind blew and knocked over all the cutlery and I was like, (in theatrical voice) 'oh what happened', [youngest] was sitting in his chair, he was like, 'the wind blew it over', I was like, 'it's not the big bad wolf is it?' so I gone creeping over to the window (laughing) checking and, 'oh no, no, no, we're alright, it's not the big bad wolf' but he was laughing his head off

Mothers took great pleasure from being able to make their children laugh. Ash Lee recounted a time when her children were having a bath and she had allowed them to make it into a potion 'some Orbies went in there (laughing), some broken teabags, (laughs) …. swear to God, that was, they loved it, they absolutely loved it'. These were just two of the many stories the women shared of the fun they have with their children, and this was very important for the women, both enjoying the time they spend together and being able to make their children happy. Frankie explained how she enjoys spending her time:

> in the summer, I go out in the morning, and I get the garden all lovely and ready, have the sandpit, water out, and I just sit there and watch the kids and I'm like, this is my happy place, absolutely love it

Being the one who is responsible for eliciting that response is particularly rewarding, as Kelly relates:

> just to know at the end of the day, I've done my best and to see his happy face…. I done summin yesterday and I think, I got him, he's into getting the retail cards at the minute, like he'll get the Lotto like cards, where you write it on, he's into that at the moment and I let him get some and he's like, 'you're the best mummy ever, it's the greatest day of my life', and I'm like, 'but I only let you get a card', but the, the feeling that I've done summin and it's made his day, is the best feeling.

These narratives also serve as confirmation that they are 'good' mothers because ensuring their children's happiness is a central tenet of their perception of good mothering. Love and affection are hugely important to the women and their view of 'good' mothering. Jess summed this up 'at the end of the day, if you love your kids, you're a good mum'. Often this was highlighted as the best thing about being a mother, both verbally expressing love to each other and the giving and receiving of physical affection.

Humour was evident in many narratives and their close relationships were frequently demonstrated through affection insults and banter. Roxie described her daughter as 'worse than satan', while Hannah said her daughter was a 'psycho' and Emma told me her daughter 'was a miserable git' when she did not sleep well. Living with her son can get 'very, very, very, very, very annoying' for Kelly as 'arguing with a four-year-old drives you insane (laughs)'. When Ash Lee discovered her children's handprints on the wall behind us towards the end of the interview, she laughed, saying 'the tramps' and apologised for not having washed it off. Out of context these comments may seem demonstrate the opposite of love, but each was shared with a laugh and a mutual understanding that it was said affectionately and shows the love they have for their children rather than diminishes it. However, given the classed nature of humour, these comments can be misidentified by professionals with dangerous consequences. Misidentification by professionals can lead to a cascade of interventions and mothers classified as risky. The use of humour was vastly different to the sterile relationships and anodyne positivity portrayed within the *Tiny Happy People* clips.

Sometimes women's narratives described what could be perceived as their children's insolence. The following narratives highlight the closeness of the women's relationships with their children. This closeness means that their children can have banter with them; Lily recounted her eldest shouting down from upstairs:

> "mummy, my juice bottle's run out", and I was like, "bring it down 'ere and I'll fill it up for you", and he went, "you're so lazy sometimes", (laughs), little sod, come and say that to my face, and he did say it to my face (laughing)

There are several points to unpick here: firstly, in relation to the giving of juice in a bottle and secondly, the manner in which the child spoke to his mother. Giving juice from a bottle is likely to elicit disapproval as it is recommended only milk or water be given from a bottle (Public Health

England, 2019). Child nutrition came under the spotlight in 2005 when celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver, campaigned to make school meals healthier (Harman and Cappellini, 2015). In Rotherham there was a backlash from mothers who drew media attention when it was found they were providing takeaway food to their children by passing it through the railings (Hollows and Jones, 2010). This media attention was part of the 'wider discourse of class pathologization' (Hollows and Jones, 2010, p308) which Jamie Oliver's original campaign encapsulated. Although this was almost twenty years ago, attention continues to be focused on what and how mothers feed their children; this is seen as 'an everyday activity suffused with moral discourses of "good" and "bad" parenting, with such judgements falling more heavily on mothers' (Harman and Cappellini, 2015, p765). A healthcare professional is likely to take a dim view of a mother who allows her child to drink juice from a bottle and make moralised and classed judgements about her mothering as a result.

In terms of the way Lily's child spoke to her, this is likely to be misrecognised by professionals as defiance and therefore be read as poor parental control, with judgements made about Lily's parenting ability, possibly linked to her lone mother status. However, I can see this easy banter for what it is: evidence of their close relationship which allows for that conversation to be seen as funny rather than naughty. It may be the possibility of role-reversal that makes these interactions acceptable. Brooke was talking about her oldest saying 'bloody bitch is at it again, mum' about their dog when the asthma nurse was there. His use of language in front of a health professional was a cause for embarrassment because of the judgement which will be made about the type of mother Brooke is. Because they are trying to stop him swearing, he polices her language. Brooke said, 'if I do accidentally swear, he says, "mummy, that's a bad word, I need to smack your bum now"'. Again, this is funny precisely because Brooke's son is learning about language and how it works, but not in a way recognised by middle-class professionals as correct. Good mothering ideals create an unrealistic expectation that mothers will never lose their temper, raise their voice or swear, as this does not form part of the self-less, all-consuming expectations required by intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). These exchanges exemplify the close, loving relationships enjoyed by the women with their children and serve as a stark contrast to those serious and formal relationships in *Tiny Happy People* clips. Imposing middle-class good mothering ideals, follows 'a logic of capital [*which*] demands we become better individuals, obscuring and delegitimizing a social realm in which interdependence, care, altruism, kindness and humility may be valued above instrumental self-enhancement' (Gillies et al, 2016, p234). Those relationships modelled by *Tiny Happy People* create a teacher-pupil relationship, which was rarely something women wished to replicate. The

next section will consider the values working-class women hold in relation to school and how these diverge from middle-class educational values.

8.3 Education

As discussed in chapter 4, Bourdieu's symbolic capital is a useful concept to understand working-class values in relation to education. Since this form of capital relates to how working-class people's value is recognised, or more accurately, *misrecognised* by education staff, it is useful for understanding working-class mothers' values relating to education. In relation to mothering:

> rich relationality that working-class mothers necessarily develop by way of compensating for their material disadvantages provides circuits of care and interdependence that are simply not recognised within symbolic fields that operate under an ethic of individualised psychology. *(Jensen, 2010, p190)*

The factors which were important to the women in relation to education do not align with intensive mothering ideals. Mothers placed much greater emphasis on social aspects of schooling than education and they did not see teaching their children as part of their role.

Not wishing to act as their children's teacher puts them in opposition to the good mother portrayed by *Tiny Happy People* whose sole purpose is to educate and aligns with middle-class mothers who 'had to make every minute of the day into a pedagogy', (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989, p8). Walkerdine and Lucey's description of middle-class mothering practices could almost be the blueprint for *Tiny Happy People* since 'boundaries between this work [domestic and] the children's play have to be blurred and so it comes as no surprise that any household task can transform itself into the basis of domestic pedagogy' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989, p20). These practices are distinct from working-class mothers', who 'viewed their role in terms of caring, protecting and loving their children rather than teaching or cultivating them' (Gillies, 2007, p154). School and home were viewed as two distinct places, with learning taking place at school, as Charly explains:

> personally, I think, he needs to learn at school cos otherwise they get bored, they get distracted because it's something they already know, that's not me goin', 'ooh I don't wanna do this cos I've not got time or der ler der', but it's just, that's what they're there to learn and that's how they learn and interact and develop via a school, not what you've been, what your parents learnt from a book… I think that's what the schools are there for,

> it's like teachers say, 'stop trying to teach the kids, that's what we do', cos you're teaching them something different and then they don't wanna follow it in school

School was viewed as a place where children would sit down and do as they were told. Sitting at a desk was something Keira and Kelly talked about in terms of their children needing to get used to it before they start school. Working-class parental values relate to pride in their 'children's ability to stay out of trouble, get on with others, and work hard' (Gillies, 2006, p287). Generally, mothers were keen for their children to get on with things at school to reduce the need for them to become involved. Usually when women talked about contact from the school, this was in relation to their children's behaviour requiring improvement. A couple of women shared stories of their children who are clever; both of these narratives were told in terms of the child being an anomaly. For example, Frankie was talking about her middle child:

> he was a good baby, good lad, still to this day, he loves to go to school, I think he's gonna be my clever one, bless him

She found it a bit of a novelty that he enjoys school and is 'clever'. Sarah made a similar comment about her second eldest:

> she's a bit of a, bit of a little brain box, she likes reading, she, I don't know if you know the Harry Potter series, she thinks she's Hermione who's always got her nose in a book, she is also always got her nose in a book, when you get their reading things you've got to write down, it's easier for me to write down when she's *not* reading cos she's always, which is really good

The emphasis around education which is central to *Tiny Happy People*, government Home Learning Environment policies and intensive mothering, is rejected by the women interviewed. As outlined earlier in this chapter, fun, enjoyment, and humour are central to the relationships enjoyed with their children, rather than education. What is important in relation to education for working-class women can be demonstrated through their views on school choice.

8.4 School choice

For the women interviewed, school choice was made for reasons other than education; of utmost importance, to almost all of the women interviewed, was that their children would fit in there. This meant that their narratives about school related to choosing a school where it was likely they

would fit in and helping them to fit in. Rather than education, proximity was the main factor which influenced their decision-making in relation to school. It was only really when I interviewed Ash Lee, whose narrative was markedly different, that I considered this in more detail since being close to home has been my main priority when finding childminders, nurseries and schools for my children. By contrast, Ash Lee described thoroughly researching schools: soliciting opinions on social media, visiting them and reading Ofsted reports. Only one other woman (Brooke) mentioned Ofsted reports and two (Alice and Courtney) had visited their schools to inform their decision. Of the two schools Alice viewed, the uniform was a factor in her decision:

> they had a uniform what I thought looked complicated in the morning, sounds ridiculous but there was kilts, there was smart, you know socks, and I just thought my kids would do better in polo tops

Here Alice emphasises the practical aspects which informed her choice of school, rather than the educational provision or facilities. Brooke also mentioned ruling out one school because she did not like the colour of the uniform. Most of the women were bemused by my asking about school-choice as it was obvious to them that they would send their children to the nearest school. Although the women had to fill out school choice forms, this was more a formality rather than them viewing it as a 'choice' since their children would attend the nearest school. Not engaging with school choice and rejecting middle-class educational values position working-class parents 'as failing to undertake the responsibilities that "good parenting" requires' (Exley, 2013, p78). The women's values cut across dominant expectations of intensive mothering, and *Tiny Happy People*, as they do not take the prescribed consumer approach to education. Another example of this refusal of intensive mothering is in relation to the women's emphasis on the social aspects of school ie making friends and getting along with other children. Sending their children to the school closest to home meant there was a greater likelihood of their peers being from similar households to theirs which would make friendships easier.

8.5 Fitting in

Attending their local school was important beyond the immediate practicalities in that it meant they would be at school with children 'like them', (Reay and Ball, 1997) making it easier to fit in. This was something which the women placed value on and described the importance of actively working to help their children with: Both in terms of having the right stuff and encouraging sociability. It was very important for the women that their children would make friends and fit in

with the other children. To encourage this Ella makes sure her daughter has the same stuff as her friends. When talking about her eldest starting school, Ella recalls:

> I was panicking she won't know anyone, so I went all over the top, got all her uniform, I got her a little personalised bag, like I was one of them mums

In getting her daughter all the right stuff, Ella was attempting to avoid misrecognition through possessions and personal presentation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013). However, 'misrecognition serves the interests of the powerful because it allows their interests to be achieved surreptitiously' (Link and Phelan, 2014, p25). It was not just in relation to starting school that the women described their children fitting in. Often, narratives of their children's sociability were deployed to demonstrate pride; for example, Lily describes her younger child:

> she is a really sociable child as well, the teacher said that at parent evening, all the other kids fight who gets to sit next to her at carpet time

Both Charly and Aimee cited social interaction as the main reason for sending their children to nursery. Parental encouragement of sociability and fitting in is a technique to deflect othering of working-class children due to their material circumstances (Daly and Kelly, 2015).

To complement sociability, women often emphasised the importance of good manners. This was the main thing that mothers talked about teaching their children and attached great importance to. It rejects an individualistic approach and rather 'priority is given to the goals of the in-group over personal goals, and in order to behave in a communal way, qualities such as obedience, good manners, unselfishness and respect for others are promoted', (Sieben, 2017, p370). An emphasis on manners resists the idea that education alone defines a person's worth. Instead, good manners were a source of pride for mothers, as Roxie states:

> I'm proud that, they're well-manner, well-spok…, respectful, they're kind, you know

Charly echoed similar sentiments as this would make them good people. Related to this, Ash Lee highlights the importance of manners for being liked and accepted:

> I want my kids to always have their manners, like, even now, I get told, 'oh they're such lovely house guests', like 'they've got such lovely manners', I want that to stay, like I want that to be instilled in them, like from now for ever

Many of the women did not view their role as being to teach their children, with the exception of equipping them with good manners. Keira highlights this as a central part of her mothering role, which she describes as:

> caring for 'em, giving 'em love, teaching 'em manners and the ways of the world, feed them, bath them, the general stuff that you've gotta do as a mum, (laughs) but, also showing 'em manners and, showing 'em the world really

Hannah's narrative draws out why good manners are essential for working-class children:

> I taught her please and thank you first, that was my mum's, my mum said that that was the first word that she taught me, and, it, it balanced out, it balanced out, erm, erm, like other people's opinions, so mum would walk past with me as a child and someone would shake my hand and I'd say, 'thank you', and they would say, 'what a polite little girl you have'

This section highlights the difference between working-class educational values and the dominant discourse. Rejected is the choice agenda in relation to schools as is the attention to educational aspects of schooling. Instead, efforts are put into avoiding the symbolic violence of misrecognition that they and their children will face from schools. This is done by ensuring their children are able to enjoy the relational aspects of school through the instilling of good manners and encouragement of sociability. To deal with that symbolic violence themselves requires a great deal of emotion work which the next section will explore.

8.6 Symbolic violence

The previous chapters have described some of the work that goes into working-class mothering, including providing a home and undertaking the majority of the invisible work of social reproduction, alongside helping their children to fit in at school without the benefit of symbolic capital which other pupils may enjoy. How then do working-class women manage their emotions resulting from symbolic violence to enable them to undertake their role? This section of the chapter will consider that emotion work and the range of strategies deployed by the women interviewed. Many of the women felt the weight of expectation on their shoulders, which is unsurprising given the multifarious nature of their mothering role, particularly in light of *Tiny Happy People* and similar policy initiatives which deem parenting to be the solution to society's problems. Briony summed up the expectations on mothers succinctly:

> you are expected to entertain, enjoy, communicate with 24 hours a day and that is, impossible, to maintain without getting either grey at 30 or insane

Lily also highlighted the unrealistic expectations placed upon mothers by *Tiny Happy People*, describing it as 'patronising' twice repeating that she 'wouldn't watch that'. She related the clip to pressures on mums:

> yeah, I do think, like, the pressure on, mums, is just unreal these days, like...the fact that they're telling people to feed your child and then stand there at their eye level and talk to them about how their food feels, I just think is absolutely ridiculous, and I'm not surprised that that came from the BBC

Lily associated the clip with the unrealistic presentation of parenting on social media and its impact on maternal mental health:

> it reminds me of all these Instagram mums and I'm just, I can't stand it, honestly, I really can't stand it because, like, being a mum, like, is, they've just glorified it, and it's not any of that, like sometimes it's really shit, and I get every other weekend off, so, I'm really lucky, and I just think, like, nobody, when you have kids, like, nobody ever, thinks about the mum, they never say to her, like, you know, 'how are you?', and I always say that to people when they've had babies, I'm like, I don't even ask them about the baby, I'm like, 'how are you?', nine times out of ten they're doing really shit and they just wanna cry, I'm like, why does nobody really address this? And then the BBC are telling people to talk to your child about how soft their food is and I mean, no wonder there's so much like postnatal depression and things like, I don't think people, even know, like, I guarantee that was started by a man, that must've been a man's idea, that's just shocking, it really is, but I think if people were more honest about what it is like to be a parent, I think the new generation are kind of waking up to it, you know, you don't have to have children, that is an option

Charly highlighted the additional pressure she feels from social media as a place she is obliged to perform to display her mothering:

> sometimes I have to put pictures on social media of my kids otherwise it looks like I don't love them, cos people put so many pictures up and I'm like, 'oh it's bin like a month since I put my kids up, maybe people think I've got rid of them', (laughs)

Misrecognition, coupled with our surveillance culture, means that the women want to avoid being seen as 'bad' and social media is one site where this takes place. In addition, they are aware that their own mothers' parenting is likely to be viewed as deficient, according to dominant discourses, so want to avoid replicating. However, this is an impossible task since it is wholly unrealistic to never lose one's temper or be anything other than happy or upbeat.

Unrealistic expectations make mothering difficult since there is external pressure to conform to good mothering ideals of intensive mothering while also engaging in employment, having an immaculate home and ensuring your children eat healthy food. Lily highlights this in her comment and the gendered nature of parenting culture which places women as the ones who must be everything to everybody which 'serves men in that women's commitment to this socially devalued task helps to maintain their subordinate position in society as a whole' (Hays, 1996, p163). Alongside this Lily's reference to 'Instagram mums', or Charly feeling pressure to put photos of her children onto social media, relates to the surveillance culture which surrounds motherhood. Social media extends this surveillance culture into people's homes and creates a further site for judgement. Working-class mothers attract increased surveillance and are frequently used to exemplify 'bad' mothering practices, for example in relation to food as Brooke mentioned:

> it's more comparing myself to other mums, and feel like you're being judged cos you're doing something different, that's what I mean, like the whole like, home-cooked meals, like [youngest] will eat anything, whereas he's [gesturing to eldest] literally, turkey dinosaurs, chicken nuggets or fish fingers

There were several narratives which highlighted social media as a place for parents to seek help and reassurance though. This was particularly important for those women who felt isolated through displacement, such as Ash Lee. Aimee too described turning to Facebook for advice and support:

> I just have to just, deal with everything on my own at the moment….[and seek advice on the] internet, or like YouTube videos, or even sometimes Facebook groups, I find I can search for Facebook groups

Like other women interviewed, Aimee has had multiple house moves since becoming a mother and does not live particularly close to family members. Her status as a young mother and her daughter's additional needs have led to isolation. This feeling was shared by several of the women

interviewed and often meant that they had no outlet for their feelings. For example, Roxie described her relationship with other mums on the school run:

> I talk to a couple which is nice, erm, so it's nice, but we don't really talk about, the struggle, like we say, 'been a pain in the backside today', or you know, 'oh I've had a right morning', or something like that, I mean I, I meet up with one of the mums every now and again, but, yeah we don't really talk about how hard it is in general

Both Charly and Ella thought that the way people are nowadays means that they have to keep themselves to themselves. Ella said:

> I've, (laughs) it sounds really silly but I don't trust many people, a lot of people these days are two-faced or they've got sommink to say about you or the way you do things

Of the women interviewed around half talked about being isolated and this was particularly apparent in the younger women. By and large, permanency of housing impacted access to support networks. This was related to the type of neighbourhood women lived in and how transitory the neighbourhood was. Living in a permanent, settled location with a fairly stable population facilitated networks with other women who they could off load to and offer mutual support. How then do women manage their emotions when they are socially isolated? The next section will consider the women's solutions to this.

8.7 Emotion management

The women had a range of strategies to manage emotions, broadly categorised as: containment, positivity, and realism, with some women combining two or more of these. Overwhelmingly, the women talked about the importance of holding their emotions in and being upbeat for their children. For example, Ash Lee described the importance of remaining calm:

> trying to be as calm as possible with them, and just not like, your emotions and your feelings, always, keeping them in check, not always, but trying to keep them in check as much as you can do

Managing their emotions and presenting as permanently positive requires a lot of emotional work. Expecting never to lose their temper is unrealistic and always trying to remain calm while suppress their own emotions to deal with their child's leaves no space for the women to feel anything. Roxie describes the reality of this:

> once he's, I've sort of calmed him down, I then have to go 'mate, I'm just gonna be five minutes, I'm just gonna go toilet' and I'm like this (head in hands) sitting on the bathroom toilet and I'm like this (rocks), erm, rocking myself and like crying, like trying so hard not to get them red puffy eyes (laughs) cos then he will notice

Frequently, the women would describe their conscious decision to manage their emotions in order to avoid behaving as their own mothers had. They are aware that their own mothers' parenting is viewed as deficient according to dominant discourses so aim to avoid replicating it. Usually this meant avoiding shouting, or, less often, not hitting their children. Hannah described this as being a 'passive mum' and Brooke aimed for 'gentle parenting' although this led to disagreements with her partner:

> I've always wanted them to be independent but my partner's like, 'but you're also letting him tell you what to do, like he's controlling you, you're not controlling him', so it's trying to find that balance sometimes as well

Hannah and Brooke both talked about occasionally losing control and Brooke emphasised how bad this made her feel. Courtney expressed similar sentiments, talking about her own mum:

> she used to get quite shouty, and I know that I can, I can get like that, and I don't even mean to, and I hate it, and I'm like, I don't wanna be like that, but, it's how I was raised, obviously we never got hit, we never got anything like that, it was just, my mum used to get really overwhelmed and she'd shout at us, and, sometimes I try my best to be like, really gentle, I'll be like, 'come on, can we do this', and then you find yourself shouting at them anyway, even if you don't mean to

For Lily, her motivation in avoiding being a similar parent to her own mum goes beyond shouting and is more focussed on being a role model to her children:

> basically, my goal is to bring them up so they don't have to go through anything that I went through, that is my goal really, most of that lies with me really, don't become a bloody alcoholic, is a good start (laughs) … I try and support them and encourage them to be independent because I think if I was more independent when I was younger, I would be doing so much better for myself now

Note here Lily's assertion, 'most of that lies with me', which is characteristic of 'good' mothering discourses which centre individualised responsibility.

As this section has shown, the women put a great deal of effort into being a good mother which includes containing their own emotions so that they are able to provide a calm façade to their children as this is an important aspect of mothering to them. Alongside containment, Roxie, Hannah, and Ash Lee use positivity as a self-management technique. Roxie describes this:

> I made a promise to myself, and it's the most SIMPLEST thing ever, I made sure I promised myself that, even on the most crappiest days that I feel like, I would think of something positive, whether that be a roof over my head, my two kids, you know, food, clothes, or, just being alive, kind of, think of something positive, and, yes I would still feel crappy but, not as bad, I'd still be like no cut it out, stop thinking like that, you know I'd have to have a little word with myself (laughs)

Likewise, Hannah, relies on positivity to keep her going day-to-day and incorporates this into her daily routine:

> Every morning, erm, although she can't say it back to me, we do positive affirmations when I'm doing her hair, so I'll say, 'you are beautiful', and she tries to copy obviously, 'you are brave' (H: mimics), brave, 'you are strong', can you say strong? Yeah, strong, you are loved, every morning we do it, don't we?

Along similar lines, Ash Lee ensures a positive environment for herself and her children by avoiding 'mood hoovers':

> I stay away from mood hoovers in all aspects of my life, if I see someone that's just a Negative Nancy, I'm like, I'm just gonna stay away from you

Each of these women are raising their children in challenging circumstances but individualised wellness culture reinforces the notion that the problem and solution lies with them rather than a society which does not work for them. Popularised through social media 'positive thinking, affirmations, and gratitude', (Gill and Orgad, 2018, p477) appear alongside resilience (popular in policy discourses) as a means of self-help or empowerment. It 'systematically outlaws "negative" feelings, including (political) anger' (Gill and Orgad, 2018, p490). In promoting individual change to

'overcome' adversity, this culture is creating additional work for the women as it their responsibility to cultivate (and maintain) a positive mindset.

The third emotional management method women described is that of being realistic and accepting how things are, even when they are far from perfect. Jane sums this up by saying:

> you gotta make do with what you've got in it?

Rather than dwelling on the difficult aspects of her circumstances, Jane takes a practical approach to addressing issues as they arise and pragmatically accepts her reality. Similarly, Sophie and Alice highlighted that they do not aim for perfection and that things change. Sophie said:

> even when things are tough, I try and bear those things in mind, this is temporary, I, I still remember, you know, doing things in the garden when I was a little girl, it seems like it's just yesterday, so, yeah, I do try and, bear that in mind when I'm at my wits end

And Alice stressed the importance of being:

> as honest to yourself as possible and accept a bad day

As this section has explained, the women utilise a variety of strategies to meet the demands of their different roles and manage their emotions. Often these are women who are just managing to keep things together for their children and several women's narratives underline the fine line they are navigating, for example Sophie being 'at my wits end' or Briony's projection that mothering expectations could lead to someone being 'grey at 30 or insane'. At times during the interviews, women were relieved to be free to say the unsayable, that mothering is tough. The next section will return to *Tiny Happy People* and share the women's views on the advice clips appearing on it.

8.8 *Tiny Happy People* and its (ir)relevance to working-class women's lives

When we compare the lives of the women in this chapter to those portrayed in *Tiny Happy People*, there is a clear disconnect. As this chapter demonstrates, *Tiny Happy People* completely ignores the emotional work expended by working-class women in providing for their children. Instead, it creates additional work for this group of women to undertake in order to avoid the pitfalls of their children starting school behind. Working-class mothers' lives are not understood by *Tiny Happy People*, as this chapter and the previous two have outlined. Home is not the taken-for-granted

place depicted by *Tiny Happy People* and working-class mothers' time is not an empty space waiting to be filled with activities.

None of the women had accessed *Tiny Happy People* content before and most had not heard of it; two thought they may have seen it advertised. When showing the clip, I introduced it as something I had found when looking at parenting advice available online. For the first seven interviews I showed the women a clip entitled 'People at Home: Everyday ways to chat'[8], which shows mums using household chores as a prompt for talking to their children. The mothers focussed on the chores rather than the chat, interpreting it as encouraging them to get their children to help with housework. Most of these mothers said it might be a good idea for other people but did not do it often, or at all, as it slowed them down or would not be appropriate for their children. None of the women suggested that it could make the chores more enjoyable as *Tiny Happy People* suggest. One of the women described the suggestion as being not 'on the top of my head, it'd be kind of like in the middle, nearer to the bottom'. Tracey Jensen highlights that not everyone is able to dispute or push back against parenting advice, which is 'itself an enactment of different forms of privilege, entitlement and a sense of oneself as competent' (2018, p45). Often, in these early interviews, there was a degree of hesitation in sharing their reaction to the clip, possibly trying to anticipate my desired response. Since the women focussed on the chores, rather than the talking, a different clip was shown for the remaining thirteen interviews. This clip was entitled 'Advice from a speech and language therapist on everyday chat: 18-24 months'[9]. It suggests using morning routines to facilitate chat. The reaction to this clip was more diverse; half agreed with it in principle although they may not have time to do it (Ella, Alice, Keira, Aimee, Brooke, Kelly and Frankie), others thought it was unrealistic (Emma, Briony, Sophie and Tara), or increasing pressure on already busy mothers (Courtney and Lily) as described earlier in this chapter. Ella's comment exemplifies the first group:

> I never sit 'ere when they're eating, like I leave 'em and go do other stuff (laughs), yeah, no I never, and like dinner time and stuff, I'm usually washing up while they're eating, so I never usually eat till, way gone in the evening cos I'm sorting other stuff

[8] https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/THP-at-home-everyday-ways-to-chat-3-4-years/zb2gf82
[9] https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/slt-advice-18-24-months/zbfcrj6

Three of the mothers derided the content of the *Tiny Happy People* clip as unrealistic. Beginning with Emma who thought that it was ridiculous to discuss food with a two-year-old:

> I will get down to her level, but where it was saying about, explaining the taste and the texture of food, she wouldn't have a flipping digeriedoo what I'm talking about, like, she's just gonna look at me like, woman, just give me my food, (laughs) she's not gonna care, if she's hungry, she'll just eat it

For Tara and Briony, their comments were more in terms of the reality portrayed in the clip as Tara explains:

> it's just, it's sort of, it's sort of a bit staged, a bit too, staged, you know like a mum sitting there going, 'num num num, is it soft, is it', I'm like, chuck the breakfast, I'm like over at the counter, preparing like something else, or I'm doing packed lunches, but I'm still there…. I was thinking, no, like, you know, you're busy in the morning like, the last thing you've got time for is, to sit there and be like, 'num num num, is it soft, is it hard, is it…' (laughs), I don't get time to do that anyway (laughs)

Briony thought the clip was setting unrealistic expectations, given the other tasks which women have to do:

> behind that camera I bet she's got dishes piled up, she's got washing, she's thinking, 'oh my god, how am I supposed to have time to do all of that', and yet on camera they're the happiest smiliest person, why can't someone just come out and say, 'this shit is hard, but if you get a five minutes, try this they'll really appreciate it', or 'if you get ten minutes to do this, this is what they need', not what is fun and not what is gonna even give them a multi-sensory experience that listening to Bach might do when they're, you were pregnant because it's not real life, it is *not* real life, people cannot do that, people who are trying to give their kids a better life, kids who are trying to work and improve their lives, they are not gonna be sitting there doing their ABCs with a three month old, they are not, not real

Briony's comment echoes that of Lily, discussed earlier in this chapter, about how hard parenting is. In presenting it as easy, while ignoring all the other aspects of maintaining a household, *Tiny Happy People* contributes to an idealised image which has a negative impact on mothers. This section highlights the disparity between *Tiny Happy People*'s version of mothering and the reality

for much of their target audience. Lily's comment (included in section 8.6) is particularly insightful as it draws out the disconnect between those making the *Tiny Happy People* content and its intended audience as well as the gendered reality of parenting.

Differences relating to home (chapter 6), time (chapter 7), and values are brought into sharp relief by social class. The mothering of the working-class women, whose narratives form these chapters, is shaped by their social class and that cannot be neatly removed, as it has been from *Tiny Happy People*. Those constraints, ignored by *Tiny Happy People*, have become invisible since increasing concern with individual parenting behaviour has displaced 'longstanding concerns about structures of disadvantage (Jensen, 2018, p73), and unpicked in preceding chapters. None of the women shared HRH Duchess of Cambridge's view that *Tiny Happy People* was 'gold dust'.

8.9 Conclusion

The mothering values which the women described in their narratives are borne out of their experiences of raising working-class children and cannot be neatly detached from that reality to emulate the middle-class intensive mothering portrayed by *Tiny Happy People*. Raising children knowing that they are likely to encounter symbolic violence means that working-class women are actively working to protect their children from it. This means that good manners are especially important as is their children having the right stuff to help them fit in at school. Relationships between mothers and children are key to defending children from the outside world and the love and mutual affection borne out of those relationships help working-class women manage their emotions. To do this, some of the women have sought individualised neoliberal alternatives to traditional family and community support structures which working-class mothers have traditionally relied upon. These individualised alternatives are positivity and drawing on mental health narratives as explanations for why they fall short of 'good' mothering ideals. Promotion of individualised narratives encourages women to see problems and solutions as lying within them rather than looking outwards at the structures of society which position them, as working-class women, as deficient.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore to what extent family policy and 'expert' discourses of parenting impact on and shape working class mothering practices. All the work described in the previous chapters, related to making a home and time spent on social reproduction, is disregarded, as too are the love, care and joy which define the relationships working-class women enjoy with their children: these hold no symbolic value. Instead, they are:

> positioned as the constitutive limit to proper personhood: the abject, the use-less subject who only consists of lacks and gaps, voids and deficiencies, sentimental repositories, sources of labour, negative value that cannot be attached or accrued and may deplete the value of others through social contagion. (Skeggs, 2011, p503)

Working-class mothers must then work to be recognised as respectable since they are viewed as inherently disreputable, as are their children by association. Current good mothering discourses ignore and misrepresent working class women's lives. Policy initiatives which rely on a middle-class intensive mothering model fail to fit working-class women's realities. Nor do childcare policies aiming to increase women's employment; as this research has found, working-class women's employment is secondary to their mothering. A combination of poorly paid, precarious, and unfulfilling employment opportunities, coupled with a desire to be the ones to raise their children, mean working-class women are unlikely to benefit from recent policy announcements extending funded childcare provision for children of employed parents. Instead, resources should be deployed in consultation with those directly involved and separated from economic concerns to make 'care less exploitative and ensure that a better future is more evenly distributed' (Hester, 2018, p351). Schemes aimed at working-class people must acknowledge the reality of their lives and target improvements to inadequate housing provision and a labour market which creates low-paid, precarious work; these initiatives would dramatically transform family life.

Projects such as *Tiny Happy People* are destined to fail in their stated aims since they do not make sense as part of working-class women's lives. However, given the individualised nature of parent-blame which fits with current dominant discourses and deploys techniques of neoliberal governance, it is unlikely to go away. Failure of the initiative will be placed on the shoulders of the

working-class women who are perceived to have not been attentive to their children or engaged with them. The women I interviewed take obvious pride in their children and the relationships they enjoy with them, resisting dominant good mothering discourses based on middle-class sensibilities (albeit not always fully or explicitly). Good mothering discourses certainly impact the women interviewed, in terms of the expectations placed on them and subsequent blame attaching to their parenting. However, there was little evidence of their practices being directly shaped by good mothering discourses, since the women rejected the ideas promoted by *Tiny Happy People*. Any mothering guilt expressed during the interviews related to not being able to afford to take their children out or buy them things, rather than not engaging in *Tiny Happy People* endorsed intensive mothering.

9.1 Research Summary

Drawing on literature which demonstrates the targeting of family and parenting relations as a site for state intervention over the last century reveals enduring themes that position working class mothers as deficient, requiring correction, and labelled as problem families. Alongside this, underpinning policy shows an increase in parental determinism and increasingly normative mothering expectations which led to my research question. I explored this question using a critical discourse analysis of a prominent parenting advice website, biographical interviews with working-class mothers and autoethnography to situate myself within the project.

I have drawn on Foucauldian and Bourdiesian theoretical frameworks, considering how knowledge is constructed and its gendered and classed impacts. My research took an autoethnographic approach since who I am is central to its origin, design, and execution. Taking a critical discourse analysis approach to *Tiny Happy People* website enabled me to establish the dominant discourses being promoted. This involved looking at the BBC's status as commissioning editor of the website, the potential impact of its position within the British Establishment and the choice of HRH the Duchess of Cambridge as figurehead. Commissioning documents and class markers deployed within the website's animations reveal it to be targeted towards working-class parents. A 'good' mother is produced by *Tiny Happy People*, who is hard working, frugal and attentive to her child's needs by actively working to build their brain through talking to them in the prescribed mode. This mother must listen to and follow expert advice since her child's happiness and school readiness rests on her completing this task. Throughout, the website promotes the idea that following their

advice is easy to do, so a 'good' mother will incorporate these tips into her family's daily life to develop her child's language skills at every opportunity. Learning is not viewed as a natural process but one which must be worked upon and constructed by parents since it is their responsibility to ensure their child does not begin school as one of the pupils who is deficient in language skills. *Tiny Happy People* is promoting an intensive parenting discourse which is based on middle-class ideals and aimed at working-class parents.

Narrative analysis of biographical interviews produced three overarching themes: home; time and values. Each of these themes is invisible within *Tiny Happy People* but are key to working-class mothering. This absence allows those aspects to be ignored and attention instead focussed on mothers' behaviour. Chapter 6 uses women's narratives to highlight the material constraints, of insecure or unsafe housing and scarcity of food and heat, which frame their mothering. Due to moralised notions of home which connect provision of these aspects with good mothering, the inability to provide the idealised home ultimately invalidates working-class mothers and their families. Chapter 7 emphasises the hidden work of social reproduction, which *Tiny Happy People* increases and the implication that mothers' time is free. Failing to take into account the difficult, time consuming and complicated arrangements working-class mothers make to ensure everyone in the family is clean, fed and clothed, through their social reproduction, means these tasks are unrecognised. Instead, working-class women are assumed to be failing at good mothering, rather than engaging in good mothering appropriate to their circumstances. Within chapter 8, I considered working-class mothering identity and the centrality of fun to the relationships women enjoy with their children. Education, in particular, is a context in which it is markedly apparent that working-class culture and values do not attract symbolic capital and are instead misrecognised since they do not align with the dominant middle-class values within those institutions.

9.2 Limitations

Internal and external events meant that I encountered many obstacles whilst undertaking this research, not least attempting to gain ethical approval to conduct in-person interviews during a global pandemic. In answering my research question, I had wanted to recruit participants in two contrasting English locations. However, personal and family issues meant that this was not possible within the timeframe. Conducting interviews in another local authority would have allowed me to compare themes across and between localities which would have given greater validity to my findings. For example, proximity to London may have created more acute issues in relation to

housing for the participants interviewed in this study. Furthermore, the absence of data from migrant women or women of colour mean that their voices are missing from this research project. Inclusion of migrant women and/or women of colour in future research within this area would address this limitation.

My own social reproduction labour impacted this project, with my immediate household being impacted by long covid, anxiety-based school refusal and going through the complex and emotionally draining process of securing an educational health and care plan. Precarious employment at the university has been necessary for financial reasons and future career prospects but has also constrained the time available for writing this thesis. However, the security, support and love of my family has kept me going when I otherwise might have packed it all in. Producing a deeply personal piece of research was always going to create emotional angst but I feel the importance of the topic necessitates it. Using autoethnography and deploying my narrative in this way has allowed me to tell my story and how my life chimes with people like me.

9.3 Original contribution to knowledge

My research makes an original contribution to academic work in the field in its reflexive style and use of autoethnography. I set out to explicitly reject notions of the disembodied researcher and deliberately subvert traditional ideas of what constitutes knowledge and who gets to make it. I have deliberately chosen not to be objective and done something completely different. By centring myself in the research I have modelled an autoethnographic approach to researching one's own community and in so doing, made a methodological contribution to academic research.

The thesis builds on the body of knowledge in relation to motherhood and class, as outlined at 1.4, particularly the work of Skeggs (1997; 2004; 2005; 2011), Gillies (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007; 2014; 2016; 2020; Edwards and Gillies, 2016; Gillies et al. 2016, 2017), Jensen (2010; 2018; 2020; Jensen and Tyler, 2015), Allen (Allen and Osgood, 2009; Allen et al., 2015), Reay (2004; 2005; 2017), and Tyler (2008; 2020). Jensen identifies in the current era a 'proliferation of romances about austerity: that doing 'more' with 'less' can be a joyful and liberating experience' (p143). My analysis of *Tiny Happy People* directly builds on this concept, ironically demonstrating no less than royalty (Princess of Wales) advocating doing 'more' with 'less'. As Jensen (2018) argues, it is crucial to unpick the binaries of 'good' and 'bad' mothering, and to critique the 'moral landscape of mothering that holds women to punishing ideals' (p174), a landscape that has only intensified in

the climate of neoliberalised individual responsibility amidst contemporary austerity. The THP website continues to play into notions of the 'deficit' working-class mother. I have argued that working-class mothers do not necessarily recognise THP's 'good mothering' imperatives, but they do, as Gillies (2005) has argued, care deeply about their children and value close relationships with them based on love and support.

This research (and associated journal article (Green, 2023)) is the first academic analysis of the BBC's *Tiny Happy People*. It sought to explore the impact of dominant good mothering discourses on working-class mothers and has highlighted a complete disconnect between these discourses and their everyday lives. Those dominant discourses are firmly grounded in an intensive mothering model based on middle-class values and gain their power from the lack of 'opposition to the neo-liberal view, that is has succeeded in presenting itself as self-evident, that there is no alternative' (Bourdieu, 1998, p29). It is necessary to find 'techniques and strategies to undermine and dismantle neoliberal ideology and economics', (Littler, 2018, p217). As the critical discourse analysis of *Tiny Happy People* shows, there is little understanding from the producers, or indeed wider policymakers, of the discrepancy between what they think will help and what will actually be useful. Emphasising the use of everyday materials as a way of adapting intensive mothering to a working-class audience fails to recognise the structural issues impacting this group of women. Housing is not something many working-class women can take for granted, nor are the other elements which form the idealised home. Until housing is 'recognised by government as a social good rather an economic commodity, there currently appears little optimism for the future' (Iafrati, 2021, p148). On top of that, employment available to working-class parents is frequently irregular, precarious, and low-paid. Introduction of policies to provide funded childcare will not address the fact that employment is not a route out of poverty. These types of behaviour-change interventions adopt a view that working-class mothers are deficient and in need of correction, rather than addressing the economic model which puts profit over people and exacerbates inequalities. However, 'popular rhetoric around individual responsibility continues to act as vitriolic narratives that exacerbate blame … and deflect attention from the responsibilities of those with the power and remit to effect positive change' (Thomas et al, 2020, p1135).

Fundamentally, working-class lived realities create alternative moral rationalities, based on love, care and enjoyment rather than profit, extraction and investment which are at the heart of the intensive mothering model. When did it become accepted that the raising of children should be viewed as another technical competency which can be undertaken along a business-model instead

of being a relationship? It is 'taken for granted that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions; or that economic forces cannot be resisted' (Bourdieu, 1998, p30/31). This research has shown that the working-class women interviewed are good mothers by the standards which they deem important rather than those which are aimed at investment in human capital. However, this standard is the dominant discourse available since those in power perpetuate their own classed interests and wield their power (symbolic and otherwise) to categorise working-class women, like me and the women I interviewed, as deficient. This displays either a great deal of ignorance or a cynical manipulation of discourses aimed at highlighting behavioural differences to account for inequalities rather than addressing structural issues of housing and work or acknowledging that not every woman wants to dedicate themselves to employment; some would rather spend their time nurturing and enjoying their children. As the interviews have shown, there is room for resistance and pushback against dominant good mothering discourses; perhaps a decision to place importance on fun and enjoyment of the day-to-day intimacies of family life ahead of middle-class intensive mothering or employment is a daily practice in resistance. It is necessary to continue to refuse to accept the 'populist weaponisation of the families most impacted by poverty, racism and precarity, and their transformation into objects of suspicion and threats to the fitness and fertility of the body politic' (Jensen, 2020, p9). Individual and collective resistance is already occurring within families and their support networks, but it needs to be shared and brought into the mainstream dialogue to highlight the alternative to this neoliberally governed mothering model which continues to form dominant discourses of good mothering.

My research is important because those in a position of power are living in a different world to the one inhabited by working-class mothers. The mothers' world is rich and full of its own capitals, values, morals, and culture. However, due to symbolic violence these are deemed worthless. Instead of middle-class policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners assuming they know what is necessary, attention should be given towards actively listening to working-class mothers. Policy should address those issues of most importance to their lives and be grounded in lived experience. Policy changes which really would be gold dust for the mothers would include legislation to provide adequate and liveable housing for all, which has security of tenure to prevent the upheaval of eviction and temporary accommodation. It would require employment and welfare changes which would give everybody a decent, liveable income rather than provision of vouchers and unsolicited advice. Investment in health and education provision is needed; to ensure healthcare,

childcare, and SEN support are available in a timely manner to all removing the lengthy waiting lists, prohibitive costs, and unequal allocation of resources. Above all, a complete change in approach to people built on a foundation of equality, where working-class people and their values are not dismissed, viewed as deficient or derided.

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Appendices

Appendix 1	Participant information sheet and consent form
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Appendix 4	BBC Professional facing content brief. *BBC Education Tiny Happy People brief round 3 commissioning*. (2019)
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Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form Date:28.09.21

The impact and influence on working-class mothers of 'good' mothering ideals

You have been asked to take part in this project because you are a mother of young children who meets my definition of 'working class' in that your household income is below £29,500 and you do not hold educational qualifications beyond Level 3 (ie A-levels, NVQ3 or BTEC National). You may have responded to a request by me or someone known to me, either face-to-face or through Facebook or WhatsApp. Before you agree to take part, it is important you understand what the research is for and what you need to do. I am a Sociology PhD student at the University of Westminster and the project is part of my degree. This information sheet will tell you what my research is about and what will happen if you take part. Please read this carefully and ask me if anything is not clear or you want more information. After reading this information, take time to decide if you want to take part.

What is the research about, what do I have to do and why are you doing it?

My research is based on working-class mothers of young children in the Medway towns and their experiences of mothering. The aim of the research project is to explore how the idea of 'good' mothering affects mothers in their everyday lives. I live in Medway and am a mother of young children so want to share the experiences of people like us to allow voices to be heard which aren't usually.

If you agree to take part, you will have to fill in the attached consent form which gives details about how I will use and store the information from your interview, as well as your right to withdraw. For my research you will be interviewed for about 60-90 minutes. You do not have to answer every question or give a reason for not answering. If you want to stop at any point, let me know and we can either use the answers you've given so far or you can pull out altogether. The research project will take a number of months to complete. If you agree to be interviewed then you can choose to be updated on the progress of the project.

The interviews

We will agree a place and time for the interview to suit you. The interview will be about your experiences of being a parent and you can answer how you want. The questions will be about your experiences, past and present, and future hopes for your child or children. I will record the interview and type up our conversation which will then be kept safely at the University of Westminster and could be reused for research in the future

What happens to the results of the research and the final project?

A one-page summary of the project will be available on request. The final written project will be stored at the University of Westminster and the data may be published in academic books or journals.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The University of Westminster's ethics board and my supervision team have reviewed the research project. The project has been approved by the College Research Ethics Committee.

Exclusion criteria

Excluded from this research is anyone deemed vulnerable, including those under 18 years of age, people with learning disabilities or those suffering from mental illness. If you fall into one of those categories, please let me know that you cannot participate.

Confidentiality

Please note the following:

- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn at any time before the analysis stage of my research study (I will inform you of these dates).
- Your responses will be made anonymous (participants will be given different names in the project) and will be kept confidential and only shared amongst the supervision team of this research project.

- The interview will be audio-recorded on an encrypted device and transcribed by the researcher. Transcripts of interviews will only be seen by the researcher (myself) and my supervision team.

- All electronic data files will be PIN-protected, stored on the university drive and accessed at the university only.

- The consent forms will be kept in a locked cupboard on the university premises.

- All electronic data will be stored safely for up to five years in line with the University of Westminster data security policy.

- The transcribed interviews will be kept safely in the university archive.

- The researcher will comply with the requirements of the University of Westminster's data management policy.

- In the event that a disclosure of immediate danger is made in relation to yourself or a child in your care then confidentiality will be broken in order to protect you or the child in question.

- If you have any questions, please ask me.

- If you have any concerns or complaints about the project, please contact Professor Dibyesh Anand, Head of School of Social Sciences (see contact information below).

Contact information

Lorette Green (Researcher)

Email: w1750400@my.westminster.ac.uk

Val Gillies (Supervisor)

Email: v.gillies@westminster.ac.uk

Address: 32/38 Wells Street, London, W1T 3UW

Contact information for complaints

Dibyesh Anand (Head of School of Social Sciences)

Email: d.anand@westminster.ac.uk

Address: 32/38 Wells Street, London, W1T 3UW

Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated 28.9.21.	☐	☐
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.	☐	☐
I understand that taking part in the project involves being interviewed and audio recorded.	☐	☐
I understand that none of my personal details or identifying information will be revealed to anyone apart from the researcher and supervision team.	☐	☐
I understand that my words may be quoted anonymously in the researcher's thesis and in any subsequent academic publications.	☐	☐
I understand that the anonymised transcripts will be stored in a data archive at the University of Westminster and may by reused for research purposes in the future	☐	☐
I confirm that I am over 18 years of age, do not have a learning disabilities or suffer from a severe mental illness.	☐	☐

I confirm that my household income is below £29,500 per annum and I do not hold educational qualifications beyond Level 3 (ie A-levels, NVQ3 or BTEC National). ☐ ☐

I agree to take part in the project. ☐ ☐

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant [printed] Signature Date

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

_____

I confirm I have provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet approved by my supervisor to the participant and fully explained its contents. I have given the participant an opportunity to ask questions, which have been answered.

_____ _____ _____

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

1. Initiation

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet and are you happy to be interviewed as part of the research? [**Gain written consent at this point**].

2. Main Narration

I would like you to tell me your story of being a parent, all the events and experiences which were important for you. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for afterwards.

Possible prompts:

- Did you always see yourself being a parent?
- Tell me how you felt about becoming a parent.
- Think about how your life changed when you became a parent.
- What kind of childcare have you used for child/children? How did you make those decisions?
- In what ways do you think you have a similar or different parenting style to your own parents?
- Tell me about your relationships with other mums.
- When your child was due to start school, what kinds of things were you thinking about?

Any other things you remember happening?

Do you remember/recall anything else?

3. Questioning Phase

In this phase, questions related to the narration will be used related to the following themes:

- Parenting advice.
- 'Good' mother attributes.
- Mothering identity – how they view themselves as mothers.
- Mothering role.
- School-readiness.

Areas are subject to change depending on outcome of Stage 1 analysis.

Is there anything else you would like to add at this point?

4. Concluding Talk

This stage will allow for 'why' questions to clarify anything in the Phases 2 and 3.

Details of participant's children (names and ages) will be noted down for clarification of main narration.

Appendix 3: Table of Participants

Participants are aged between 24 and 40 years (with a mean age: 30.8 years). Their other children are aged between 3 months and 14 years. The mothers have between one and six children (mean: 2.6 per household). Eight of them are engaged in regular employment as are their partners (of those who have them). Seven are married, five live with partners and eight are single parents. Individual details are listed in the table below.

Name	**Age**	**Marital Status**	**Children**	**Children's Ages**	**Employment**
Roxie	27	Living with partner	2	5, 2	Part-time nights in fast food outlet
Jess	31	Living with partner	4	7, 6, 3, 1	
Jane	33	Married	6	11, 10, 8, 5, 4, 1	
Charly	26	Living with partner	2	2, 0	Online fraud detection
Sarah	40	Living with partner	4	14, 10, 7, 3	
Ash Lee	36	Single	2	6, 3	
Hannah	24	Single	1	2	
Ella	27	Single	3	7, 3, 1	
Tara	32	Married	2	10, 2	Part-time night support worker, occasional beauty therapy
Courtney	27	Married	2	5, 3	

Emma	28	Married	1	2	
Alice	32	Married	4	7, 7, 5, 0	
Briony	31	Married	2	5, 0	Part-time graphic designer
Keira	31	Single	2	3, 2	Part-time barista
Aimee	24	Single	2	8, 3	Part-time cleaner
Brooke	29	Living with partner	2	3, 1	
Kelly	33	Single	1	4	Full-time clinical support worker
Sophie	37	Single	4	8, 7, 4, 0	
Frankie	37	Married	3	12, 7, 4	Part-time dental nurse
Lily	31	Single	2	6, 4	Part-time dog groomer

Appendix 4: *Tiny Happy People* Professional Facing Content Brief December 2019

BBC Education Tiny Happy People brief

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Round 3 Commissioning

PLEASE TREAT THIS AS CONFIDENTIAL

DECEMBER 2019

PROFESSIONAL FACING CONTENT BRIEF

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Round 3 Commissioning

DECEMBER 2019

What we're looking for from you:

A collection of films which will be available on a new area of our website aimed at supporting professionals working with families, providing useful and supportive content to make Health Care Professional's working lives a little easier.

There are four separate briefs aimed at four different professions that are available to pitch for. These are:

1.Midwives.

2.Health Visitors

3.Speech and Language Therapists (Supporting children under 5)

4.Early Years Practitioners. (0-4 years old, Pre-Reception. Eg Nursery Staff, Family Care Workers)

For each of the above briefs we would like to see:

- **A Who am I / What do I do?**

A 2 minute film/s explaining what the healthcare professional specifically does, what they *don't* do, and how they fit within a child's language acquisition and development

This film could be professional lead and aims to be of use to both parents and front line workers to clearly and concisely break down the often confusing remit of who does what and who is responsible for specific areas and stages of baby's development.

- **Understanding Tiny Happy People**

A 2 minute film/s explaining and demonstrating how and when the resources on the Tiny Happy People website can be utilised, demonstrating the use of website and the tools in the context of their role.

This may feature one of the above professions showing parents or colleagues how they can use the TINY HAPPY PEOPLE website content.

- **Ask The Expert films**

A series of 1 – 2 minute films utilising the Healthcare Professional/s that would have been featured in the above films. These films should be are a real opportunity to ask the professional/s the *'most often asked'* or *'most wanted to know but were afraid to ask'* questions, and should provide an archive of questions and answers that Health Care Professionals can recommend to parents. We are open to original and creative ways of shooting these.

- **Testimonial/s**

Personal examples from your Healthcare Professional/s explaining how the TINY HAPPY PEOPLE Website has been useful for them in their role, and how it *can* be useful for other professionals (and parents) who may seek to use the resources and tools in the future.

- **Film/s explaining and demonstrating a Healthcare Professionals unique specialism**

Some experienced healthcare professionals will have a specialism. For example a health visitor may specialise in working with vulnerable mothers, or a Speech and Language therapist might specialise in working with parents with Special Educational needs or Disabilities.

- **Additional Films and Content**

We are exceptionally keen for you to pitch your own content ideas in relation to one of these four areas.

For example **'Having Tricky Conversations with Families'** or **'Building Trust and Relationships'** could be interesting areas to explore and share for Health Care Professionals.

However, we are very open to your own ideas, thoughts and creativity when pitching.

When working on content we would encourage a dialogue with Healthcare professionals and Organisations such as the Royal College of Midwives, or the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Advice on casting:

- We would like to see real Healthcare Professionals that are relatable to the target audience, and representative of the UK population in gender, sexuality, race, and disability.
- This will also apply to families if featured, however the parents involved should come from less advantaged backgrounds and be no older than the top end of the target audience age range, i.e. 30 years old, but ideally in the 18-28-age range.
- We would like to hear regional accents in some of the films.

Budget, Schedule and Deliverables

For each of the four professional areas there is a maximum overall budget is **£20,000 for no less than 10 minutes** (excl. VAT).

Midwives: 20k

Health Visitors: 20k

Early Years Practitioners: 20k

Speech and Language Therapists: 20k

This is slightly higher than the BBC Standard £1500 per minute tariff to reflect potential casting complexities.

Please provide us with a budget summary. You may be asked for more detail in the future. The finer details of the payment schedule will be agreed with the BBC Production Manager on commission. However, without exceptional business justification, BBC Education will pay no more than 5% of the total fee on signature, no less than 30% of the total fee on final acceptance of (i) project delivery and (ii) post-production paperwork and the remainder of the payments against delivery milestones as agreed within the budget summary.

Please note when preparing your budget:

- Short form productions are not eligible for access to the BBC Quartz insurance scheme.

- There has been a change to the employment of chaperones. All chaperones employed by the BBC, or by independent production companies commissioned by the BBC, must have done this NSPCC course:

  https://bit.ly/2XtcO8z

  It's an online interactive course and costs £25.00.

- Any consultants engaged must be paid for by you and included in the budget breakdown you submit.

Please bear these notes in mind when preparing your budget.

Deliverables

Deliverables tech specs;

- Each video to be delivered in FULL HD Apple Pro Res 4:2:2 1920 x 1080 and also h.264 MP4 format with separate audio tracks; subtitle files (XML); metadata; post-production paperwork.
- Uncompressed audio provided in multiple editable audio layers.
- To deliver 2 x high quality photo representative of each film.
- HD Quality 16:9 1920x1080 JPEGS to be used as placeholders for online films / publicity.
- Bespoke optimised social video content, not just shorter re-cuts of the films. They need to offer something to the audience in themselves and not just a highlights reel.
  - Outtakes – funny, cute;
  - Short, sharp and snappy GIFs/Memes/Stories;
  - Square video (640x640) and/or vertical (1080x1920);
  - Subtitles should be burnt in for social media;
- No commercial music should be used in the videos unless there is an editorial reason to do so and this needs to be agreed with BBC Education prior to inclusion.
- All stills must be cleared for use online in perpetuity.
- Project files and assets.
- Post production paperwork to be delivered via Silvermouse.
- We will work collaboratively and supportively throughout the process sharing insights from pilot 1 and 2 as required.

- We will sign off on all casting, locations, scripts, VO, story boards, rough cuts or animatic so that you are able to proceed with confidence at each stage.
- Milestones will be incorporated into the contract to facilitate deliveries.
- Going forwards we anticipate that this content will be used in the public initiative from launch.

Please note that this document is for information purposes only and does not form part of a contractual agreement with the BBC.

Contracting

This is a stand-alone new media commission and the BBC will require all rights in the content, worldwide and on all platforms. This commission will be contracted under the BBC's Digital Services Agreement. Further information on the BBC's New Media Frameworks can be seen on our Commissioning pages here: **http://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/online/articles/how-we-work#framework**

Sustainability

BBC Education is working to ensure that all its projects are as environmentally sustainable as possible. As part of this, we ask that any independent supplier we work with have an environmental sustainability policy, carbon literacy aware staff (free training can be found here - http://wearealbert.org/help/get-trained and that all productions, where appropriate, complete an Albert carbon footprint calculation).

A good way to demonstrate your environmental credentials is to undertake Albert certification. Please see here for more details http://www.bbc.co.uk/responsibility/environment/albert-plus or contact Nicholas.Leslie@bbc.co.uk for more information.

More details can be found at http://wearealbert.org/ and http://www.bbc.co.uk/responsibility/environment/industry-collaboration

These links may also be of interest http://wearealbert.org/inspiration/case-studies

Additional relevant guidelines

https://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/generalsafety/thirdparties/working-with-indies.html,
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production/articles/working-with-children;
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production/articles/health-safety-insurance

BBC Policies and Guidelines

For information on these please follow this link;
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production
***Please note – short form commissions are currently not eligible for the Quartz Production Insurance scheme.**

BBC Health & Safety

The BBC needs to ensure that any Independent Production Company it commissions is able and competent to make the programme with due consideration for health and safety, the following link will take you to a guide which outlines the BBC's health & safety vetting procedure & requirements;
https://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/generalsafety/thirdparties/working-with-indies.html

Guidelines on Working with Children

For information on this, including Chaperone advice, please follow this link
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production/articles/working-with-children

Proposals

Proposals should be provided as PDFs. They should be a maximum of 5 pages long. Any large files (over 5mb) should be delivered separately from the proposal itself (via a password-protected video site or secure file transfer).
Proposals and supporting materials should be sent to:
aleister.mayer@bbc.co.uk

Commissioning Schedule 2019-2020

Brief made available: 5th December
Deadline for proposals: Midnight 12th December
Pitches: 16th – 18th December (London and Manchester)
Work Awarded: 20th December
Production Starts: 6th January
Delivery: By end March 2020.
If you have any questions please do get in touch with aleister.mayer@bbc.co.uk

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT TINY HAPPY PEOPLE…

BBC Education is the department is responsible for delivering the BBC's Royal Charter commitments to commission and produce educational and learning content, to help with both informal and formal learning outcomes, for use throughout the United Kingdom.

BBC Tiny Happy People is one of three ambitious initiatives that are the backbone of the BBC's new education strategy.

BBC Education campaigns are large scale, impactful initiatives that aim to tackle a societal or cultural deficit – often in partnership with others. BBC Tiny Happy People is set to be **the most ambitious initiative** ever rolled out by the department. It's incredibly exciting!

Context

The UK has a challenge with pre-school language and communication. In 2017, **18%** of children aged five did not reach expected levels of **Communication and Language** (Listening and Attention, Understanding, Speaking). For **disadvantaged children** (those eligible for free school meals), the gap is even greater. It's a situation that's mirrored in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Evidence suggests that low levels of language and communication are linked to low educational attainment at various stages in school: poorer vocabulary leads to poorer communication, which leads to poorer numeracy, all of which means poorer academic achievement. And in later life this affects economic wellbeing, civic engagement, mental and physical health and life expectancy.

For some children with additional needs, communication will always be a challenge, but we can provide the tools to help in those challenges. And for many other children who haven't had the best start in life, having the gift of being able to communicate is priceless. We've got an opportunity to make a really positive difference, to support children at an early stage in their lives, which will help them fulfil their potential.

It takes a community to bring up a child, so we want to equip whole communities, not just families, with the tools and resources to help children communicate more

effectively, which in turn will help them to be happier. And who doesn't want children to be happy?

We're planning to launch in early 2020 and plan for the initiative to last for the remainder of the current BBC charter, so it's a 10-year commitment. We are currently preparing for launch and it's anticipated that this and subsequent commissioning rounds will deliver films for launch and beyond.

The change we want to affect

There are many factors affecting cognitive development: for example **family characteristics** (number of siblings, marital status, lone parent status, mother's age at birth, whether mother / father / carer is in work). **Parental Education** (mother / father's highest qualification) is also a factor. As is whether a child is in **'looked after care'** (e.g. foster family or children's home). Add to that general factors such as poverty and access to services and it's not hard to see how children can fall behind in their language development. Although we can take all of these factors in to account when creating content for our initiative, we cannot change them. However, we can influence and improve the **Home Learning Environment**, which is a **massive** factor in cognitive development.

Early years settings and the home learning environment hasn't been a government priority for many years (until very recently), and as a result there are numerous small-to-medium initiatives all over the UK doing great work in this area. We're not seeking to replace these; instead we want to provide the resources to make them even **more** effective. To do that, we need to be **distinctive**. We need **fresh ideas and innovative** ways of connecting with the target audience. We have made **brave** with our content choices during our period of development and invite you to do the same as we move to launch.

The audience

Ultimately, we want to affect a positive change in lives of very children (0-5 year olds), particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, but it's the **adults** in the children's lives, the adults who are in charge of the **home learning environment** that are our **target audience**.

Young adults from less advantaged backgrounds don't tend to engage with the BBC. It's a target audience we don't normally serve so well. So, although they may

acknowledge the quality and trust in our brand, they don't feel our offering is for them. They may even be hostile to the BBC. So, we're going light on the 'BBC-ness' with this initiative.

The target audience are also people who may feel marginalised in society and expecting criticism – especially if they are young parents. So, we won't be judging them. We want to create positive and sometimes funny resources, that reflect real parents / carers and their experiences. We're less interested in content that showcases 'ideal' parents or professionals lecturing parents on what they *should* be doing. We want to create resources that teach techniques, model behaviours and empower those adults to stimulate their children's language and communication skills.

We want to get parents and carers to ***talk* to their children**. That's the key to the whole initiative.

Having tested the tone and feel of video content in pilot 1, the focus of our second pilot has been to explore the **impact of our content on parent's behaviour in terms of 'intention' and 'action'.** We also had lots of questions about how parents move between different types of content, for example, do they seek functional content after seeing a funny film that grabs their attention and connects with them as parents. And it's the insight from these pilots that have shaped our commissioning plan.

How we're planning to reach the audience

We're planning a multi-platform, multi-pronged initiative supported different ways of getting the messages out to the target audience:

- Broadcast
- Digital, and Social Media
- Front-line workers
- Community Activation

*****Further information on the initiative and our target audience is available in the Language and communication Production Bible, for a copy please email:**

aleister.mayer@bbc.co.uk

Appendix 5: *Tiny Happy People* Black, Asian and minority ethnic brief, December 2019

BBC Education Tiny Happy People brief

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Round 3 Commissioning

PLEASE TREAT THIS AS CONFIDENTIAL

DECEMBER 2019

BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC BRIEF

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Round 3 Commissioning

DECEMBER 2019

What we're looking for from you:

A collection of films (up to 2 minutes each) featuring children and families from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background.

The content should be useful, engaging and inspiring for parents, but also a relevant resource for healthcare professionals to recommend to others– And always ultimately be focussed children's language and speech development.

We really want to increase campaign reach and engagement within these communities, so we are looking for a series of parent facing films that have strong casting with families from a Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority background.

We are very open to new content ideas currently not featured on the website. However, you are welcome to draw on existing Tiny Happy People content, such as:

Hook Content:

This is any content that can be used to raise awareness or to garner interest in the campaign and website. This can be comedy, animation, social content, or any other that does not fit in to the above remit. Hook content is often best when it's sharable on Social Media and can occasionally deviate from Speech and Language, as long as it ultimately reaches an audience that will engage further with the TINY HAPPY PEOPLE website and campaign.

Good examples of Hook Content include:

Dad Life films, aimed at getting more 'Dad' based engagement with the website and campaign.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/tips-and-advice

Mommune, a short form sitcom made especially for Tiny Happy People.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/mommune-series/zks4382

Mardy Baby, short sharable sketches from baby's point of view.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/mardy-baby/zbsm47h

Activity lead:
Short films demonstrating an activity or interaction with child/baby and parent/s or relevant carer.

Current Activity content is found here on the Activity area of the website:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/activities/zjh8hbk

Advice for activity films:

Audience research tells us that parents will focus on events leading up to the birth and may have difficulty thinking about and imaging what life will be like after the birth. We're interested in seeing a creative approach that gets parents to throw forward and begin thinking about the importance of talking to their babies from the start.

Starting points offered below, however as stated above, we are open, and will be delighted, to hear your additional suggestions & ideas:

- We want to show simple activities that parents can do with their baby these can be daily or repetitive tasks such as preparing meals, going shopping, travelling or bath time etc. We want to use these as a vehicle for developing language and communication skills.
- Films showing parents and children in a range of everyday scenarios both out and about and indoors.
- The tone for these films should be supportive, accessible and inclusive.

Advice on locations:

We want to reflect the everyday, universal environments that parents will visit.

- Indoors home settings that are familiar to everyone.
- Out and about at the GP's, healthcare centres, with the midwife.
- Locations should be relatable, down to earth, everyday inner city, rural, or costal environments.
- Please avoid settings that might be seen as 'aspirational' or 'out of reach'. Please avoid any paid settings e.g. NCT.

Advice on casting:

- As well and Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority casting, we would like to see real families that are relatable to the target audience, representative of the UK population in gender, sexuality, and disability.
- Showcasing parents who come from less advantaged backgrounds where possible, and be no older than the top end of the target audience age range, i.e. 30 years old, but ideally in the 18-28-age range.
- We would like to hear regional accents in some of the films.
- We know that parents often search for content by age in months or weeks e.g. 4 weeks or 2 months. Please be clear about the age of children featured in months so we can correctly segment the content to serve to the audience.

Professional Advice

The health care professional that you appoint to support your production will be able to help with knowledge and information about language acquisition and for initial reference we have found this summary to be useful:

Language and Communication Development

From birth, children start to show wide ranging abilities within developmental stages, so we don't want to scaremonger, but reflect that there are different behaviours possible - i.e. some may be using first words, others may be chatting away with baby talk. Your baby loves you to talk to them and talking about the things they are interested in will make it easier for them to understand what your words mean and learn from what you are saying. Hold your baby comfortably; look face-to-face Follow baby's cues for "more" and "stop" point and name pictures for baby.

Parents should:
Adapt to their level
Respond to them – not bombard with questioning prompts
Tune in to their interests and talk about that
Take turns

By following the child's lead (**being contingent**), expanding on the child's single words and simple sentences (**expanding**) and giving the child chance to respond (**taking turns**), the parent creates conversations around the child's interests and provides the child with models of the kind of things they are interested in to help their language development.

General Points:

- If props or equipment are required they should be objects found around the home, or easily created and not involve expensive or specialist equipment.
- We're conscious of being an environmental sustainable project so please be aware of the use of plastic in films e.g. bottles, straws, please include in your brief how you would address sustainability.
- All activities should be risk assessed and safe; beware potential choking hazards for example.
- A qualified childcare consultant or healthcare professional should sign off all activities.

Finally in all of the above films we want to see 'good quality' interactions between parents / carers and babies on screen where parent / carer and baby are having fun together and displaying simple language and communication techniques that will naturally boost 'baby talk' whilst doing the activities together – e.g. taking turns and responding to each other, face to face, following baby's lead and using a sing-song voice - we are able to provide further reference on these techniques if required.

Budget, Schedule and Deliverables

Maximum overall budget is **£40,000 for no less than 20 minutes** (excl. VAT). This is higher than the standard BBC tariff of £1500 to reflect the complexity of casting for this format.

Please provide us with a budget summary. You may be asked for more detail in the future. The finer details of the payment schedule will be agreed with the BBC Production Manager on commission. However, without exceptional business justification, BBC Education will pay no more than 5% of the total fee on signature, no less than 30% of the total fee on final acceptance of (i) project delivery and (ii) post-production paperwork and the remainder of the payments against delivery milestones as agreed within the budget summary.

Please note when preparing your budget:

- Short form productions are not eligible for access to the BBC Quartz insurance scheme.
- There has been a change to the employment of chaperones. All chaperones employed by the BBC, or by independent production companies commissioned by the BBC, must have done this NSPCC course:

  https://bit.ly/2XtcO8z

  It's an online interactive course and costs £25.00.

- Any consultants engaged must be paid for by you and included in the budget breakdown you submit.

Please bear these notes in mind when preparing your budget.

Deliverables

Deliverables tech specs;

- Each video to be delivered in FULL HD Apple Pro Res 4:2:2 1920 x 1080 and also h.264 MP4 format with separate audio tracks; subtitle files (XML); metadata; post-production paperwork.
- Uncompressed audio provided in multiple editable audio layers.
- To deliver 2 x high quality photo representative of each film.
- HD Quality 16:9 1920x1080 JPEGS to be used as placeholders for online films / publicity.
- Bespoke optimised social video content, not just shorter re-cuts of the films. They need to offer something to the audience in themselves and not just a highlights reel.
  - Outtakes – funny, cute;
  - Short, sharp and snappy GIFs/Memes/Stories;
  - Square video (640x640) and/or vertical (1080x1920);
  - Subtitles should be burnt in for social media;
- No commercial music should be used in the videos unless there is an editorial reason to do so and this needs to be agreed with BBC Education prior to inclusion.
- All stills must be cleared for use online in perpetuity.
- Project files and assets.
- Post production paperwork to be delivered via Silvermouse.

- We will work collaboratively and supportively throughout the process sharing insights from pilot 1 and 2 as required.
- We will sign off on all casting, locations, scripts, VO, story boards, rough cuts or animatic so that you are able to proceed with confidence at each stage.
- Milestones will be incorporated into the contract to facilitate deliveries.
- Going forwards we anticipate that this content will be used in the public initiative from launch.

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Contracting

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Sustainability

BBC Education is working to ensure that all its projects are as environmentally sustainable as possible. As part of this, we ask that any independent supplier we work with have an environmental sustainability policy, carbon literacy aware staff (free training can be found here - http://wearealbert.org/help/get-trained and that all productions, where appropriate, complete an Albert carbon footprint calculation).

A good way to demonstrate your environmental credentials is to undertake Albert certification. Please see here for more details http://www.bbc.co.uk/responsibility/environment/albert-plus or contact Nicholas.Leslie@bbc.co.uk for more information.

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Additional relevant guidelines

https://www.bbc.co.uk/safety/generalsafety/thirdparties/working-with-indies.html,
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production/articles/working-with-children;
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production

https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production/articles/health-safety-insurance

BBC Policies and Guidelines

For information on these please follow this link;
https://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/tv/production

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BBC Health & Safety

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Proposals

Proposals should be provided as PDFs. They should be a maximum of 5 pages long. Any large files (over 5mb) should be delivered separately from the proposal itself (via a password-protected video site or secure file transfer).
Proposals and supporting materials should be sent to:
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Production Starts: 6th January
Delivery: By end March 2020.
If you have any questions please do get in touch with aleister.mayer@bbc.co.uk

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT TINY HAPPY PEOPLE...

BBC Education is the department is responsible for delivering the BBC's Royal Charter commitments to commission and produce educational and learning content, to help with both informal and formal learning outcomes, for use throughout the United Kingdom.

BBC Tiny Happy People is one of three ambitious initiatives that are the backbone of the BBC's new education strategy.

BBC Education campaigns are large scale, impactful initiatives that aim to tackle a societal or cultural deficit – often in partnership with others. BBC Tiny Happy People is set to be **the most ambitious initiative** ever rolled out by the department. It's incredibly exciting!

Context

The UK has a challenge with pre-school language and communication. In 2017, **18%** of children aged five did not reach expected levels of **Communication and Language** (Listening and Attention, Understanding, Speaking). For **disadvantaged children** (those eligible for free school meals), the gap is even greater. It's a situation that's mirrored in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Evidence suggests that low levels of language and communication are linked to low educational attainment at various stages in school: poorer vocabulary leads to poorer communication, which leads to poorer numeracy, all of which means poorer academic achievement. And in later life this affects economic wellbeing, civic engagement, mental and physical health and life expectancy.

For some children with additional needs, communication will always be a challenge, but we can provide the tools to help in those challenges. And for many other children who haven't had the best start in life, having the gift of being able to communicate is priceless. We've got an opportunity to make a really positive difference, to support children at an early stage in their lives, which will help them fulfil their potential.

It takes a community to bring up a child, so we want to equip whole communities, not just families, with the tools and resources to help children communicate more

effectively, which in turn will help them to be happier. And who doesn't want children to be happy?

We're planning to launch in early 2020 and plan for the initiative to last for the remainder of the current BBC charter, so it's a 10-year commitment. We are currently preparing for launch and it's anticipated that this and subsequent commissioning rounds will deliver films for launch and beyond.

The change we want to affect

There are many factors affecting cognitive development: for example **family characteristics** (number of siblings, marital status, lone parent status, mother's age at birth, whether mother / father / carer is in work). **Parental Education** (mother / father's highest qualification) is also a factor. As is whether a child is in **'looked after care'** (e.g. foster family or children's home). Add to that general factors such as poverty and access to services and it's not hard to see how children can fall behind in their language development. Although we can take all of these factors in to account when creating content for our initiative, we cannot change them. However, we can influence and improve the **Home Learning Environment**, which is a **massive** factor in cognitive development.

Early years settings and the home learning environment hasn't been a government priority for many years (until very recently), and as a result there are numerous small-to-medium initiatives all over the UK doing great work in this area. We're not seeking to replace these; instead we want to provide the resources to make them even **more** effective. To do that, we need to be **distinctive**. We need **fresh ideas and innovative** ways of connecting with the target audience. We have made **brave** with our content choices during our period of development and invite you to do the same as we move to launch.

The audience

Ultimately, we want to affect a positive change in lives of very children (0-5 year olds), particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, but it's the **adults** in the children's lives, the adults who are in charge of the **home learning environment** that are our **target audience**.

Young adults from less advantaged backgrounds don't tend to engage with the BBC. It's a target audience we don't normally serve so well. So, although they may

acknowledge the quality and trust in our brand, they don't feel our offering is for them. They may even be hostile to the BBC. So, we're going light on the 'BBC-ness' with this initiative.

The target audience are also people who may feel marginalised in society and expecting criticism – especially if they are young parents. So, we won't be judging them. We want to create positive and sometimes funny resources, that reflect real parents / carers and their experiences. We're less interested in content that showcases 'ideal' parents or professionals lecturing parents on what they *should* be doing. We want to create resources that teach techniques, model behaviours and empower those adults to stimulate their children's language and communication skills.

We want to get parents and carers to ***talk* to their children**. That's the key to the whole initiative.

Having tested the tone and feel of video content in pilot 1, the focus of our second pilot has been to explore the **impact of our content on parent's behaviour in terms of 'intention' and 'action'.** We also had lots of questions about how parents move between different types of content, for example, do they seek functional content after seeing a funny film that grabs their attention and connects with them as parents. And it's the insight from these pilots that have shaped our commissioning plan.

How we're planning to reach the audience

We're planning a multi-platform, multi-pronged initiative supported different ways of getting the messages out to the target audience:

- Broadcast
- Digital, and Social Media
- Front-line workers
- Community Activation

*****Further information on the initiative and our target audience is available in the Language and Communication Production Bible, for a copy please email:**

aleister.mayer@bbc.co.uk

Please see below, it is what we think we're looking for so please do be creative in your response to this brief.

Appendix 6: *Tiny Happy People* Special Educational Needs and Disability Brief, December 2019

BBC Education Tiny Happy People brief

Round 3 Commissioning

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DECEMBER 2019

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY BRIEF

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Round 3 Commissioning

DECEMBER 2019

What we're looking for from you:

A collection of 14 X 90 second films featuring Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and demonstrating best practise for early language acquisition for the a range of developmental stages of the SEND children. The content should be useful, engaging and inspiring for parents, but also a relevant resource for healthcare professionals when engaging with parents and families.

Special Educational Needs can affect a wide range of children for many different reasons. This is why we are particularly looking for short films that feature babies/children (aged 6 months – 4 years) with recognised and diagnosed conditions that CAN impact speech and language development, for example:

- Cerebral Palsy
- Down's syndrome
- Hearing Impairment
- Genetic conditions
- ASD (Autism spectrum disorder)

We would like to see families in a range of scenarios inside and outside. We are keen to see films describing or showing routines that are relevant for the ages of 6 months - 4 years, and the developmental stages of the child in relation to their needs

In addition to the 14 X 90 second activity films, we would like:

-Getting to Know the Family – 2 Minutes:
An opportunity to meet the family featured in the activity films, including parents, siblings and introduce baby/child's specific needs, understanding how the condition CAN affect speech and language development, and how this may impact the family.

Tips and Advice: - 2 Minutes
Film offering personal insights and top tips from parents, with possible contribution from an Educational Consultant, advising and demonstrating best practice targeted at the child's speech and language development in relation to their needs.

However – we are also very keen to hear original ideas you may have related to SEND, that may not be outlined above.

Advice for activity films:

We're interested in seeing a creative approach that gets parents thinking about the importance of talking to their babies from the start.

Starting points offered below, however as stated above, we are open and will be delighted to hear your additional suggestions & ideas:

- We want to show simple activities that parents can do with their baby these can be daily or repetitive tasks such as preparing meals, going shopping, travelling or bath time etc. We want to use these as a vehicle for developing language and communication skills.
- Films showing parents and children in a range of everyday scenarios both out and about and indoors.
- The tone for these films should be supportive, accessible and inclusive.

Other requirements / considerations:

Film locations / settings:

We want to reflect the everyday, universal environments that parents will visit.

- Indoors home settings that are familiar to everyone.
- Out and about at the GP's, healthcare centres, with the midwife.
- Locations should be relatable, down to earth, everyday inner city, rural, or costal environments.
- Please avoid settings that might be seen as 'aspirational' or 'out of reach'. Please avoid any paid settings e.g. NCT.

Casting:

- A diverse and engaging cast of contributors is essential. In addition to SEND, we would like to see real families that are relatable to the target audience, representative of the UK population in gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity.
- Films could also include Parents and Carers who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities – but the focus should still be speech and language acquisition for the child.

- Parents should be no older than the top end of the target audience age range, i.e. 30 years old, but ideally in the 18-28-age range.
- We would like to hear regional accents in some of the films.
- We would need to know the developmental stage/age of the child featured in terms of Language acquisition.
- When casting families, we would expect to see footage approximately one minute minimum including parents explaining the child's need or disability, and featuring Parent/s engaging with their child in an activity.

Professional Advice

The health care professional that you appoint to support your production will be able to help with knowledge and information about language acquisition and, if suitable, appear on screen.

Language and communication development of SEND children.

With different babies, and different degrees of SEND, children start to show wide ranging abilities within the developmental stages, so we don't want to scaremonger, but reflect that there are different behaviours possible - i.e. some may be using first words, others may be chatting away with baby talk.

General Points:

- If props or equipment are required they should be objects found around the home, or easily created and not involve expensive or specialist equipment.
- We're conscious of being an environmental sustainable project so please be aware of the use of plastic in films e.g. bottles, straws, please include in your brief how you would address sustainability.
- All activities should be risk assessed and safe; beware potential choking hazards for example.
- A qualified childcare consultant or healthcare professional should sign off all activities.

Finally, in all of the above films we want to see 'good quality' interactions between parents / carers and babies on screen where parent / carer and baby are having fun together and displaying simple language and communication techniques that will naturally boost 'baby talk' whilst doing the activities together – e.g. taking turns and responding to each other, face to face, following baby's lead and using a sing-song voice - we are able to provide further reference on these techniques if required.

Budget, Schedule and Deliverables

Maximum overall budget is **£50,000 for no less than 25 minutes** (excl. VAT). This is higher than the standard BBC tariff of £1500 per minute to reflect the complexity of casting for this format, and the professional advice needed.

Please provide us with a budget summary. You may be asked for more detail in the future. The finer details of the payment schedule will be agreed with the BBC Production Manager on commission. However, without exceptional business justification, BBC Education will pay no more than 5% of the total fee on signature, no less than 30% of the total fee on final acceptance of (i) project delivery and (ii) post-production paperwork and the remainder of the payments against delivery milestones as agreed within the budget summary.

Please note when preparing your budget:

- Short form productions are not eligible for access to the BBC Quartz insurance scheme.
- There has been a change to the employment of chaperones. All chaperones employed by the BBC, or by independent production companies commissioned by the BBC, must have done this NSPCC course:

  https://bit.ly/2XtcO8z

  It's an online interactive course and costs £25.00.

- Any consultants engaged must be paid for by you and included in the budget breakdown you submit.

Please bear these notes in mind when preparing your budget.

Deliverables

Deliverables tech specs;

- Each video to be delivered in FULL HD Apple Pro Res 4:2:2 1920 x 1080 and also h.264 MP4 format with separate audio tracks; subtitle files (XML); metadata; post-production paperwork.
- Uncompressed audio provided in multiple editable audio layers.
- To deliver 2 x high quality photo representative of each film.

- HD Quality 16:9 1920x1080 JPEGS to be used as placeholders for online films / publicity.
- Bespoke optimised social video content, not just shorter re-cuts of the films. They need to offer something to the audience in themselves and not just a highlights reel.
    - Outtakes – funny, cute;
    - Short, sharp and snappy GIFs/Memes/Stories;
    - Square video (640x640) and/or vertical (1080x1920);
    - Subtitles should be burnt in for social media;
- No commercial music should be used in the videos unless there is an editorial reason to do so and this needs to be agreed with BBC Education prior to inclusion.
- All stills must be cleared for use online in perpetuity.
- Project files and assets.
- Post production paperwork to be delivered via Silvermouse.
- We will work collaboratively and supportively throughout the process sharing insights from pilot 1 and 2 as required.
- We will sign off on all casting, locations, scripts, VO, story boards, rough cuts or animatic so that you are able to proceed with confidence at each stage.
- Milestones will be incorporated into the contract to facilitate deliveries.
- Going forwards we anticipate that this content will be used in the public initiative from launch.

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These links may also be of interest http://wearealbert.org/inspiration/case-studies

Additional relevant guidelines

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BBC Policies and Guidelines; -

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Round 3 Commissioning

DECEMBER 2019

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How we're planning to reach the audience

We're planning a multi-platform, multi-pronged initiative supported different ways of getting the messages out to the target audience:

- Broadcast
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- Front-line workers
- Community Activation

*****Further information on the initiative and our target audience is available in the Language and communication Production Bible, for a copy please email:**

aleister.mayer@bbc.co.uk

Appendix 7: *Tiny Happy People* General Animation Brief, June 2020

BBC Education

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Commissioning June 2020

PLEASE TREAT THIS AS CONFIDENTIAL

GENERAL ANIMATION BRIEF

What is Tiny Happy People?

Tiny Happy People is a UK-wide initiative by BBC Education highlighting the fundamental importance of parents talking to their little ones. The ultimate aim of Tiny Happy People is to help improve social mobility across the UK. The 'word gap' in children starting primary school, and the subsequent 'attainment gap' throughout school has been proven to be a significant barrier in social mobility. Tiny Happy People aims to equip parents with knowledge, understanding and ideas to develop their child's communication skills *before* they start school, which in turn will help to close the 'word gap' and 'attainment gap' and lead to improved social mobility in the longer term.

Through our digital offering, we show parents how to create opportunities to chat to their babies, toddlers and children through their daily tasks, every day play and share expert advice and tips from real parents.

This initiative is in response to research stating that 20% of children starting school in the UK don't have the expected levels of language and literacy.

Our website offers a variety of activities, tips, advice & scientific facts, our Instagram channel helps to maintain a close connection with our audience. It's fun, supportive and provides a daily comfort and gentle reminders to our parents to keep talking to their little ones. Both complement each other for a dual journey.

Who do we want to target through this commission?

Primarily, our audience is parents aged 18-34 with children aged 0-5 (***before*** they start primary school), with a particular focus on the seldom heard, easily ignored, lower socio-economic background audience (C2DE).

We ensure all companies we work with keep our audience at the forefront of every commission and be as diverse and inclusive as possible when portraying families and contributors in animated content.

We are always keen to hear how you think your ideas can engage dads from this audience, as well as parents in the younger end of this age bracket (18-24).

Aim of the animation commission – what we're looking for from you?

In this present climate where the safety of crew and contributors is of the upmost importance, we want to build on our animation collections. Content must inspire and equip our audience to prioritise and encourage their children's language and speech development.

Through animation we can highlight incredible facts, top tips, themes, light-hearted narrative as well as more in-depth situations and treatments.

We're also keen to see ideas that include and portray relatable families and talk directly to parents.

We want to ensure that all our content supports language development and any facts, tips or advice presented are correct. We always recommend bringing on board an expert speech

and language consultant or expert practitioner to work with you on animations - we can point you to people we have worked with throughout the campaign if this helps.

For any ideas presented for the site we want a simultaneous proposition for Social too. We want to know how the idea can support Social and what that content would be. We have an established Instagram account and a new Facebook presence.

Budget

Budget is up to **£40,000** for not less than **20 minutes** online (excl. VAT).
Budget is up to **£5,000** for social not less than **5 minutes** in total.
The standard tariff of £2,000 per minute for animation for online and £1,000 per minute for Social content.

Some thoughts to get you started:

New animation ideas:

What are we missing? What would you like to see on the Tiny Happy People website? We are open to other and new ideas that complement the website, Instagram account and Facebook presence that can bridge the gap at the moment of filming with real families and their wider family and friends. Ideas that wow us too!

https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/
https://www.facebook.com/bbctinyhappypeople/
https://www.instagram.com/bbctinyhappypeople/

Hook and Comedy Content:

Content that can be used to raise awareness or interest in the campaign and website. Hook content is may be sharable on Social Media or produced for online and can occasionally deviate from Speech and Language, as long as it ultimately reaches our target audience that will engage further with the Tiny Happy People website and campaign.

An animation example aimed on the site aimed at Dads is To Paternity and Beyond:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/paternity-beyond/zhj7jhv

Tips and Advice Content:

Can we do anything animation wise for our tips and advice section on the site?

https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/tips-and-advice

NB – we have a new animation series not yet on the site called Parent Manual – giving tips and advice from sleep to sensory play

Activity led Content:

Currently all of our activity content is live action featuring real parents. Moving forwards is there a clever way to build on our activity content through animation demonstrating an activity or interaction with child/baby and parent/s or relevant carer?

What about pre-birth, is there anything we can do in animation with pregnancy?

Activity content is found here on the Activity area of the website:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/activities/zjh8hbk

Advice for activity films:
Activity films are for parents of 0-5 year olds (before children start primary school).

We want to show simple activities that parents can do with their baby. They can be daily or repetitive tasks such as preparing meals, going shopping, travelling or bath time etc...
We want to use these as a vehicle for developing language and communication skills.
Films showing parents and children in everyday scenarios out and about and indoors.
The tone for these films should be supportive, accessible and inclusive.

Proposals
Proposals a maximum of 5 pages long only please. Please don't feel like you have to work on a lengthy proposal. **Proposals and supporting materials should be sent to:**
nathan.blades@bbc.co.uk

COVID19 INFO:
All ideas and commissions need to be compliant with Government COVID19 secure guidelines and relevant COVID19 Industry Guidance. Please adhere to:
https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/tv-production-guidance-managing-the-risk-of-coronavirus-in-production-making-v1.pdf

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19

As part of their answer to the brief, every company should include how they would produce and deliver their proposed content under the current COVID19 situation, bearing the guidelines above in mind, to safeguard everyone involved at every stage of the development, production and delivery process.

Commissioning Schedule – TBC – suggested dates below
Brief made available: 12th June
Deadline for proposals: Thursday 25th June - 10am
Virtual Pitches: week of 29th June (poss wk after depending on availability)
Work Awarded: week of 6th July
Production Starts: asap after
Delivery: TBC depending on project

Budget:
Please provide us with a budget summary. You may be asked for more detail in the future. The finer details of the payment schedule will be agreed with the BBC Production Manager on commission.

Deliverables:
The usual set of deliverables will be required and discussed on commission, including different final film formats to work across platforms, stills, music and all post production paperwork delivered on final delivery.

Further information on the initiative and our target audience is available in the Language and Communication Production Bible, for a copy please email:

donna.damassa@bbc.co.uk

Appendix 8: *Tiny Happy People* Science Live Action Brief, December 2020

BBC Education

BBC TINY Happy PEOPLE

Commissioning December 2020

PLEASE TREAT THIS AS CONFIDENTIAL

SCIENCE LIVE ACTION BRIEF

What is Tiny Happy People?

Tiny Happy People is a UK-wide initiative by BBC Education highlighting the fundamental importance of parents talking to their little ones. The ultimate aim of Tiny Happy People is to help improve social mobility across the UK. The 'word gap' in children starting primary school, and the subsequent 'attainment gap' throughout school has been proven to be a significant barrier in social mobility. Tiny Happy People aims to equip parents with knowledge, understanding and ideas to develop their child's communication skills *before* they start school, which in turn will help to close the 'word gap' and 'attainment gap' and lead to improved social mobility in the longer term.

Through our digital offering, we show parents how to create opportunities to chat to their babies, toddlers and children through their daily tasks, everyday play and share expert advice and tips from real parents. Our Science content explains everything from how a baby's brain works to illustrating the theories driving their child's language development. It also explains what the benefits are and why it is important for parents to prioritise their child's language and communication development.

This initiative is in response to research stating that 20% of children starting school in the UK don't have the expected levels of language and literacy.

Our website offers a variety of activities, tips, advice & scientific facts, our Instagram channel helps to maintain a close connection with our audience. It's fun, supportive and provides a daily comfort and gentle reminders to our parents to keep talking to their little ones. Both complement each other for a dual journey.

Who do we want to target through this commission?

Primarily, our audience is parents aged 18-34 with children aged 0-5 (***before*** they start primary school), with a particular focus on the seldom heard, easily ignored, lower socio-economic background audience (C2DE).

We ensure all companies we work with keep our audience at the forefront of every commission and be as diverse and inclusive as possible when portraying families and contributors in animated content.

We are always keen to hear how you think your ideas can engage dads from this audience, as well as parents in the younger end of this age bracket (18-24).

The aim of the 'Live Action Science' commission – what we're looking for from you?

We want to build on our **Science Live Action collection**. Content must inspire and equip our audience to prioritise and encourage their children's language and speech development.

Through live action we can highlight incredible facts, top tips, themes, show easily explained investigations and outcomes illustrating the science behind language development. Light-hearted narratives as well as more in-depth explanations can be covered. We're also keen to see ideas that include and portray relatable families and talk directly to parents. We want to ensure that all our content supports language development and any facts, tips or advice presented are correct.

Expertise in this Field:

We will always ask you to bringing on board an expert speech and language consultant or expert practitioner to work with you on our website content – **they can be on screen talent or work with you in an off screen advisory way.**
As an example we can point you to people we have worked with throughout the campaign if this helps.
Also see the science section on the THP website for onscreen examples.

H&S Covid 19 Filming:

In this present climate where the safety of crew and contributors is of the upmost importance we're looking for productions to ensure safe filming is paramount. Please give a short explanation of how you intend to film this production within government guidelines. See COVID production guidelines below.

The Science Proposition - what we're looking for:

The Science behind Child Speech and Language Development: fundamental theories, concepts or explainers studied in the field of developmental psychology, theory and neuroscience.

We already have a few 'Live Action' films on the website where we reveal the science behind some of the child development milestones; for instance in the simple game of Peak a Boo we discuss the concept of **Object Permanence. (We don't want to duplicate this topic.)** With this in mind, we want to continue exploring the science behind other **key milestones of child language development**, in a series of short live action science films.

For example what's the science behind:

- Canonical babble & variegated babble
- The role of anticipation in the emergence of language E.g. Ready Steady Go games
- Other playful routines, e.g. 'I went to the shops and bought….'
- De-contextualization, talking about things beyond the here and now. E .g. Reminiscing, understanding others view point
- Talking contingently
- The Theory of Mind, other examples of de-contextualisation, making a joke, faux pas, etc.
- Phonological awareness

It would be good to explain and understand the science behind speech and language development highlighting the theory, neuroscience and psychology. Investigations could be in a studio setting for instance, showing the science and outcomes in action through play.

The science topics should all be related to the child development prime area of

- Communication and Language development

It might also be interesting to look at parents and the use of their language. This will help parents to see when they are actively supporting the development of their child's language

and when their interaction lacks content. E.g. the language parents use when playing with their children and what effect this has. It has been observed that dads use of language around play is often different to mum's choice of language. Dad's chat around play has been found to stretch a child's language development often expanding their vocabulary… could this be explored in a science experiment for example?

Check the website for content we already cover – what else can we discover?

https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/science-and-facts

Content breakdown:

We want to expand our science content across the ages from **6 months to 5yrs.**

Please give details on how your ideas will be brought to life both visually and factually.
As an example; this could include live action experiments that have clear results illustrating scientific points, or include high end graphics that intercut experiments that help explain the neuroscience. We're open to all ideas that can bring this to life to make it as interesting & unique as possible.

We're looking for up to 25 minutes of content.

Split of minutes: minimum of 1 min, up to a max of 2 min … dependent on the strength of ideas. We're open to discussion around the age & minute ratio depending on the strength of the subject / content ideas per age.

These are a guide to the minute split, leaning more to the older age content.

- 6- 12 months x 2min -
- 12-18 months x 2min
- 18 – 24 months x 3min
- 2-3 years x 6 min
- 3-4 years x 6 min
- 4-5 years x 6 min

Social Proposition:

For any ideas presented for the site we want a simultaneous proposition for Social too. We're looking for innovative ways to drive the audience from the connected social content back to the THP website films above.
Could we set up questions on social that lead the audience to find out answers in the web films? or tease with amazing science that leads the audience wanting to know more?
We want to know how the idea can support Social and what that content could be.
We have an established Instagram account and a new Facebook presence.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

https://www.facebook.com/bbctinyhappypeople/

https://www.instagram.com/bbctinyhappypeople/

Budget:

The total budget is up to £58, 000 (excl. VAT).

50K for web content:
The standard tariff of £2,000 per minute for Science Live Action for online.

Social Content Budget:

£8,000 for up to **8 minutes**.
The standard tariff of £1,000 per minute for social content.

Proposals:

Proposals a maximum of 5 pages long only please. Please don't feel like you have to work on a lengthy proposal. **Proposals and supporting materials should be sent to:**
Aleister.Mayer@bbc.co.uk

COVID19 INFORMATION:
All ideas and commissions need to be compliant with Government COVID19 secure guidelines and relevant COVID19 Industry Guidance. Please adhere to:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19


industry-wide-...

Please make sure you are referring to the latest available industry wide TV production guidance and ensure that any filming you propose needs careful consideration as to what is allowed under the guidance set out, and you adhere to local tier restrictions.
The guidance is ever changing so you will need to be adaptable if restrictions have changed once filming is due to start.
If you are unable to access the embedded PDF attached please request a copy from Aleister Mayer on the above email.

As part of your answer to the brief, you should include how you would produce and deliver your proposed content under the current COVID19 situation, bearing in mind the guidelines above to safeguard everyone involved at every stage of the development, production and delivery process.

We're open to discussing additional COVID costs for this particular production that fall outside of the above tariffs. This would need to be shown on a separate budget to be discussed with our production management team.

Commissioning Schedule

EOI: Please email Aleister.Mayer@bbc.co.uk by EOP 11th December if you are interested in this commission and are intending to submit. (This date does not stop you submitting on the 8th January 2021 if you become aware of this brief after the 11thDecember)

Brief made available: **4TH December 2020**
Deadline for proposals: **11pm Friday 8th January 2021**
Virtual Pitches: **Wk 18th January 2021 TBC**
Work Awarded: **Wk of 25th January 2021 TBC**
Production Starts: asap after
Delivery: TBC depending on project - ideally end of March 2021

Budget:

Please provide us with a budget summary. You may be asked for more detail in the future. The finer details of the payment schedule will be agreed with the BBC Production Manager on commission.

Deliverables:

The usual set of deliverables will be required and discussed on commission, including different final film formats to work across platforms, stills, music and all post production paperwork delivered on final delivery.

Further information on the initiative and our target audience is available in the Language and Communication Production Bible, for a copy please email:
Alexandra.hounslow@bbc.co.uk